Beyond survival, beyond the border: migrants' everyday negotiations from the urban ground of Palermo

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ABSTRACT

Critical border scholars have recursively denounced the structural racism subtending the contemporary European border regime, grounded on the interplay of violent repression and patronising humanitarianism, framing migrants as impending threats/disempowered victims, and counterbalanced by multivarious solidarities, supporting migrants' autonomy. As cities are increasingly observed as sites where racialised borders proliferate beyond their geography, but also as places of potential counter-action against states' repressive politics, this project argues that, from an urban perspective, the seemingly clear-cut categories of repression, humanitarianism and solidarity described at the borders are blurred into much grayer relationships. Focusing in particular on the dimension of solidarity, the project explores it as a layered concept, not starkly opposing the border regime, but embedded within it - and more broadly, within the racial capitalist society/economy the latter is intertwined with. Furthermore, as much attention within public/academic discourse focuses on responses towards migration, this project foregrounds migrants' direct experience of navigating life beyond the border.

This work builds on an ethnographic fieldwork conducted between February 2022 and January 2023 within the Southern Italian city of Palermo, narrated as a 'haven for refugees', and undergoing a process of transformation heavily built on the imaginary of hospitality. Through participant observation across a collection of places of what I call the city's 'solidarity network', this project observes how both racialised borders and multiple forms of solidarity embed within a multiplicity of other urban processes, foregrounding migrants' complex experiences of inhabiting these intersections. Expanding across migration, border and urban scholarship from a still relatively understudied Southern European/Southern Italian perspective, I suggest a geographically and historically situated approach, attentive to the nuances and variously concealed power relations subtending solidarity spaces, as these simultaneously reproduce and contest racialised hierarchies, while advocating for foregrounding migrants' strategic ways of navigating these spaces, along ubiquitous borders.

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I cannot thank enough the people I have met in Palermo, without whom this research would not exist. I am thankful for their friendship, for the constant, passionate chats that hardly ever ended. I thank Palermo for being a weirdly incomprehensible place.

I thank my mother and fathers for constantly supporting me even though no one has yet understood what I am doing with my life. My family in Palermo, which I was not used to having. Marco for the support, which has never ended, even in the most difficult times. Nonna, I hope this makes even a tiny bit of sense.

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

1.1 Why is it more important than ever to critically think and talk about migration?

When I was interviewed as part of the admission process for the PhD in 2020, I was asked why I wanted to investigate migration. It was, after all, one of the most studied and written about subjects in many different disciplines. In particular, the relationship between migration and cities had been long studied since the beginning of the Western social sciences. What was it that I could bring to the subject? At that time my knowledge and political understanding of the topic was little developed. I had just finished my studies in architecture and my reply was tightly focused on the city and its internal processes as disproportionately affecting migrants. Today, my reply would simply be 'because it is never enough'.

"Migration is at the heart of urban growth, both as a lever of development and as a set of challenges for cities. By 2050, two-thirds of the world's population will live in cities (UN, 2018), with migration driving significant demographic, socio-economic, and cultural transformations" (Triandafyllidou et al 2024:1). This sentence often introduces the need for further studies on migration and cities, and still at the end of this path, I think it lacks purpose.

Since I started my PhD, among the rest, the 2022 latest conflict between Russia and Ukraine has spurred a renewed debate on the differential, racialised treatment of migrants within Europe. A huge crowd by the name of 'Not on our skin' marched in Rome in April 2023 to denounce the criminalization and exploitation of the migrant population under the silence and connivance of the European Union, and Italy in that case (Melting Pot Europa 2023). In February 2023 over 100 people died at sea in Cutro, Italy, as no rescue operation had been activated by the Italian authorities (Messinetti 2024), leading to the current Italian right-wing government legitimising a further criminalization of mobility and to a clustering of the debate on 'keeping migrants in Africa' to avoid death. During the summer of 2023 the UK Conservative government decided to host asylum seekers in waiting on a 'prison ship' off the shore of South Dorset. Later in April 2024 that same government ratified the Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Act 2024 to 'off-shore' asylum seekers in Rwanda, a plan that was dismantled by the Labour Party after winning the 2024 General Election (Walsh

2024). Further externalisation of the European borders has become reality through the Italian attempts to ratify agreements with Tunisia and Albania in November 2024, for hosting disembarkation platforms (Millona 2024). In 2022 a contestation started in my former university, Politecnico di Torino, regarding the agreements between FRONTEX - the European agency for border management with its own autonomous armed corps, repeatedly denounced for violating human rights - and the same university, where a research group was awarded a research contract with FRONTEX for producing cartographies for the agency. These are only a few events, related directly to the places I was moving back and forth from in the past three and a half years.

Perhaps, then, the point is not yet how we are going to manage whatever emergency is going to happen in 2050. Rather, the pressing issue is a critical, radical and politically necessary reconceptualization of migration, migrants and the unresolved, racialised colonial ties that still link the West to the Rest (Bhambra 2016a; Casas-Cortes et al 2015; De Genova 2010, 2016; Stuart Hall 2019), but that have also historically shaped the West from within (Danewid 2024; Virdee 2019).

This project looks beyond the exceptional geography of the borders, beyond the constellation of sites of confinement, detention and incarceration, and their related violent 'legal' practices, that have been recursively denounced - at the European borders - by critical border scholars such as Nicholas De Genova, Martina Tazzioli, Deanna Dadusc, Sandro Mezzadra and others. It questions what happens beyond survival and beyond arrival, when migrants manage - one way or another - to get to the city and strive to maintain a foothold within it. The project seeks to understand how the interplay between repression, reception and various forms of solidarity - an interplay which is far from resolved at the border - plays out within everyday life in the city and how racialised migrants make sense of it.

Through looking at the multiple, contextual and simultaneous entanglements of multi scalar politics, local responses, personal histories, and imaginaries, the project's main aim is to investigate this complex embeddedness. Such an approach challenges the binary readings that continue to shape public discourses, but also much academic production, on migration and cities. Instead of clearcut oppositions - between repression and solidarity; patronising humanitarianism and empowering solidarity; state's violence and local exceptionalism - this

project moves within the grey spaces generated by the inevitable contradictions spurring from all of this existing within a racial capitalist framework.

Understanding the binary's elements as mutually feeding into each other, the project ultimately reflects on what we can make of this not so paradoxical co-existence, where can we find the 'radical' outside the exception, while fundamentally bringing to the fore migrants' complex subjectivities, in the way they also navigate daily contradictions, and in the way they defy the narrow categories assigned to them by Western societies: victims when not threats, disadvantaged and powerless.

This work builds on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in the Southern Italian city of Palermo, mainly between February 2022 and January 2023. The fieldwork has built on an intensive participant observation that unfolded across a collection of places, mainly belonging to what I call the 'solidarity network' of Palermo, overlapping with parts of a city centre increasingly shaped by tourism-led transformations and new inhabitants on the move.

Palermo has been chosen for affective reasons, it is the city I was born in, but also for its interesting historical and geographical position. In fact, Sicily, the island where Palermo is located, can be read as one of the many Souths generated by Eurocentrism (Giglioli 2017), historically portrayed as an underdeveloped region for an Italian country historically struggling for racial belonging to Europe (Hawthorne 2021). Today Sicily has become a fundamental external border for Europe, to be kept under control with regards to the Mediterranean route. Within this context, the city of Palermo has been increasingly described as a 'solidarity city' and as a 'haven for refugees', combining a complex mix of manoeuvres that sit at the intersection of social, political, cultural and economic enfranchisement.

Approaching the intersection of migration, neocolonial formations and racial capitalism from an urban perspective, this research thus focuses on the relational grey space that emerges, furthering a question on the multiple ways this is navigated and negotiated daily by different actors and on the kind of politics it generates. Working in such a way, the project reflects on what it might mean to truly decolonise solidarity within cities, to 'create cracks' (Dadusc and Mudu 2020) beyond the sea. It considers the necessity for a constant and open

acknowledgement of the unbalanced power relations that subtend the relation of solidarity, and the part that we - researchers, activists, volunteers and so forth - also play in the reproduction of these. It reflects on what it might mean to practically think "global ethics and solidarities" through "the shared, intertwined histories that arise out of the colonial past and the neo-colonial present?" (Danewid 2017:1683). And if not going as far as imagining radical forms of liberation, at least asking how things are worked out daily – or not - within a racial capitalist system that continuously suppresses, coopts, others, in order to work, with no-one and nothing being completely detached from it.

1.2 Main aim and questions of the research

Drawing on a critical, postcolonial approach to migration and European history, the main scope of the project revolves around the question of how to move on from understanding contemporary issues of migration through binary categories - such as migrant/local, repression/solidarity, good solidarity/bad solidarity, victims/criminals and so forth - towards more nuanced, complex and politically relevant understandings, able to grasp our everyday embeddedness within a multiplicity of ongoing processes under a racial capitalist frame.

This frame is not intended as an overarching, unopposable rule, but as a racialized and classed structure that hierarchies Western society, a structure that each of us negotiates daily. In this sense a fundamental interest of the project is to focus beyond the exceptional space of the border but also beyond other exceptional spaces, such as radical autonomous experiences, to question how reproduction and contestation of the border regime simultaneously articulate within ordinary spaces.

The overarching question is *how and where is it possible to negotiate a racial capitalist system from 'within' the state?* The following research sub-questions have further guided the research:

1) *How does the European racialised border regime embed itself within everyday life in Palermo? And how is it navigated by racialised migrants?*

2) *How do racialised migrants claim space for their own political and affective expression in Palermo?*

3) *What can everyday urban encounters in Palermo tell us about the conscious and unconscious, relational understanding and racialisation of the 'black other'?*

Through answering these questions, the thesis contributes to an expansion at the intersection of critical border, migration and urban scholarship through: 1) the understanding of how racialised borders operate within everyday life in the city; 2) a more nuanced reading of the repression/humanitarianism/solidarity interplay from the urban ground; 3) bringing first arrival migrants' experience of this interplay to the fore. All of this is looked at from a South European perspective - which is still understudied, despite its increasingly geographical relevance – and adopting a relational approach to the urban, able to consider how the border regime – and migrants experiences of it accordingly – embed within a multiplicity of other processes.

1.3 Structure of the thesis

Chapter 2 engages with the key literatures, concepts and approaches which have shaped the project, from an academic and political point of view. The chapter is divided into three sections: section 1 focuses on the scholarship of European critical border studies, exploring the interplay, within the European border regime, of neocolonial repression, humanitarianism, manifold solidarities and migrants active negotiations of these. Section 2 provides a geographical context for the thesis, exploring what it means to observe the European border regime explicitly from a Southern European perspective and positionality. That is, from an inner, 'precariously white' South, with all its local constraints. Section 3 centres on the city, beyond the geographical border, observing how the urban ground might be a preferential site from where to observe the intersection and mutual shaping of racialised borders, multiscalar politics, local responses, personal histories and everyday life.

Chapter 3 explores the context and methods of the research. On the one hand, Palermo is presented through the changing narrative around the city - from 'Palermo as Beirut' to 'safe harbour for refugees'. This changing narrative is connected to a slow but steady process of enfranchisement, strongly built on the figure and discourses of the former Mayor Leoluca Orlando, who has tightly linked the city's historical centre's regeneration with a discourse of hospitality. On the other hand, the ethnographic methods are presented - especially the construction of a multi-sited, relational ethnography mainly based on participant

observation enacted in different capacities, as observant, volunteer, activist. Within this chapter reflexive considerations on a complex positionality and the ethical issues presented by the project are laid out.

Chapter 4 centres on the local enactment of the international and national border regime around and within Palermo. The 'around' part emerges from stories of arrival in the reception centres scattered in the surrounding province, whereas the 'within' part looks at the local, multifarious network of responding solidarity, as well as the racialised, daily struggles navigated by migrants. The chapter considers the state's enactment and the solidarity network relationally, as two inevitable faces of current regimes of racial capitalism, existing one because of the other. The chapter also observes the multiple, difficult to grasp natures of different solidarity actions, making a call for the need to look beyond binaries, and to adopt a more understanding of the contradictory apparatus built around migration.

Chapter 5 goes on to consider how migrants become actively embedded within the social, economic and political fabric of Palermo, far from being mere passive recipients. Working at the intersection between an expanding infrastructure of solidarity and constrained opportunities locally, which are also racialised, this chapter observes how young, first arrival migrants embed themselves within the humanitarianism/solidarity network as a best option. It also looks at the development of political voice and alternative spaces and actions, which are claimed back from white subsidiaries. Finally, the chapter considers these young migrants' affective relationship with the city, which they oftentimes call 'home', in an attempt to foreground more complex histories than those related to their 'forced migration'.

Chapter 6 broadens the gaze from the solidarity network to the broader context where this network and its multiple actors are located: the safe harbour city-centre, increasingly unaffordable and congested by tourists, continuously navigated by several categories of people on the move, whose free movement is unquestioned. A place where imaginaries connected to migration are made to work through exotic spaces and narratives, while personal stories of something more than 'forced migration' are kept mostly covered. The chapter observes how the encounters made possible by the 'being in the right place at the right moment', by pulling racialized and non-racialized migrant newcomers, tourists and

Palermitani together, reveals the stark contradictions surrounding mobility and the racialized, classed and gendered access to these right places at the right moment.

Chapter 7 elaborates on the conceptual and empirical contributions of the thesis. It reflects on the research questions that have guided the project, extending and critiquing the conceptual debates articulated in chapter 2, and connecting back to the empirical material that this is built upon. It then advances a reflection on where to find radical struggles when acting from within the state. Drawing on the concept of 'antipolitics' presented by Ida Danewid, the discussion explores the potential for foregrounding open, contradictory and conflictual practices as antipolitical struggles 'from within'. The chapter finally considers what this might mean in practical terms for those actively engaging with migration.

Chapter 8 summarises the main points of the thesis and the main findings. It then reflects on the potential for further development.

CHAPTER 2 - MIGRATION, BORDERS, CITIES

Within this chapter I lay out the key literatures, concepts, approaches that have shaped my research project, from an academic and political point of view.

The chapter is divided into three sections: section 1 explores authors who have approached Western contemporary management of migration, especially black migration across the Mediterranean, from a critical and postcolonial perspective. It focuses on the interplay, within the border regime, of neocolonial repression, humanitarianism, manifold solidarities and migrants active negotiations of these. This project expands on this literature, exploring how this interplay is translated from the urban ground, beyond the border, especially focusing on the dimension of solidarity in its multiple forms.

Section 2 provides a geographical context for the thesis, pushing further a postcolonial perspective in terms of the importance of not considering Europe as an homogeneous entity, but as a fallacious construction rooted on racialization and differentiation, asking the question of what it means then to observe what has been described in the first section from a Southern European perspective, that is from an inner, 'precariously white' South, with its local constraints. The point is, on the one side, to provide an idea of the practical context of arrival for migrants, at the intersection of the European border regime and its local enactment and everyday arrangements of inhabitation; on the other hand to push further the postcolonial understanding not only as related to a Global North/Global South divide, but as something significant from within Europe itself.

Section 3 centres on the city, on what happens beyond arrival, observing on the one side what I think are significant gaps in the urban approaches to contemporary migration, especially centred on an apparent depoliticization and still underdeveloped cross-fertilization with other critical approaches, on the other side opening for a relational take on the urban, which considers how cities might be preferential sites from where to observe the intersection, and mutually shaping, of racialised borders, multiscalar politics, local responses, personal histories and everyday life. This project expands on this literature in two ways: 1) it explores how the interplay of repression/humanitarianism/solidarity is configured from an urban perspective, especially challenging easy conceptualizations of

“solidarity”. 2) it foregrounds migrants’ direct and complex experiences of inhabiting the city. This latter point is particularly important as much literature still focuses on who responds to migration, than to migrants themselves.

SECTION 1 - A CRITICAL, POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVE ON MIGRATION AND BORDERS

1.1 The 'refugee crisis' as an 'identity crisis' and a 'racial crisis' for Europe

Borders appear today as a fundamental object of inquiry when looking at the intersection of migration, neocolonial formations and racial capitalist nation-states. In the following section I explore how critical border scholars have adopted a 'border lens' to explore both the ideological roots and practical outcomes of a Western border regime grounded on the repression, differential inclusion and exploitation of the racialised black other.

Within the European context, what has been depicted as the 'refugee crisis' by nation-state's political discourses and media, or the 'long summer of migration', by activists and border scholars (Mezzadra 2018), has increasingly given rise to generalised right-wing nationalist and populist responses, as well as moral panic throughout Europe (Bhambra 2016a; Bulmer and Solomos 2018; De Genova 2018). These have been especially fomented by the aftermath of the economic 'crisis' of 2008 and consequent regime of austerity (Bhambra 2016a; Tazzioli and Genova [ND]), urging the questioning of the concepts of nations, of borders, and whose rights are those portrayed by self-proclaimed liberal, post-colonial and post-racial Europe (Isakjee et al 2020).

As "'migrant' and 'refugee' are not naturally existing categories but name a specific relation of difference imposed by the state" (Danewid 2024:82), the black migrant has increasingly become the scapegoat of raising populists leaders across Europe "to distract the electorate from structural inequality and encourage the populace to blame migrants for their daily quandaries"(Danewid et al 2021:11).

Understanding contemporary migration is increasingly significant "for any adequate theorization of power and politics today." (De Genova et al 2022:783). In this sense, critical scholars across different disciplines have linked the so-called 'migration crisis' to an 'identity crisis' and a 'racial crisis' for Europe (Bhambra 2016a; De Genova 2016, 2018). In this sense, violent repression legitimised by securitization as well as patronising humanitarian actions, the European supposed "aversion to violence" (Isakjee et al 2020:1756) and the discourses of prominent intellectuals (Bhambra 2016a; De Genova 2010; Virdee 2019) are regularly flattening and unacknowledging how colonial racism is still "a defining socio-political fact of

the European condition" (De Genova 2010:413), shaping the relationship between presumed modern, whiteness-bound nation-states and a multicultural rest, who are still not understood as "constitutive of Europe's own self-understanding" (Bhambra 2016a:188; Danewid 2017).

In particular, the "European racial denial, disavowal, and dissimulation in the aftermath of the Holocaust." (De Genova 2016:77) foregrounds and makes the persistence of a "global sociopolitical order of white supremacy" possible (De Genova 2013:1192). In fact, through the adoption of the term 'crisis' the EU conceals as a state of exception/emergency what is actually the permanent and exclusionary neocolonial "norm under global capitalism and our global geo-politcs" (Davies and Isakjee 2019; Tazzioli and Genova 2016:11) .

Practically speaking, by embarking in deadly routes which are actively "produced" (Garelli et al 2018) by the Western regime, in light of "the preemptive unavailability of any other route for migration to Europe for the vast majority of the world's population" (De Genova 2016; Tazzioli and Genova 2016), contemporary waves of immigration are disrupting the historical racism at a distance, which has shaped the European colonial experience and the post-war 'controlled' neocolonial import of labour (De Genova 2016; Kobayashi 2013), forcing Europeans to "contemplate the legacies of Europe's historical crimes" (De Genova 2016:79).

Suzanne Hall has recently described this constant tension between the Western simultaneous need and refusal of migrants as a paradox (S M Hall 2021). Still, today's paradox simply conceals what is indeed a continuation of the colonial and imperialist politics of exploitation and expropriation that have enabled the birth and richness of the very same Western 'modern' nation-states, and the consolidation of Western ideas of belonging, security and supposedly homogeneous identity (Bhambra 2016b; c; De Genova 2016; Stuart Hall 2019; McKittrick 2011; Roy 2019), with the former point still unacknowledged by mainstream discourses and the latter being a prominent excuse for expulsion.

1.2 Border thinking and political imaginations

Within this context, borders have become not just a key geography, but also an epistemic device (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013) and a perspective lens for political imagination. In 2015's 'New keywords: migration and borders' (Casas-Cortes et al 2015), a collective of

scholars across critical migration and border studies observed how migration and borders have consistently become "key figures for apprehending "culture and society" in our contemporary (global) present", as shaped by "the contemporary social regime of capital" in the way it "has multiplied borders and the rights they differentially allocate across populations" (2015:57). Within such a frame, borders' multiscalar multiplication and manifold nature needs to be understood as a proliferation of sorting devices, through which "the state is itself racialising, gendering, and hierarchy-producing" (Danewid 2024:9), therefore maintaining "the hierarchies and stratifications that capital needs to successfully exploit, extract, and expropriate" (ibid.).

And yet borders could also become the "crucial site in the antipolitical struggle against racial capitalism and the state." (2024:19). Tazzioli and De Genova have proposed "seeing from the critical standpoint of migration as inextricable from an interrogation of borders as modalities for the production of racialized difference and inequality" (2023:5), observing how borders are the device through which "racial distinctions and meanings" are produced as function to the production of "'national' populations [...] within a global/postcolonial sociopolitical order of white supremacy and a global political economy of racial capitalism"(2023:5). Infusing the reading of borders with a deeper postcolonial and critical race critique that look at "how contemporary border struggles correspond to longer and less self-evident histories" (2023:19), the authors call for an epistemic change of perspective that centres the lens not on the border, but on migrants' multiple negotiations and struggles around and through borders. As an example, observing how migrants make life beyond citizenship might offer prompts to different modes of thinking "lived politics of participation" (De Genova and Tazzioli 2022:788), allowing for an "emancipation from citizenship altogether" (Tazzioli and De Genova 2023:14), if we consider citizenship as "irrevocably corrupted by fundamental and constitutive inequalities" (De Genova and Tazzioli 2022:788).

For the above mentioned authors, borders are not just the primary expression of the violent racial capitalist state, but also a critical site of political (or antipolitical) imagination, a potential for thinking otherwise. Borders, in their multiscalar dimensions - as sorting devices, bureaucratic impediments, as operating differential inclusion with limited rights, as allowing for the reproduction of multiple forms of extractions to be practised, as suspending moments - will be a main theme throughout the chapters in the way they operate on

migrants' lives beyond arrival (but also upon and prior to), within the urban dimension, but also in the way they are challenged, negotiated daily, strategically. Still, this work stops before the imagination, while strongly acknowledging the inevitable short circuit that is created if state, governance and citizenship are kept as the beginning and the end of the problem (of any problem), allowing for repression and co-optation to suppress radical forms of empowerment and liberation (Danewid 2024).

1.3 The binary logic's function of European borders

Increasingly since the so called 2015 refugee crisis borders within the Schengen area have been allowed to be enacted and protracted (De Genova and Roy 2020), motivated by crisis discourse, impending threats and hypothetical terrorism, defining whose freedom is allowed and whose not (Tazzioli 2020a), and making the differential mobility of resources and different human lives even starker.

Borders allow the enactment of the European asylum system, which "is premised on a comprehensive suspicion of people seeking asylum and is effectively designed to disqualify as many applicants as possible, as allegedly bogus refugees" (De Genova 2016:88). Borders have been extended, through the hotspot system and a multiplicity of other spaces of containment, creating a "variegated spectrum of other spaces of containment and confinement" beyond the physical border (Genova 2021:21; Tazzioli 2018). Borders have also been increasingly externalised (Dadusc and Mudu 2020; De Genova and Roy 2020), shifting a "putatively "un-European" border violence [...] to its "European" (non-EU) peripheries and ("non-European") "third countries,"" (Tazzioli and Genova 2023:40), shifting violence and the attention to it elsewhere. Examples are the EU-Turkey deal in 2016, the Italy-Libya memorandum in 2017, and, more recently, the 2022 UK government attempted agreement for deporting asylum seekers to Rwanda and the 2023 Italy-Albania Protocol for the establishment of "reception and detention" centres "for individuals intercepted with unauthorized border crossing" (Millona 2024).

This section reflects on critical work, mostly from the geographical borders of Europe, which has brought to the surface how borders articulate migrants' lives into criminality or victimhood through the employment of repression and/or humanitarian action, as well as the countermaneuvres enacted by migrants themselves and activists working in solidarity.

European borders have become places where everyday violence is being legitimated and legalised as a ward to communities from illegal subjects - whose illegality is the subversive act of movement from outside the European fortress - or, at best, deprecated as exceptional policy-failures (Isakjee et al 2020), glossing over colonial and racial practices and perspectives, which are all but residual.

The process of criminalization and illegalization of migrants is a global phenomenon (De Genova and Roy 2020). It is aimed at stripping migrants of whatever form of protection or security, making them at the same time disposable and deportable subjects, highlighting the apparently contradictory nature of the nation-state's perspective towards immigration, based on need/rejection. Migrants are routinely recipients of extraordinary laws and manoeuvres, such as those in the aftermaths of terrorists events, leading to a protracted state of emergency that allows for extra-legal actions, which are nonetheless said to be justified by the threat, posing an interesting question regarding who defines legality and illegality (Dadusc 2019:20; Dadusc and Mudu 2020; De Genova and Roy 2020; Isakjee et al 2020; Tazzioli and De Genova 2020). Borders, through the spectacularization of their 'dutiful' enforcement against the 'invasion', displace "'illegality' from its point of production (in the law) [...] to the scene of ostensible crime-fighting" (De Genova 2013:1189), and create that "sheer subjectivity of labour" (2013:1190; Tazzioli 2018; Tazzioli and Garelli 2020), that preludes the subordination of then 'illegal' migrants, as labour surplus without rights beyond the border.

Ultimately, the disposability of the migrant translates into the disposability of human life itself (De Genova and Roy 2020; Isakjee et al 2020). This happens through violent bordering practices, such as the calculated preclusion of safe passages (Tazzioli 2020a), operations of kidnap as sea, where migrants' lives at risk are used in the geopolitical game of 'not taking responsibilities' (Tazzioli and De Genova 2020); or through making the environment hostile, for instance through politics of dispersal and dismantling, or through banning food distribution in the name of potential hygienic-health emergencies (Dadusc and Mudu 2020; Tazzioli 2020a, 2021), or even through simple "deliberate state inaction" (Davies et al 2017:1276). The slow and subtle violence of these actions is aimed at 'choking' migrants, keeping them "short of breath without necessarily dying" (Tazzioli 2021:4). Overall, these

practices, often "framed" as the migrants' "own making" (Isakjee et al 2020:1756) are "disturbingly familiar" (McKittrick 2011:953).

Migrants at the borders are subjected to many forms of spatial control, they are not just immobilised, by being kept into a specific place as it happens with the hotspot approach, but especially contained through being hyper-mobilised, geographically and statutory (Schuster 2005; Tazzioli 2018, 2020a). Containment, in particular, is framed as "the effects of mobility disruption, spatial fixation and temporal suspension that are generated through measures of confinement that do not coincide with detention." (Tazzioli and Garelli 2020:1010), it "is about governing migration by disrupting, decelerating and diverting migrants' autonomous movements and by hampering migrants' presence in certain spaces" (2020:1011). One example might be the extenuating back and forth imposed by the Dublin Regulation, with the intent of "wearing migrants out" (Tazzioli 2020a:519), but also the dispersal tactics enacted to dismantle informal camps at the borders, not just meant to spatially invisibilize migrants, and make the 'problem' less evident, but especially to impede self-organisation between different people under a common struggle and cut the opportunity for developing a political voice as a collective formation (Tazzioli 2020a).

Within this frame, humanitarianism has become the other face of the border regime. Humanitarianism has a long history tightly connected to colonialism and imperialism and, often influenced by catholic thought, paternalistically promotes tolerance and endurance, speaking for suffering victims, without empowering them (Dadusc and Mudu 2020; Mezzadra 2020; Tazzioli 2020a). This produces - together with the repressive state - a binary reading of migrants as either passive victims (the deserving refugee) or 'subversive' subjects (the undeserving economic migrant), wanting more than basic provisional needs, accorded out of compassion (Dadusc 2019; Tazzioli 2018). Though the spectrum of humanitarianism is wide, co-optation into the state's border management is hardly escapable (Stierl 2018). In the Mediterranean - especially with the discursive shift from invasion to humanitarian rescue - there has been an evolution of a "military-humanitarian frontier" "with the marginalization of traditional humanitarian actors (NGOs and UN agencies)" (Garelli et al 2018:665).

On the other side, solidarity practices "creating cracks" (Dadusc and Mudu 2020:1207), that is those solidarity practices rooted in political activism that work with migrants towards their empowerment, are being recursively criminalised as potential pull-factors for migrants, as they create a 'safer space' both at land and at sea (Garelli and Tazzioli 2021; Tazzioli and Walters 2019). With regards to the distinction between solidarity and humanitarianism, Tazzioli and Walters observe how it "relies on the inequalities of lives that the latter is predicated upon, as well as on the asymmetrical, hierarchical power relations that humanitarian interventions entail and foster." (2019:181). Still the interplay of repression/humanitarianism/solidarity, again potentially generates stark simplistic readings, which is that "between 'good whiteness' (tolerant, multicultural, liberal) and 'bad whiteness' (fascist, white nationalist)." (Danewid 2017:1682), glossing over underpinning hierarchies between those who give and receive solidarity (De Genova and Tazzioli 2022:809) and over the tight reciprocal embeddedness of them all.

Observing both the repression and humanitarian apparatus, authors have looked into the huge and multi-dimension economy generated with migration control, around security (e.g. FRONTEX) and humanitarian provision (De Genova and Tazzioli 2022; Dadusc 2019; Dadusc and Mudu 2020; Mezzadra 2020). From the "highly lucrative enterprises for the military-security-prison-industrial complex" (Tazzioli and Genova 2023:27) and the "humanitarian industrial complex" (Dadusc and Mudu 2020), to their multi scale outsourcing to "private companies and third-sector organizations." (Tazzioli and Genova 2023:27) "enacting a minimalist biopolitics that ensures their most basic needs of survival, rather than facilitating the expression of their autonomous subjectivities and the pursuit of their migratory projects (2023:28).

These accounts of the commodification of immigration, together with the accounts of the impossible network of regulatory systems which keep migrants on the move and in constantly precarious status show how the counter-sense of the migrant does not solely sit on a recursive racial banishment from somewhere (Roy 2019), but on this very being kept on the move, dispersed, entangled in back and forth movements and statuses, in order to be overall present somewhere but politically immobilised nowhere (De Genova and Tazzioli 2022).

Still, that of the migrant is a stubborn, “autonomous and incorrigible subjective force” (De Genova and Roy 2020:361), continuously creating counter-manoeuvres and spaces of self-organisation (Genova 2021; Tazzioli 2020a). Examples are the criminalised makeshift camps at the borders (Tazzioli 2020a, 2021), the ‘absurd’ politics of refusal adopted by migrants arriving to South European borders - where they refused being fingerprinted upon arrival, actively rejecting asylum without freedom of movement (Tazzioli 2018)-, the raise of protests and movements against the border regime (Tazzioli 2020b), and the experiences of mutiny to avoid both being disembarked in a specific border or being pushed back to the Lybian shores (Tazzioli and De Genova 2020).

SECTION 2 - SOUTHS WITHIN: UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEMPORARY MIGRATION CRISIS FROM A SOUTHERN EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE

2.1 South Europe, Italy, Sicily: a russian doll of 'othered' places within

As authors have pointed to how contemporary migration is forcing Europe to come to terms with its own history and relationship with a racialized Rest outside of its borders, the intersection of the 2008 economic crisis and 2015 'refugee crisis' has also recursively increased internal tensions. Building on the European internal, never resolved, 'identity crisis', this section shows the messy entanglements of multiple 'othered geographies' within. A broadly academically neglected, politically stigmatised Southern Europe; a country, Italy, historically suspended between its geographical 'blurry boundaries' (Hawthorne 2021) and difficult racial belonging to modern Europe, and today a prominent external enforced border of arrival across one of the deadliest migratory routes; Sicily, the island where Palermo is located, as part of an internal 'South within a South', which represents an experience of internal colonisation, suspended between its former history of cultural contaminations, its role as underdeveloped region of Italy, and as a strategic island for Europe.

The purpose of this section is first, to bring forward the specific context of arrival of migrants who undergo the Mediterranean route, considering also the socio-economic context beyond arrival, the strained relationship between Southern European countries and Northern countries with relation to migration management. Second, by looking at the Italian treatment of its black population, considering authors who have worked on second generations, this section brings to the fore how Italy has made use of its Southern population first, and then its black migrants to create that 'underdeveloped other' on which modern belonging to Europe could be built on. This geographical and historical understanding is fundamental from an epistemic standpoint, to destabilise further not only European modernity, but also stark binary readings of Global North/Global South. This understanding will allow for a more complex reading of how the image of Palermo as a safe harbour city has been built, as well as migrants' experiences of reception upon and beyond arrival in the city.

2.2 From the PIIGS of Europe to subordinated frontiers of the European border regime

Migration across the Mediterranean has pushed forward a reflection on the messy internal relationships of Europe, and on how, "[...] if indeed Europe may be said to be a racial formation of postcolonial whiteness, this certainly does not mean that all Europeans are equally white, or white in the same ways" (De Genova 2016:90).

Greece and Italy, part of the so called PIIGS of Europe – a derogatory term increasingly used during the 2008 'economic crisis' to refer to the weaker economies of Portugal, Italy, Ireland, Greece, and Spain[1] - have gained a prominent role as main external borders. Becoming the forefront of migration management has become synonymous with proving deservingness of being and belonging to Europe (De Genova 2016), especially for countries such as Greece, whose "fiscal "irresponsibility"" intersected with its allegedly "incapacity to "manage" the influx" of migrants in 2015, has led "to threats to suspend Greece's inclusion in the Schengen zone" (De Genova 2021; Tazzioli and De Genova 2016:10). In this sense, "the Hotspot System" for instance "is formed by a set of procedures and infrastructures for regaining control over autonomous migration movements and, simultaneously, for monitoring and putting pressure on Greece and Italy, concerning their obligation to identify migrants" (Tazzioli 2018:2765), and can be seen as the "spatialisation of the EU attempt to discipline Italy and Greece to comply with the EU identification procedures and forcing the countries to share the collected fingerprints in the EURODAC17 database" (Tazzioli and Garelli 2020:1014). This diplomatic war between countries is ultimately exercised on migrants' bodies, such is the case of Italy and Malta refusing docking migrants until Northern countries accepted to host them (Tazzioli and De Genova 2020), or the case of migrants "explicitly directed and coerced into moving to other European countries by police and border authorities, being informed that they could not expect provisions in Italy" (Davies et al 2017:1273) after having been fingerprinted, which means forcing them in a state of illegalization due to the Dublin rules.

Interestingly, migrants too contribute to the ranking of European countries, such is the case of those attempting to defy the Dublin regulation and "'rating with their feet,' down-grading or disqualifying countries that they deem to be not sufficiently 'European' - not fulfilling

[1] https://www.ft.com/content/b0493358-45ad-447f-883a-f58780aa01f9

their ideal of 'Europe'" (Tazzioli and Genova 2016:15). Emblematic, the case of Tunisian migrants after the 2011 revolution who, upon arrival in Italy expressed that "they had no desire to remain in Italy and wanted instead to go to Europe", showing how "there is no such monolith as Europe, that much of Europe comes up short of the gleaming ideal of "Europe" as an obscure object of desire" (De Genova 2016:76). Although this project engages with what happens beyond arrival and beyond the hotspot, as a main enactment of the broader regime to smaller scales, keeping these frictions in mind is fundamental in the framing of Palermo, placed within a border zone, as a safe harbour.

2.3 The South European context of arrival: othered people in 'othered' places

> "*The world is not polarized. It is fragmented. With the incorporation into the discussion of in-between spaces of the South, we have easily shown that between contemporary western culture and 'non-western others', there are western others!*" (Leontidou 1996:191)

Despite the growing relevance of this geography and the growing body of literature across disciplines observing Southern countries of arrival from a migration perspective, both in terms of reception system and raising solidarities, the relationship between Southern European cities and migration has been overall underexplored.

From an urban perspective, authors such as Leontidou (1996, 2014) and Arbaci (2008) - the latter specifically on migration and cities - have argued that the overall underdevelopment of South European studies is tightly connected to the hegemonic nature of American and Western-European theory. This has overlooked the non-fitting stories of South European countries, whose path cannot be read through the (Western) Eurocentric modern/developmentalist tale. These countries' 'non-compliance' has alternatively been either romanticised for its spontaneity (Pfirsch and Semi 2016), or 'othered' and stigmatised as scapegoats by Western European political discourse denigrating indolence and irresponsibility, especially following the recent economic crisis (Arapoglou 2012; Leontidou 2014; Pfirsch and Semi 2016).

Within a Europe as "a cultural construct through the ages, rather than a continent or a fixed bordered entity" (Leontidou 2014:594) - where throughout history ambiguous identities and

internal racialized others have been constructed, with consequent shifting borders demarcating who belongs and who does not - in the context of urban studies, Lila Leontidou (1996) has observed how Mediterranean cities do not fit Northern models, whose “grand, universal stories and generalisation” dictated a linear/evolutionary behavioural standard, for places of “absent welfare [...] moderated by family solidarity”, where “segregation is fractured by vertical differentiation, contractual relationships fade with informal social networks”. Places where “fordism seldom took root” - despite few experiences that never became the rule - and whose political economy “has been based on late industrialization, a feeble bourgeoisie, and informal labourers rather than a proletariat” (180). The author observed then how these Mediterranean cities could not be “conceptualised within the development/underdevelopment, core/periphery dichotomies of political economy or the urban/rural, modern/traditional, modern/postmodern bipolarities of urban theory.”(Leontidou 1996:180). What she was basically asking was to ‘provincialize’ Western urban understanding and studies, not just through a rejection of European imposed universalisations, but through critically engaging with those (Chakrabarty 2007). A call from ‘within’ that is still underrepresented within an academic context that is still heavily theoretically built on a, more or less critical, clear-cut Global North/Global South divide, as shown by examples working on decolonising knowledge (Leitner and Sheppard 2016; Parida and Agrawal 2022; Robinson 2006; Sheppard et al 2013).

Understanding the specificity of Southern European cities is fundamental not just as decolonial practice, but as that is the context where the majority of contemporary migrants get stuck in as either asylum seekers, as refugees-in-waiting, or as subjects made illegal.

Overall, migration to South Europe - historically a country that exported labour more than importing it (Leontidou 1996) - is a younger phenomenon than in Western Europe - having become massive from the ’90s onwards. It has presented since the beginning those traits, such as the post-industrial character, high diversity of origin and frequent irregular nature (Arbaci and Malheiros 2010; Malheiros 2002; Maloutas 2009), which are now becoming frequent also in those countries used to the controlled import of labour from ex colonies.

Insertion of migrants into the labour market has not been pulled by high demands in growing sectors of the industry, such had been the case of the economic boom in America

and post war reconstruction in West Europe. Immigrants have filled a demand for cheap labour in niches emptied by natives, such as low productivity sectors and the family-care system, due to social restructuring processes, such as the overall improvement of employment for natives and the growing employment of women. Furthermore, migrants have often ended up within the informal market, which is consistent in South Europe alongside the formal one (Arbaci 2008; Arbaci and Malheiros 2010; Maloutas 2009).

The type of labour, often informal, intermittent and low paying, has huge impact on the affordability of housing, this too often accessed informally (Arbaci and Malheiros 2010), especially given that migrants usually try to save on rents for other purposes, such as remittances or entrepreneurial take-off (Arbaci 2008). The access to housing has been also impacted by sparse area-based regeneration processes, especially within historical centres, with consequent displacement of migrants from old housing stock, once improved (Arbaci and Malheiros 2010; Arbaci and Tapada-Berteli 2012; Malheiros 2002). The internal upward mobility framing some working-class neighbourhoods, characterised by a weak presence of migrants, contrary to Western countries, has precluded access from outside. Finally, an housing regime which is hugely based on owner occupation, supported by credit system and patrimonial inheritance, made possible by family ties - which are common reliefs in South Europe - and hardly disposable by migrants. This adds to limited public housing, the corrosion of self-built housing – on which internal migrants in the '50s and '60s had heavily relied on – (Arbaci and Malheiros 2010; Maloutas 2009) and a shrunk rental sector, without control over rents, due to the liberalisation of the housing market from the mid '80s (Arbaci 2008; Arbaci and Malheiros 2010; Malheiros 2002).

All of the above complete the picture of a social and economic structure that routinely pushes away migrants to areas poorly served and infrastructured (Arbaci and Malheiros 2010). Migrants, in fact, are hardly segregated within South European cities, not due to specific policies, but due to the fragmented spatialization of labour and the ever-present risk of displacement, without this having the positive rhetoric of mixed society as a solution to migrant's marginalisation spread across West Europe (Arbaci 2008; Malheiros 2002).

Although Ponzo (2019), observes the gap between migrants' and natives' employment in several South European cities has been less impacted by the 2008 economic crisis than in

some Western cities, with the intent of showing the existence, in South Europe, of positive alternatives (and the overall attempt of attesting South Europe's capability at managing immigration), simplistic positive assumptions of different Southern ways to integration should be avoided. Significantly, with reference to the Italian case of Tunisians in Mazzara del Vallo (Sicily), Giglioli (2017) has pointed out how immigration's legislation, with impossibly hard ways towards citizenship, does not exclude, but it does incorporate the migrant as exploitable labour force with controlled rights, thus highlighting the interplay between what the migrant should achieve, according to the law, to get documents and with them the possibility to access public resources (also Maloutas 2009), and the tragically ironical combination between absence of papers, informal low-paid, precarious jobs, and high rents difficult to maintain (also Avallone 2018).

Furthermore, whereas others have already pointed out a different, if not necessarily policed, treatment between natives and migrants for what regards housing accommodation (Arbaci 2008; Arbaci and Malheiros 2010; Malheiros 2002), Giglioli also points out how natives, even disadvantaged ones employed within informal sectors, still can access services such as the social pension, being guaranteed a steady if low income, which migrants cannot access because of not being citizens. In the same way, informality should be understood in its multidimensionality, not just as a powerful counter-narrative from the bottom to the menacing neoliberalist societies (Leontidou 1996, 2014), but also as the institutionalised informality that contributes to migrants' everyday precarisation. In practice, speaking of the Italian case, Giglioli observes how "The Italy and Europe into which migrants are inserted […] are highly differentiated, and regional economic differences have substantial effects on the lives and livelihoods of migrants and people of migrant descent." (Giglioli 2021:16).

2.4 Italy's post-colonial question and the erasure of race.

"As a counterrevolution, state formation was from the start a racial-colonial project entailing both internal centralisation and domination as well as external conquest and enslavement. This went hand in hand with the making of racialized others who could be enslaved, exploited, and expropriated, as well as with the emergence of whiteness as the integral element of European ruling-class identity. The state has therefore always been a racial state" (Danewid 2024:8)

Satnam Virdee (2019) and, more recently, Ida Danewid (2024) - drawing on Cedric Robinson's conceptualization of racial capitalism - have stressed how the racialisation of exploitable 'others' was not born with imperialism and colonial politics, but before that, first of all within the very same Europe and its various Souths and Easts. Indeed, the "wilful invention of racism" (Virdee 2019:13) is collocated "within the unfolding story of historical capitalism" (2019:22), constitutive not only of the relationships between the West and the Rest (Hall 2019), but also of the "plurality of racisms" (2019:22) that have occurred within, as "colonialism did not just occur beyond Europe's imagined boundaries but within them" (2019:6). Fundamentally, "there was no simultaneous incorporation of the European-descended subaltern into whiteness across time and space" (Balibar 2009; 2019:22).

Pushing such a postcolonial stance to the fore is fundamental to fight Europe's contemporary erasure of race - and its deadly outcome for migrant newcomers as well as for non-white long-standing inhabitants - and is the fundamental premise for questioning what Europe is, what its democratic concepts and ideals are and whom they work for, both looking outside and within. Within this section, I will briefly observe the Italian and Sicilian context, as part of a messy entanglement of 'othered' geographies, constantly striving for a social, cultural, economic belonging, which are often subtly fought for on a racial basis.

In Italy, discourses on race and racialization have been foreclosed within the country's post-war culture, deprecated as a Fascism trace, and concealed by mainstream discourse as mere matters of cultural difference and security (Hawthorne 2022; Lombardi-Diop and Romeo 2012). Racism has been configured in public discourses as "the expression of a backward culture, restricted to individual actions and fuelled by largely irrational ideas and feelings" (Oliveri 2018:1855).

Despite the growth in recent years of a critical postcolonial scholarship within the Italian academy, "the general public and the intellectual sphere still seem to be impermeable." (Lombardi-Diop and Romeo 2012:91) and "it is difficult to find any significant theoretical debate on racism anywhere in Italian intellectual history, or on its role in the formation of the modern Italian nation." (2012:93). Merrill (2011) and Hawthorne (2021) echo this comment observing an overall lack of engagement with critical race and black studies, "often

rejected as Anglo-American impositions" (Hawthorne 2021:191). In a call to 'de-provincialize Italy' (Mellino 2012), Italian decolonial scholars have stressed how a postcolonial discourse in Italy, as well as a proper understanding of the Italian approach to contemporary migration, cannot be separated from Italy's often revisioned, "charged history" (Lombardi-Diop and Romeo 2015:370). This would comprise the never resolved 'Southern Question', that is Italy's relationship with its own internal colonial experience and its related South-North migration; the country's colonial experience in Africa; the "epochal mass emigrations to the Americas, North Africa and later Northern Europe" (Lombardi-Diop and Romeo 2014:429), all fundamental moments/movements in defining Italian cultural (racial) identity.

Although deepening these issues is beyond the scope of this project, this remains a fundamental context to take into account. For instance, it sheds light on black migrants' position in Italy and on how blackness has given purpose to an imagined Italian homogeneity, by putting "southern Italians [...] in a position of greater privilege as citizen insiders vis ` a vis 'blacks'" (Merrill 2011:1543). "Racial discrimination and segregation constitute a heavy legacy for contemporary Italy." (Lombardi-Diop and Romeo 2015:374), regularly enacted within the country and outside of it in the colonies, with racial restrictions regulating access to rights, citizenship and belonging (Hawthorne 2021, 2022). Public racial hate discourses and crimes, as well as securitarian approaches, in Italy were already growing exponentially before the 2015 'refugee crisis' (Lombardi-Diop and Romeo 2015:374; Merrill 2011), while being counterbalanced by a "discourse of Mediterranean mixing and conviviality", which further eludes questions on the "connections between racism, xenophobia, and dispossession in Italy." (Hawthorne 2021:185). Basically, the same Mediterranean geography that makes Italian identity unstable "becomes an easy proxy for Italian race-neutrality—in other words, Italians do not have a racial identity because they are a "mixed" people, geographically proximate to Africa and not fully white, and are thus are incapable of racism." (ibid).

The foreclosure of race in Italy is evident within an increasingly repressive management of migration, which, in line with other European countries, is simply framed as security measures and fight against human trafficking. Colucci (2018) observes how the country's migration politics has been developed later, compared to other European countries, and has

been linked first, from the 60s, to the regulation of quantities as related to the demand for workers, being later increasingly connected - in unison with what was happening at the European level - with a securitarian approach and the dominance of discourses of emergency. In both cases, a comprehensive approach to migrant lives beyond arrival has never been taken into account. This is especially reflected by a long list of 'sanatorie' (amnesties), which have remained the only way to progressively make migrants, already subalternly positioned within the country, 'legal'.

Mirroring wider politcs, today requesting asylum has become the only legal way to enter the country, considering the progressively stricter numbers of job permits, which have been suspended altogether in certain years. To give a brief overview of the Italian reception system, newly arrived migrants are hosted within a Hotspot centre, which acts as a 'securitarian filter (Tazzioli 2018)', where migrants undergo biometric identification. On the one hand, migrants who refuse requesting asylum are transferred to detention centres for repatriation (CPR), which by law should guarantee the respect of human dignity. In practice, CPR across Italy have been long denounced for the long detention in inhuman conditions, as places where "it is legit to affirm that no one can be suitable to live […] (not only those persons categorised as vulnerable)" (Melting Pot Europa 2024). Places where "if you are not crazy, you become crazy" (Ferrara and Gennaro 2024).

On the other hand, migrants who make an asylum request, should be transferred to first reception's regional hubs for no more than 30 days, before being transferred to second reception centres. The latter is the SPRAR system, imagined as a second reception beyond the emergency. The SPRAR system should be grounded on the cooperation between local authorities and third sector actors, aimed at tailoring paths for migrants 'to integrate in the host society'. Still, as this system is heavily undersized and under-resourced, the CAS system was born, as centres of exceptional reception. These structures are entrusted to profit or non-profit realities, according to the procedures for awarding public contracts. Within these structures, there is no requirement in terms of the operators' skills and activities of monitoring are activated only in the case of a denounce (Galdo 2018). Within the CAS system migrants' existence can be suspended for years: asylum seekers have to undergo a Territorial Committee, which decides whether to accept or reject the asylum request, but the length of the procedures is arbitrary and unpredictable.

Border scholars have recursively observed the violence enacted by the Italian reception system, which configures as a "quasi-carceral process of documentation" (Davies et al 2017:1272), that produces vulnerable subjects in both cases of acceptance or rejection of the asylum request, due to long delays, arbitrariness, lack of infrastructures and so forth. Also, the Italian emergency reception has been recursively denounced for the proliferation of corruption, organised crime and clientelist management of its structures (Colucci 2018; Accardo 2018; Avallone 2018).

Aside from the reception system, but related to it, increasingly repressive measures are being introduced by the recent governments. For instance, the 2017 Decreto Minniti-Orlando has removed, among the rest, the possibility to appeal after a first degree rejection of the asylum request (Agostino 2018); the 2018 Decreto Salvini's has abolished the permit for humanitarian protection in favour of more fragmented and restrictive categories (Facchini 2021). Lately, the Decreto Cutro, which takes the name of the 2023 Strage di Cutro (the Massacre of Cutro) where almost one hundred migrants died at sea for a wilful failure to assist, eliminates the possibility of converting the new permit of special protection in a job permit, and the elimination of the possibility for the Territorial Commission to evaluate eventual family links (Schiavone 2023). All these measures have led to an increasingly higher number of denials. To give a practical idea, in 2022, despite Italy facing comparatively a substantially lower number of asylum requests (77.195) with respect to Germany (217.735), France (137.505) and Spain (116.140), the number of denials have reached 53% (CIR 2022).

Still, it is not possible to understand Italy's relationship with migrants without grounding the Italian reception system not only within the broader European migration management system, but within the broader context of how Italy understands its 'black others'. Interestingly, Camilla Hawthorne observes how in Italy, "at a moment when explicit mentions of race are no longer publicly acceptable, citizenship has become a primary way to mediate the relationship of Blackness to Italianness." (2021:176; Merrill 2023). In fact, "Italy has among the most restrictive nationality laws in Europe." (Hawthorne 2022:32), still rooted on *jus sanguinis* and framed, once granted, as a 'concession', which needs to be reinvigorated by a constant performance of Italianness . Children born in Italy from immigrant parents do not immediately obtain citizenship and have to wait until they reach

the age of eighteen, when “applicants must provide proof of continuous Italian residency and pay an application fee of 250 euros, among other application requirements.” (Hawthorne 2022:33). Still, continuous residency is often difficult to demonstrate. Not having an Italian citizenship means - among other things - the impossibility of applying for ‘concorsi pubblici’ (open competitions for jobs in the public sector), which cuts out a vast array of opportunities, and the impossibility of voting in local and national elections. Ironically, someone who has Italian blood running in the family and never had contact with the country has an easier access to obtaining citizenship, as this could be linked to historical mass emigration and an attempt at projecting Italian culture elsewhere (Hawthorne 2022; Lombardi-Diop and Romeo 2015).

2.5 Sicily’s ambiguous position as a ‘South within the South’

Recently, Carmine Conelli (2022) has re-inscribed Gramsci’s ‘Southern question’ within a global colonial frame. In the immediate before and aftermath of the 1861 Italian unification, the author describes ‘the discovery of the South’ by politicians, intellectuals and the general public of the North of Italy, but also from Northern European countries – one example being English intellectuals visiting the Italian South during the Grand Tour. Conelli describes the construction of multiple imaginaries, observing how the South of Italy has been produced by Northern European and Italian elites to counteract their own modernity. Initially an exotic fascination, later criminalised as a backward “heaven inhabited by devils” (2022:68), Italy’s ill part, the “Africa at home” (2022:80), also due to supposedly biological differences ‘scientifically proved’.. Conelli also observes how the patronising gaze of Southern intellectuals, who had been trained with Northern models, still resonate today in the ways, within Southern cities, wealthy inhabitants denounce the backwardness of the poor strata of the society, within a never ending process of othering, which aims at detaching and being included within the Western modern/developmentalist tale. Interestingly, what Conelli describes is particularly resonant with the processes described by postcolonial authors such as Aimé Césaire and Franz Fanon.

Within such a frame, Giglioli (2017) has interestingly observed how Sicily, the Southern Italian island where Palermo is located, represents one of the many Souths generated by Eurocentrism and uneven development. In this sense, Sicily’s responses to immigration have

been influenced by its peculiar history as a subordinated part of Italy, its own story of migration, its attempts at autonomous relationships across the Mediterranean with North Africa, as well as its progressive assimilation into the European Union, of which Sicily represents today an important border zone to be kept under control. Building on the experience of Tunisia during the late nineteenth century's French protectorate, the author observes the complex positioning of Sicilian migrants escaping poverty, as they were exploited on the one side by the Italian government as a country's step into Tunisia, and by the French government as slightly more civilised mediators - as they were Christians - with respect to local Tunisians. At the same time "In 1970s and 1980s Italy, promoting economic cooperation with a land that was 'paradoxically' poorer than Sicily, represented a way for the intellectual and political elites of the island to challenge its marginality within Italy and Europe." (Giglioli 2017:421). The author uses this history to address Sicily's apparently different approach to migration, as well as to point to the material context of arrival of migrants: drawing on the concept of differential inclusion and focusing on the Tunisian community the author observes how for migrants "in marginalised regions such as Sicily, 'full inclusion' into Italy (by acquiring citizenship) does not guarantee people of Tunisian descent access to stable lives and livelihoods" (Giglioli 2021:16), due to the various structural disadvantages of this part of the country.

SECTION 3 - BACK TO THE CITY, BEYOND SURVIVAL: READING THE BORDER REGIME FROM THE URBAN GROUND

3.1 Introduction

This last section goes back to the city, the setting of this ethnographic project. This project aims at bringing the critical, post-colonial understanding of migration offered by border scholars beyond the extra-ordinary geography of borders and beyond arrival, asking how racialised borders embed into everyday life in the city, how they map within particular historical and geographical contexts, and how they are daily strategically navigated by migrants. This is fundamental as current urban studies are still prominently centred on partial, presumptively pragmatic, policy-driven understanding of migration and cities.

In the following I observe how cities offer, through their shaping and being shaped by multiple and intersecting trajectories and encounters, a critical scale for observing the everyday entanglement of multiscalar processes and politics, local responses, histories and human lives. The first section engages with authors who have used urban encounters - with more or less critical approaches - to counteract simplistic assimilationist approaches, to describe more complex relationships between migrants and their cities of arrival. Second and third sections follow recent accounts which are specifically centred on the role of cities within the refugee crisis, arguing about the persistent difficulty, within urban knowledge production, in talking consistently about the structural role of race. Finally, the fourth section presents some accounts which are working at the intersection of borders and cities, raising fundamental questions about the politics of race and how they affect everyday life in the city.

3.2 Cities as places of multiple encounters

From the Chicago School onwards, cities have been a preferential site to discuss the negotiation (or not) of difference (Castles 2007; King 2012; Pisarevskaya et al 2020; Vertovec 2007a), adopting mainly policy-driven approaches, mainly interested in the assimilation of supposedly homogeneous ethnic groups into the host society.

On the other hand, challenging simplistic assimilationist and policy-driven approaches, authors have focused on urban everyday encounters with difference to focus on everyday

negotiations and their politics (Wilson and Darling 2016), to contest easy assumptions about marginality and a threatened social cohesion - concepts often mobilised at political/institutional level to legitimate dubious planning and policy interventions -, investigating instead possibilities of a shared common and genuine agonism among empowered subjects (Amin 2002, 2012; Back and Sinha 2016; Fincher 2003; S M Hall 2015; Suzanne Hall 2012; Sandercock 2000). For instance, ethnic economic activities, usually observed as a main way through which migrants make themselves visible and part of the city (Kloosterman and Rath 2010), have been explored, despite their being a restricted option, to discuss migrants' place-making and their multiple economic and social relationships, transnational and local ones, thus highlighting the contradictions between thriving communities and the superimposed stigma they usually bear (S M Hall 2015; Suzanne Hall 2012; Hatziprokopiou et al 2016; Hatziprokopiou and Frangopoulos 2016; Kloosterman and Rath 2010; Lagendijk et al 2011). Although a focus on everyday encounters, and especially "convivial encounters" (Valentine 2008:334), risks to leave questions of power unaddressed and untouched, these are still a "conceptually charged construct" which remain critical for understanding "the embodied nature of social distinctions and the contingency of identity and belonging." (Wilson 2017:453).

As diversity within cities embeds within a multiplicity of urban processes authors have looked into how diversity has also become a commodifiable feature, especially since the entrepreneurial turn (Harvey 1989; Jessop 2000; Shaw et al 2004), that sees cities increasingly competing against each other over scarce economic resources. Authors have observed how diversity is at the same time prompt for regeneration plans targeting marginality, but also a commodifiable feature to attract middle-class incomers, usually producing displacement in both cases (van Eck et al 2020; Hackworth and Rekers 2005; Hatziprokopiou et al 2016; Shaw et al 2004). Within such a context, Kosnick has worked at the intersection between neoliberal transformation and urban encounters to investigate the nighttime leisure mobility in Berlin, observing how racialized ethnic minorities benefit "from being in the right urban place at the right time though this time might soon enough come to an end" to navigate racialised, gendered and classed access to leisure (Kosnick 2018:9). The same author, investigating queer migrant clubbing in Berlin, observes how it defies the essentialism that organises social understanding of urban migrant populations through

simplistic notions of identity and community by presenting more malleable and fluctuant social affiliations, questioning urban space not for its immediate potential for mixing through co-presence, but rather "how different forms of sociality and association arise, and under what conditions particularly with regard to different forms of public life" (Kosnick 2017:78).

Finally, urban encounters offer also the potential for looking into whom these encounters call into question, spurring further reflection on "the different ways in which subjects and objects are formed, remade and given meaning, but also on how extensions of power are both undermined and enacted" (Wilson 2017:464). For instance, going beyond the most common migrant-native relationship, authors are increasingly calling for critically considering the normalised, legal and/or economic 'privileged mobility' (Duplan and Cranston 2023:334) of that mainly white population not labelled as migrant but through a vast array of categories: the expats, South workers, digital nomads, leisure migrants, students, retired. Categories which do not necessarily seek/need better economic opportunities but a better quality of life (Garry and Hall 2015), and whose access to mobility is given for granted and considered as totally unrelated from the imposed immobility of racialised migrants. Authors are working on the racialised hierarchization produced through differential mobility (white/non-white, but also different degrees of whiteness) and on how these hierarchies are relationally co-produced (Kunz 2020). Understanding migration with respect to other forms of migration contributes further to the intersections between race and migration (Cranston 2017), through the understanding of how they map into the "global power geometries of globalising capital, neoliberal governmentality and the histories of colonialism and Empire" (Kunz 2016:97).

Within these various accounts, although some authors denounce racism as affecting structurally migrants' lives within their cities of arrival (Hatziprokopiou et al 2016; Lancione 2016a; Tissot 2007; Valentine 2008), the paradoxical everyday coexistence of conviviality and racist attitude (S M Hall 2015), the commodified romanticization of difference and the usual intersection of ethnicity with other forms of economic and spatial marginalisation and exclusion (S M Hall 2021) still lead some authors interested in the urban dimension to flatten the role of race (Wacquant 2014, 2016), to collapse it with 'ethnicity' (Amin 2002), or to understand racism as simply a leftover (Back and Sinha 2016).

3.3 Policy-driven approaches and the difficulty of being political about migration and cities

The difficulty in urban studies with grasping consistently with race and the persistent lack of consistent intersections with critical approaches is made evident by as the fast spread of concepts such as Vertovec's notion of 'superdiversity' (2007b), which despite the critiques, has gained use across several disciplines as descriptive tool, a methodological approach, a policy-oriented tool (Meissner and Vertovec 2015). The author's perceived discrepancy between past "large, well-organized" incoming of people from former colonies to much more fragmented, variegated newcomers, which has been then made especially significant from the refugee crisis onwards, is simplified into "a multiplication of significant variables that affect where, how and with whom people live." (Vertovec 2007b:1025), without prompting further critical discussion about the colonial reasons subtending this observation (De Bock 2015). In this sense, the author's core argument stays in the identification of an "interaction of variables" (ibid.) beyond ethnicity alone, with no critical questioning of those, mirroring the apparent neutrality of urban policies and bureaucracy. Interestingly, Vertovec's response to feminist scholars questioning how superdiversity dialogues with intersectionality has been that where the latter is concerned with the "combined workings of race, gender and class" (Meissner and Vertovec 2015:545), the former is concerned "with different categories altogether, most importantly nationality/country of origin/ethnicity, migration channel/legal status and age as well as gender." (ibid.; Vertovec 2019). The author's reflection on how superdiversity is "(merely) a concept and approach about new migration patterns." and it is not "a theory" which would entail "an explanation of how and why these changing patterns arose, how they are interlinked, and what their combined effects causally or necessarily lead to" (Vertovec 2019:126) seems to operate a split between the policy and the political, with race employed as a mere variable.

And yet, what is interesting about superdiversity is its reverberation across disciplines. Within a context of widespread methodological nationalism, academic colour-blindness and difficult contamination with disciplines where an "urgent call to insert "race" more centrally into our comprehension" is already being made (S M Hall 2017:1565); a context where most studies are still "confined to measuring the level of 'integration', assessing 'separately' how immigrants of different backgrounds are doing, and how much or how little they integrate into host societies." (Padilla et al 2015:621); and where the main focus since the post-war

economic boom has been on ethnicity and homogeneous ethnic groups with policy-driven academic interests focused on integration and assimilation (De Bock 2015; Meissner 2015; Padilla et al 2015), superdiversity has seemingly provided a different lens that defies homogeneity despite how it "woefully lacks any meaningful postcolonial analysis or decolonial critical perspective" (Tazzioli and Genova 2023:38).

Observing the relationship between migration and cities from a political and not just policy-driven perspective is fundamental also because, especially since the so called 2015 'migration crisis', much work has been focusing on cities mainly with reference to governance, considering migration policies as a 'battlefield' claimed and negotiated by different stakeholders (national governments, international organisations, municipalities, third sector actors, social movements, migrants) (Ambrosini 2021).

3.4 The increasingly central role of cities within contemporary migration struggles

In light of the 'refugee crisis', cities have become increasingly a critical place from which to observe the entanglement of race, broader Western politics, local enactments and counter-manoeuvres, not only as "'destinations' for migrants, not simply sites of migrant 'reception' and 'integration' and in no simple sense 'assimilation' machines" (Genova 2021:290).

Authors working on experiences of radical autonomy within cities have explored how migrants' movement beyond arrival has been encountered by solidarity of activists and social groups within societies of arrival (Dadusc and Mudu 2020; Mezzadra 2018, 2020; Raimondi 2019), creating transversal alliances beyond the binary of migrant/citizen over shared struggles. Urban squats, as enacting 'radical autonomy' (Mudu and Chattopadhyay 2016) have provided alternatives to the institutional hotspots, places where not only migrants are segregated from the rest of society and are denied access to the city, but where human dignity is also suspended (Raimondi 2019, about the Greek hotspot of Moria).

Also, squats have emerged not as spaces of pacified difference, but places where antagonisms and divergences exist and are negotiated on a daily basis (Lafazani 2018; Mezzadra 2020; Mudu and Chattopadhyay 2016; Raimondi 2019), on a recognition basis that challenges as host/guest relationship (Dadusc 2019). Through this solidarity, which distances

from humanitarian action, and which is based on mutual recognition, they have put in practice acts of resistances, that have not the sole objective of better conditions or the obtaining of citizenship, but have proposed new social and political relations, routinely and openly condemning nationalism, borders and xenophobia (Dadusc 2019; Mudu and Chattopadhyay 2016; Raimondi 2019), with the consequent institutional outrage, which has manifested, for instance, through eviction of squats occupied by activists and migrants.

Still, again, that of the squat is an exceptional space. This project seeks, on the other hand, to understand everyday life more broadly within an every-day city, which is fundamental as the role of cities within the 'refugee crisis' is generating another dichotomy.

In fact, especially following the 2015 'refugee crisis' and consequent European borders enforcement and enactment of repressive national politics, cities are increasingly investigated as sites of proliferation of borders, where every space of everyday life becomes the ultimate checkpoint (Dadusc 2019; De Genova 2021; S M Hall 2021), but also, increasingly, as sites of counteractions and of multidimensional solidarities (Bauder 2021; Bauder and Gonzalez 2018; Bauder and Juffs 2020).

'Solidarity cities', 'Cities of refuge', 'Sanctuary cities' are being studied across Europe in the way they counteract national repressive politics and discourse, promoting counter-discourses, policies and alliances rooted on different forms of solidarities. More broadly, despite international closure, a main focus of this literature regards how cities cope, in practice, with the illegal subjects produced by the border regime (Bauder and Gonzalez 2018; Mayer 2018), working at the intersection between "the imperative of social policy and the aims of immigration control" (Ataç et al 2020:116). Authors have used solidarity cities to look at how these cities enact different forms and types of solidarity depending on their cultural and political background, also potentially connected to city marketing where a culture of welcome can become a distinctive feature (Oomen 2019); the relative independence from the national frame, comparing top-down and grassroots approaches, and their potential cooperation and transnationality (Bauder 2021); the more or less politicisation of solidarity movements, leading to an array of symbolic gestures, humanitarianism, radical politics, provision of welfare and/or open contestation and

opposition of national rules (Fischer and Bak Jørgensen 2021; Mayer 2018), such as refusing to report 'illegal' migrants.

Still, this literature, which is mostly centred on discourse and policy analysis, and on interviews with local bureaucrats and activists, seems to be mostly interested in the practical understanding of cities behaviour within multiscalar governance in the case of challenging issues, migration being one of many (Özdemir 2022). It produces the risky idea that within the urban scale "solidarity bonds and coexistence prevail before national borders and cosmopolitan imaginaries about welcoming, human rights, and the universal political community are enhanced." (Agustín and Jørgensen 2019:199), without friction. It does not take into account the migrant as an active part of the discourse, as the migrant just indirectly appears as the victim of the border regime and a recipient in need of solidarity, instead of a political subject actively involved, despite being often "characterised by a severe lack of resources and extremely restricted, yet differentiated, access to rights, depending on the legal status." (Mayer 2018:241).

Moreover, most authors work on solidarity within cities as it sits within an empty space, with little critical appreciation of local contexts, of how urban solidarities map into other urban processes. Issues such as the contextual existence not just of the national border enforcement, but also of other forms of exclusion in cities, as well as the potential commodification of solidarity are only quickly cited in some cases. In the context of US Sanctuary Cities, Julie Young observed how "The city in its entirety is not a refuge; rather spaces within a particular city are claimed as refuge" and how the city is indeed "a specific site in which an individual seeking refuge materially engages the state in its actual forms, as contrasted with engaging the broad idea of the 'nation-state'", such as the border is, but it is also, differently than the border, "a particular kind of space with a built landscape, political economy, and social geography distinct from those of non-urban, small-town, or rural spaces" (Young 2011:537), that "occupies a central role in the functioning of the state" (2011:538).

Finally, there are few critical accounts that look in depth at the relationship between local administration and the civic apparatus of service provision. In this sense, Mayer observes for instance how the proliferating out-source to "unpaid and not always sufficiently trained

volunteers" (2018:239) can lead to a worsening in the delivery of quality of service while producing further cuts acted on the impression of compensation. Also, few critical accounts defy the yet another binary proposing repressive national/international framework and a proliferation of exceptionally good cities, which are seldom considered in their reproduction of border practices, as well as in their "deeply segregated systems of winners and losers", which favour "the individual most capacitated to learn the national language, find work and navigate the city, by adopting the motif of 'the good migrant'." (Georgiou et al 2022:2209). All of this in a context where "the state's devolution of care produces erratic, individualised and frequently depleted systems of support." (2022:2210), but where urban actors have nevertheless to "compete for limited resources within racialised and gendered hierarchical systems of urban governance and economy" (2022:2220).

3.5 A relational approach to borders and cities

Scholars are increasingly looking into the ways racialised borders creep through the urban realm beyond the geography of the borders. In this sense, cities become a place where to fruitfully look at the "paradoxical cohabitation of multiculturalism and racism", at how racial diversity maps into the socio-spatial inequalities produced by multiscalar trajectories (Arapoglou 2012), how the racialised border regime embeds within multiple other ongoing processes and crisis, from the economic recession to subsequent restructuring and urban regeneration grounded in a racialised "political economy of displacement" (S M Hall 2021:2) along its counter "active making of work in persistently precarious conditions" (2021:61) and proliferating "economies of repair" (2021:91), as well as the urban "unlikely affiliations" around common struggles against "long working hours, falling wages, and rising rents" (2021:124), which speak to issues that are not migration-related only, but highly affected by the migrant status. Drawing on critical border scholars, authors have looked into how cities become the place where migrants' suspension is urbanised, making it possible to observe, beyond the space of exception of the camp "how variegated dispossession happens in everyday life in shared space." (Georgiou et al 2022:2217), but also places where it is possible to discern the "never-ending ambiguity" (Lafazani 2021:1152) of borders, through the multiple ways borders are embodied and performed within everyday encounters that constantly produce who does belong and who does not in specific moments and places

(Lafazani 2021). These approaches are all strongly feeding a critical postcolonial perspective to the city that centres race more clearly.

For such approaches to be enacted, an understanding of the city is required, that does not limits it to a manifestation of a planetary condition (Brenner, 2009; Brenner, Madden & Wachsmuth, 2011; Wachsmuth , Madden & Brenner, 2011), delineated by a few (Western) cities' experiences (Derickson, 2015; Oswin, 2018). The city has to be understood as an unfinished 'self-entitled process' (Farías, 2011:368; Simone, 2016) - which simultaneously pulls together local and global trajectories as well as different times (Massey, 1994, 2005) – and as a relational process, not a place for validation of broader theories (Rankin, 2011), but as the place where enquiry is made possible on how these multiple trajectories relationally constitute themselves within everyday urban life, and can be made sense of only through their provisional contingent achievements, without pre-given properties and thus open to unexpected outcomes (Amin and Thrift, 2002; Amin and Lancione 2022; Greenhough, 2011; Massey 2005; McFarlane, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c; Lancione, 2016b). Such an attitude is able to account for the many lives that make the urban, allowing for their agency to come to the fore as shaping, as well as being shaped by, the multiplicity of trajectories (Massey 2005; Simone, 2011; Lancione, 2016b).

3.6 Conclusions and main conceptual concerns of the project

The European border regime cannot be understood simply through the management of its geographical borders - enforcement and protraction of internal ones and externalisation outside of its own territory - but has to be looked at through the continuous, multiscalar and deeply hierarchized, racialised, classed and gendered sorting and filtering of different mobilities (Danewid 2024; Mezzadra and Neilson 2013). Such borders, as an epistemic starting point, urge a question on the historical and contextual reasons subtending them, on the subsequent ways in which these are constantly negotiated and challenged, on how to see them and read them at different scales. I argue that cities provide a preferential site from where to observe the 'throwntogetherness' (Massey 2005) of the border regime, as well as for bringing to the fore migrants' intense and complex experience of it.

This work does not engage with overarching descriptions about the relationship between migrants and cities, but considers various strands of thought generated about this relationship, and reads them through a relational perspective that centres racialised borders at its core. In this sense, encounters, as a fundamental lens for understanding relationships within the urban, are not used as a way to provide examples of meaningful coexistence, but more as a way to critically consider the subtle ways in which borders manifest to the very small scale of the fleeting contact (Lafazani 2021; Wilson 2017), as a way to call into questions the multiple subjects of these encounters and what these subjects can say - if they can say something - about who is the 'other' in contemporary Western society. Shifting the gaze from the racialised migrant, to the other categories they share the space with, encounters can provide insight on the more or less subtle ways in which the access to this shared space is profoundly racialised, classed and gendered. The debate on solidarity cities is called into question as part of that academic production that still attempts to provide overarching ideas and tools to read cities in apolitical ways. This literature is relevant to Palermo, which has been recognised internationally as a solidarity city.

The geographical context of this project, grounded on a 'South within a South', provides a fundamental lens, not just in a decolonial effort of 'provincialising' Western knowledge hegemony from within, but also as a fundamental step to meaningfully engage with political imagination without being romantic about it. In such a light, from a Southern European perspective, or from the perspective of Palermo as a 'South within a South', Ida Danewid's question on "What [...] might it mean to rethink global ethics and solidarity on the basis not of the connections forged from the ontological universal experience of vulnerability and mourning but, rather, of the shared, intertwined histories that arise out of the colonial past and the neo-colonial present?" (2017:1683) takes on a different light, as it can be read not just in terms of the "entanglements that link Europe to the diverse regions from which migrants and refugees are coming." (2017:1683), but it opens to possibilities of a shared history of othering and forced subordination, as well as envisioning solidarity on the basis of a collective memory of struggles (Tazzioli 2020). This cannot be done without bringing "geographically contingent histories of race" (Faria and Mollett 2016:88) to the fore.

In this sense, this project understands the contemporary layered crisis generated around immigration as part of a broader fallacious Eurocentric discourse, which has not just

subjugated a Global South to a Global North through the construction of a developmentalist/modernity imaginary, but has overall flattened non-fitting histories, also within its borders, as the contexts of South Europe, Italy and Sicily show, thus urging a further provincialization of urban knowledge, attentive to dissonant histories (Sheppard et al 2013) of just ordinary cities (Amin and Graham 1997; Robinson 2006). Consequently, this project follows authors such as Bhambra and Santos (2017), Bhambra (2014, 2016a), Oswin (2020) and Roy (2016, 2020), as they have recursively exposed the historical mutual constitution of external political and economic reasons and an academic production still shaped by a "persistent Eurocentrism" (Roy 2020:2019). This requires both a reframing of urban processes in their geographical and historical situatedness - thus dislocating the "universal grammar" (Roy 2016:202) that puts Western history as the origin and natural course of events everywhere (Bhambra 2014, 2016a; Sheppard et al 2013) -, but also a rejection of the Western imaginary altogether, in order to challenge its damaging political outcomes (Bhambra 2014, 2016b; c), as the contemporary 'issue' of immigration is showing.

This rejection also entails the acknowledgement of race itself as an historical product, core of the Western imaginary, which has opportunistically put whiteness and its associated assets of modernity, progress and development as the rule which the Rest has to be measured and judged against. Authors such as Roy (2019), Faria and Mollett (2016), Kobayashi (2013) and McKittrik (2011) all stress how race needs to be understood as a social construction, meaning that it has to be acknowledged in the power it wields through being performed, but also that, far from being natural, it is, indeed, a historically and geographically contingent (white) man-made product, and as such it can and has to be exposed and resisted. In this respect, Italy, its "precarious whiteness" (Hawthorne 2021:173), its struggle for racially belonging to Europe for the associated meanings this entails, and the even more precarious whiteness of Sicily might be powerful in-between contexts from where to understand the power and limits of race in shaping peoples' lives from institutions and political discourse to everyday life and human interactions.

Within this broad literature, this project seeks to intervene specifically in the following debates: first, this project expands the knowledge produced by critical border and migration scholars, by observing how racialised borders extend beyond the extra-ordinary geography of the borders, beyond survival, within urban space. In this sense it follows authors who are

already centring borders within their approach to migration and cities (Georgiou et al 2022; S M Hall 2021; Lafazani 2021; Arapoglou 2012).

Also, the project particularly focuses on the different binaries produced by the current European management of migration, such as that between repression and solidarity, patronising humanitarianism and empowering solidarity (Dadusc and Mudu 2020; Tazzioli and Walters 2019), clearcut oppositions between repressive nation states and exceptional solidarity cities (Bauder 2021; Bauder and Gonzalez 2018; Bauder and Juffs 2020). In this sense, and by focusing especially on the multiple dimensions of urban solidarity, the project centres on the interplay between multifarious forms of repression, humanitarianism and solidarity, exploring their interrelations and embeddedness within the racial capitalist state (Danewid 2024), which make the clear-cut distinction between 'filling the gaps' and 'creating cracks' (Dadusc and Mudu 2020) fade within a greyer area. In this sense, this latent conceptual and practical conflict/contradiction is imagined as "something to inhabit and remain conscious of, to name, profile, and examine, rather than attempt to 'resolve.'" (De Genova and Tazzioli 2022:802). This poses an important reflection on the "challenge for activists and scholars" on "how to critically negotiate ongoing forms of coloniality and to be self-reflexive, responsive, and accountable to how their practices of protection may reproduce colonial relations of unequal power and privilege." (De Genova and Tazzioli 2022:841).

In doing so, the project centres migrants' direct complex experiences within this interplay, defying another binary reading, that is that of the migrants framed as either a victim or criminal by the European border regime. Working on the complex urban experiences of racialised migrants in Palermo, this project responds to the call for "seeing from the critical standpoint of migration" (Tazzioli and De Genova 2023:5).

These issues are explored from the ground of an 'inner South within the South', the South European, South Italian city of Palermo. This is fundamental as Southern geographies within Europe are still relatively understudied, despite their increasing prominence, but also and especially because of their own histories of racialised struggles (Danewid 2024; Virdee 2019; for the Italian case Hawthorne 2021,2022), which make these geographies a fundamental

place from where to imagine a shared ethics and solidarity grounded on common struggles and intertwined histories (Tazzioli 2020; Danewid 2017).

CHAPTER 3 - METHODS

3.1 Introduction

This project, which looks at the intersection of migration, racialised borders, neocolonial formations and Southern geographies from an urban perspective, builds on a relational ethnography that I conducted in the Southern Italian city of Palermo, Sicily. The fieldwork was conducted mainly between February 2022 and January 2023, travelling back several times afterwards, during the writing of the thesis, in particular between May 2023 and September 2023 and between May and June 2024. By 'relational' I mean to stress on the fact that my understanding has been shaped by observing the interdependent ways different groups, people, places, images, words intersected and interacted.

The fieldwork has built on an intensive participant observation carried out through several activities in which I was an active participant (at least most of the time). Participants' situated perspectives have been collected mainly through informal conversations and semi-structured interviews. The latter, in the form of audio-recorded interviews, have been limited due to personal and ethical reasons, in particular the awareness of acting within a city that has become a 'safari' - to borrow the word from activists in Palermo - for researchers, students and journalists.

Sites of observation have been multiple and fluid within the broad frame of Palermo's historical city centre: as I progressively focused on the 'infrastructure of hospitality and solidarity', I started attending several events - as a volunteer, an activist or simple participant - hosted in the different sites composing the network. Another fundamental, though unexpected, part of observation soon became my leisure time. In fact, those places where I would spend my spare time intersected constantly with the sites of the 'solidarity network'. Also, my experiences outside working hours, lived along with friends who were for the most part in Palermo from somewhere else, progressively opened the question of 'who is the other in Palermo', as a city which is increasingly traversed by a multiplicity of people on the move.

Rejecting the focus on a specific part of the city has been a counter-manoeuvre with respect to my original proposal, which focused on the Palermo borough of Ballarò, historically

portrayed as a disadvantaged but diverse and vibrant part of the city centre, and today - because of this depiction - an increasingly commodified place due to its 'multicultural vibe'. Ballarò in a sense is present, as some of the places considered within this thesis are based in that part of the city, still it is not central, as many other encounters and activities exceeded its boundaries.

As another counter-manoeuvre, pictures are not included within this research, if not for those portraying the loud calls coming from the walls of Palermo, which appear within this chapter, in order to reject the blind fetishization of diversity, marginality and decadence that is propelling much of the narrative around the city.

3.2 Context: Palermo, a South within the South

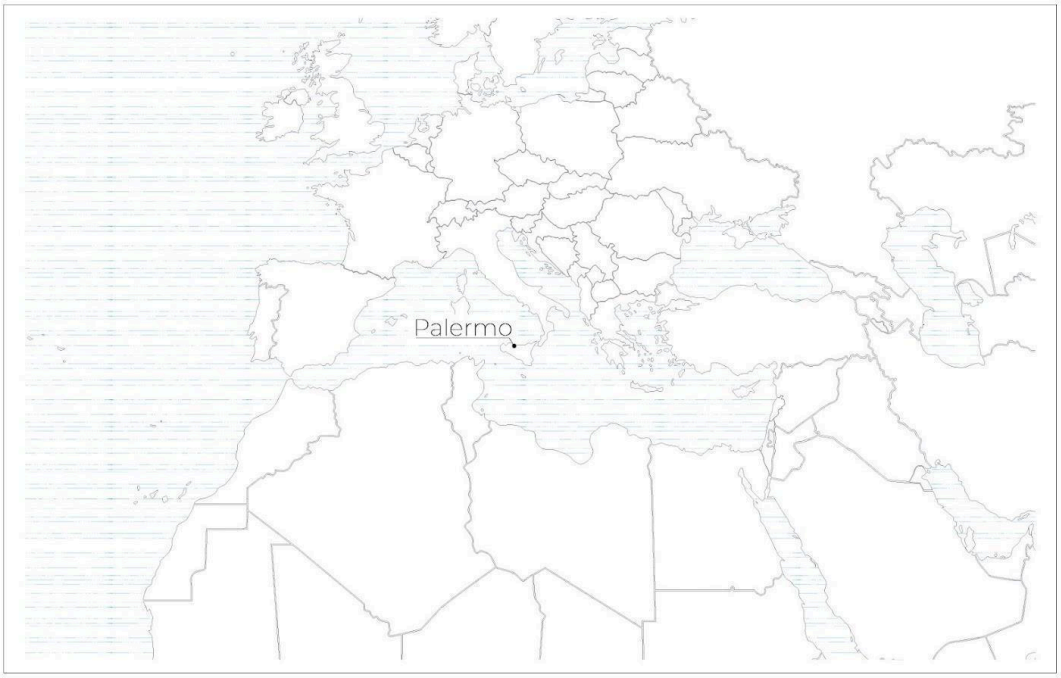

Figure 1 Location of the city of Palermo

"*Palermo was the capital of the mafia. Today it is a capital of culture.*"

"*We cannot say today that Palermo respects the rights of migrants. Because we have no migrants in Palermo. If you ask how many migrants are in Palermo, then I do not answer 100,000 or 120,000, but none. If you are in Palermo, you are a Palermitan.*

[...] That's why we have become a tourist city. Because we welcome migrants. The tourists are not afraid to come to Palermo."

"*I'm sorry, we are not a European city; we are a city in Europe. Palermo is Beirut, is Kabul, Palermo is Tripoli. My political project is to be Beirut with Wifi and trams.*"

(Former Mayor Orlando interviewed by Bauder 2019:1)

The opening sentences are excerpts from an interview released by Leoluca Orlando, the former mayor of Palermo. As explained later within the section, Orlando has been a fundamental figure within the city's politics and has recursively covered the role of Palermo's mayor, being elected for his first term between 1985 and 1999, then between 1993 and 2000 and, for his last two terms between 2012 and 2022. These sentences, which are the recurring pillars on which Orlandian discourses have built on, bring to the fore the interplay of socio-cultural and economic enfranchisement, urban regeneration, anti-mafia struggles that have been central to the production of the safe harbour city of Palermo (Fig. 1).

Especially thanks to Orlando's initiatives, Palermo has been positioned as an exception to national aggressive responses to immigration. The international press has described the city as 'a crossroad' (Bradley 2018), a place that went from being a 'mafia city' to being a 'heaven for refugees' (Kirchgaessner 2015), where 'tout le monde est palermitain' (Chabas 2018). This section briefly explores the controversial role of migrants' presence in this city, as both politically overemphasised and still under-researched, despite the proliferation of people and activities, scholars included, involved with migration in the city. This section looks first at the process of urban regeneration started in the 1990s, as it also intersected with the first waves of migration to the city. Second, it looks at the year 2018, when Palermo was nominated Italian Capital of Culture, as a fundamental non-return point in terms of increased visibility for the city, observing how much of the material supporting the candidacy was related to the theme of hospitality. Third, this section considers the academic production on migration in Palermo, observing a discernible lag in terms of critical approaches, but also the emergence of stories which are different from the romanticised Orlandian view. Finally, some more recent struggles, especially coming out after the elections of the new right-wing major, are presented, to give the idea of an increasingly

contested city. Furthermore, throughout my stay I collected pictures portraying graffiti and slogans on the walls of the city, in the attempt to give at least a flavour of the kind of struggles and political debates that animate the city from the ground today. Some of these pictures are presented within this chapter.

3.2.1 The 'Spring of Palermo' and the raise of Orlando

Between 1985 and 1990 Palermo went through the so-called 'Spring of Palermo'. This label refers to a series of different but interrelated events that saw Leoluca Orlando, elected for the first time in 1985 as the city's Mayor, as a main protagonist. First, for the first time, the municipality led by Orlando became a civil party in the Maxi Processo, the historical trial against the Sicilian Mafia (Cannarozzo 2007; Pecile 2017). Second, the first two actions of the administration led by Mayor Orlando were the drafting of a Piano Regolatore Generale (Land use Plan), to stop uncontrolled expansion and housing informality, and of another plan especially aimed at regenerating the inner historical city, almost completely abandoned to decay from the first outward expansions in the 1700s. Both plans have been fundamental as Palermo was exiting a period of intense land speculation, which had produced a disordered and uneven urban growth since the 1950s, operated by mob interests with connivance from within corrupt institutions, which goes by the name of "Sacco di Palermo" (Sack of Palermo)(Inzerillo 1981; Cannarozzo 2007; Cannarozzo 2011).

Authors note how the city of Palermo had to shake off a degrading image (Söderström O et al 2009) - just two years before the national press 'L'Unità' had described Palermo as Beirut after the mafia murder of the Magistrate Rocco Chinnici - and how the refocusing on the historical city centre has been led by a discourse of reconquering a lost territory (Bouillon and Jeanmougin 2016). Throughout the years, with the plan for the historical centre first, the participation to the European programme URBAN between 1990 and 1994, and the strategic plan made official in 2011, the city-centre (Fig 2) has increasingly become the main focus of urban planning and general attention, increasingly defined as the major driver for the city's economic re-development, together with the regeneration of the waterfront, with the two areas being tightly connected.

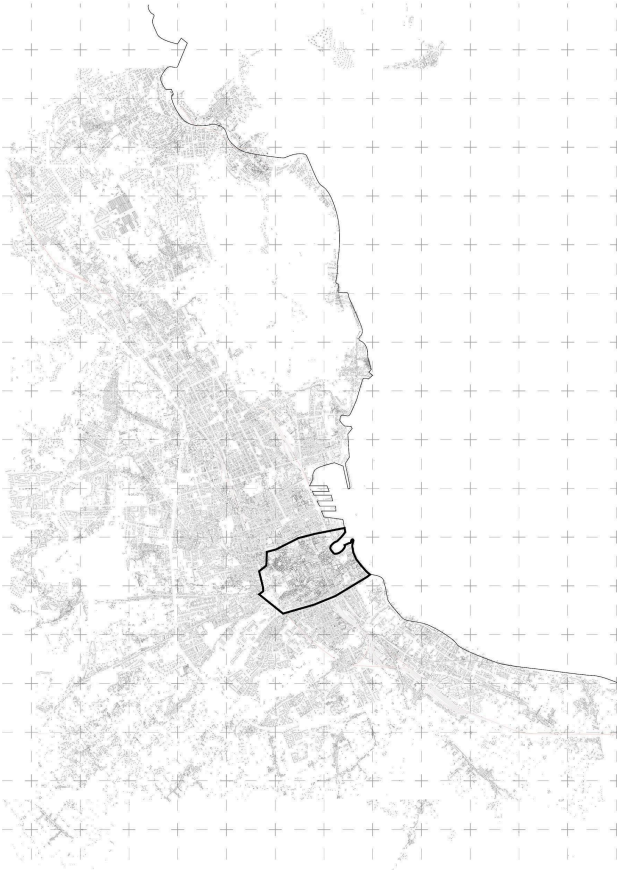

Figure 2 The administrative boundaries of the historical city-centre of Palermo. Grid 1km x 1km

It has to be noted that the historical city-centre had been long abandoned from the first expansions in the 1700s and had reached the 1980s debilitated by unfinished plans from the 1800s, the bombing in 1943 and the Belice earthquake in 1968 (Borsellino 1980; Inzerillo 1981), with the latter leading to a flight en masse towards new public housing, often through illegal occupation (lately regularised with the law n21 from 25/05/1973)(Borsellino 1980). These events had left a context of residential overcrowding in dilapidated housing, a network of family-led street economies within the inner areas, together with the historical markets (Borsellino 1980; Inzerillo 1981; Cannarozzo 2007), and main axes characterised by libraries, universities, religious institutions and the buildings of an oversized bureaucratic apparatus, the latter born from the autonomy of Sicily proclaimed in 1946 (Cole 1996; Söderström 2009). Moreover, the population was not the 'original one' anymore, for a consistent part was made of Sicilians migrating from the countryside and using Palermo as a transition towards the North of Italy and abroad (Borsellino 1980).

This is the context entered by migrants, who, in Palermo, started to be visible in the late 1980s. It is interesting to note that the first accounts of their presence within the city come

from demographic reviews of the historical city-centre's social tissue, propaedeutic for the drafting of the new planning rules of the 1990s. Migrants here are described as a growing presence and a problem to be solved as early as possible (Pavone et al 1989; Relazione Generale al PPE 1989). Far from the romantic storytelling of living within the centre of the city, compared to other migrants' stories of geographic marginalisation, migrants have simply taken their place within a discarded area, which has offered cheap housing and the possibility of informal work (Lo Piccolo 2000; Leone and Lo Piccolo 2003).

Although authors argue that in Palermo there have never been open discriminations (Lo Piccolo 2000; Leone and Lo Piccolo 2003), Cole (1996) observed a more complex coexistence between migrants and old settlers, highlighting an overlapping of understanding of common fate combined with an implicit moral hierarchy and verbal racism as cultural shortage. Overall, the everyday life of migrants in Palermo has been described in terms of: struggles for basic needs; being overcharged for dilapidated housing; difficulties in finding jobs through official routes such as trade unions and often ending up in the most unwanted, precarious positions; troubles accessing medical assistance; and being impacted more than locals by sporadic gentrification targeting the historical centre (Cole 1996; Booth and Cole 1999; Lo Piccolo 2000; Leone and Lo Piccolo 2003; Saetalu 2013; Bonafede et al 2015), thus presenting a quite common history that defies exceptionalism.

3.2.2 Palermo as a 'haven for refugees'

In 2018 Palermo was nominated Italian Capital of Culture, with a project praised for its humanitarianism and strong inclination towards inclusion. The first chapter of the application dossier was dedicated to the multicultural past of Palermo; to the participatory process of the 'Consulta delle Culture' (Council of Cultures), an advisory body with no decision-making power established in 2013 and "composed of representatives of EU citizens, non-EU citizens, stateless persons and holders of dual citizenship" (Human Foundation 2018); to the 2015 Charter of Palermo, a document promoting mobility as a human right (Orlando et al 2015). Other projects were the Arab-Norman route, physical permanence of the coexistence of two opposite cultures, which has entered UNESCO's WHL in 2015 and which represents the major tourist attraction of the city; and Manifesta12, an international

art biennial which took place in 2018, after choosing Palermo for its essence of 'global archipelagos' (Palermo Atlas).

In June 2018, a few months before Manifesta started, the rescue ship Aquarius remained stuck in the middle of the Mediterranean with 600 migrants onboard. Matteo Salvini, member of the far right-wing party Lega and, back then, Minister of Interiors, started a wrestle with the EU and Malta over who had to let the migrants in, denying Aquarius to dock (BBC 2018). Mayor Orlando on that occasion openly opposed the Italian government, stating how 'Palermo in ancient Greek meant 'complete port'. We have always welcomed rescue boats and vessels who saved lives at sea. We will not stop now' (Wintour 2018). In the end Spain 'volunteered' to let the Aquarius dock. During those same days, a huge mural portraying Saint Benedict the Moor, the black patron saint of Palermo, was created by the artist Igor Scalisi Palminteri in the heart of Ballarò. The mural had been created to bring attention to one of the very few playing fields within the city centre, a football pitch for the young people in the neighbourhood of Ballarò. Saint Benedict the Moor became a symbol immediately connected to the mayor's actions, contributing to a clearly stated identity of the city. Also, this mural started a tradition of 'institutional' murals - what might be called the urban saints of the city - that from the walls of the city present a symbolic narrative of hospitality and legality etched in the urban landscape (Fig 3,4,5,6). The picture of Saint Benedict the Moor shown below (Fig. 4) was taken in June 2024: a text has been added at the bottom saying 'TOURISM IS COLONIALISM', which is an increasingly recurring theme across the walls of Palermo.

Figure 3 The portrait of the two judges Falcone and Borsellino, killed by Mafia in 1992, inaugurated at July 2017 (source: https://triolotravel88.it/street-art-palermo-5-luoghi-in-cui-ammirare-i-murales/)

Figure 4 Saint Benedict the Moor, patron saint of Palermo together with Santa Rosalia, inaugurated at June 2018

Figure 5 'A black urban saint'. This is one of four murales commissioned by Fondazione Federico II on the theme of 'hospitality' in October 2018

Figure 6 'Saint Erasmus, fisherman of castaways' at the 'Porticciolo di Sant'Erasmo'. July 2019 (source: https://magazine.leviedeitesori.com/spunta-tra-le-case-santerasmo-il-pescatore-di-naufraghi/)

Later, in February 2018, when Salvini attempted to enforce the so-called 'Security Decree' - a body of laws on matters of security, with an entire chapter on asylum and citizenship - Mayor Orlando declared that the decree was unconstitutional and stated that he would have not applied it before a decision was made by the Constitutional Court, followed by other Italian Mayors. In the end the decree was repealed. Di Maio (2021) has observed how these acts of civil disobedience, together with the Assembly of Cultures and the Charter of Palermo are to be seen as acts of resistance. The author then draws on the historical mixing of the city, which included "Phoenicians—the founders—Romans, Arabs, Normans, Jews, Swabians, Aragoneses, Angevines, Bourbons, and, in the end, Italians, followed by returning Italian Americans and now African Italians" (Di Maio 2021:49). In the same way, Maffeis reads the above mentioned Charter of Palermo, which was signed by "local authorities [...], scholars and scientists from different Italian universities, and the High Commissioner of the United Nations of Refugees (UNHCR)" (Maffeis 2021:25), and then supported by a whole range of activists, intellectuals, artists and so forth, as an example of the ways in which "transnational democratic orders" (2021:21) can be enacted.

It is possible to see within this array of events, actions, nominees, an overlap between political stances, manoeuvres of enfranchisement - that have also gained circulation within academic production (Bauder 2019; Di Maio 2021) - and tactical urban actions of political economy (Harvey 1989; Jessop 2000; Peck 2005), that have worked to reposition Palermo within the broader European framework.

On the other hand, when it comes to literature produced on migration in Palermo, existing research is focused on the historical city centre, where the incidence of migrants on the overall population rises from four per cent (for the city overall) to 23% (ISTAT). Research is mostly led through a policy and/or planning perspective, quantitatively describing ethnic composition, residential segregation (Bonafede and Napoli 2015; Busetta et al 2015) and entrepreneurial activity (Tumminelli 2017), with limited qualitative studies which focus more on the sustaining role of administrative, religious institutions (Lo Piccolo 2000; Lo Piccolo 2003; Leone and Lo Piccolo 2008; Leone 2013) and recently of grassroots associations (Barreiro and Gonzales 2020). What is distinctly lacking is an account of the ethnic communities' perspectives.

Few international accounts address the coexistence between migrants and locals as filled with 'everyday racism' and suspended between the understanding of a common fate and supposed moral hierarchies, thus diverging from a simplistic discourse of peaceful coexistence (Cole 1996; Cole and Booth 1999). Saeutulu's work (2013) offers a more nuanced perspective, looking at how undocumented migrants in Palermo are not just disadvantaged and relegated to informal dilapidated housing and the most unwanted jobs, but they also exploit these precarious conditions, where informality allows them, for instance, to work without documents, as a transitory step to acquiring papers.

Even though Palermo has become "a hub for frontline artists, writers, intellectuals, scholars, students, and activists from around the world who in the past years have gathered in town on several occasions to explore the historically and contemporary ways in which black voices have been silenced, and black bodies ambiguously imagined, in Western-dominated global culture." (Di Maio 2021:51), migrants' experiences in and of the city are greatly understudied. Most recent accounts have tended to focus on the re-functionalization of spaces due to an increasingly super-diverse population (Rosa and Tumminelli 2022) or the 'hospitality' imaginary. The latter has been explored either as a way to reposition Palermo within the European framework (Wyer 2024), or as an overlapping of economic reasons and social aims (Neil 2024). Though these last two accounts are starting to challenge ingrained circulating ideas about the city, they are focused on discourses, or on specific places, with migrants' experiences being instrumental and not central.

3.2.3 Palermo and its city centre today

As seen in the previous section, some authors are starting to challenge the former Mayor's stances, as more related to Palermo's identity outward than to concrete practices and politics within the city. This, as it will be seen within the empirical chapters, is evident also in the increasingly changing tones of protests and press titles, especially since the victory of the right-wing administration led by Roberto Lagalla, elected as mayor in June 2022. In March 2023 protesters marched under the name of 'Palermo capital of denied rights' (LiveSicilia 2023) - against the impossible times for being registered at the registry office, for getting the residency and obtaining the issue of an identity card. Increasingly, activists and

citizens are denouncing the ‘emergency’ (Cane 2023) of denied rents to racialised migrants in the city, despite them having a regular permit and a job (Pottino 2024).

On the 23rd September 2024 the movement Right2Be, pulling together the different migrant communities in Palermo and followed by other activists and inhabitants, marched for a second time asking for justice and never arrived answers regarding the death of a young Gambian man, stabbed in March 2024 (Melting Pot Europa 2024). In July 2024 a young Tunisian man was beaten in the street and later died in the hospital (Campolo 2024). These increasing episodes have been met by blame-returning between the former and current mayors, with Lagalla accusing the past administration of lack of controls and patrolling (La Repubblica 2024), and Orlando - now Deputy of the European Parliament - accusing the current administration of a lack of community vision (Brunetto 2024). Measures of public decor are striking areas such as the main central axes of Via Maqueda and other public spaces, targeting peddlers, increasing patrols and controls on economic activities (Sicilia 2024).

In the meantime, from the 7th October 2024, water rationing will be introduced again, after decades, hitting only the city’s peripheries. In June 2024 activists of Ultima Generazione (an activist group of non-violent actions of civil disobedience against climate change), had protested against global water emergency by washing clothing in the Molo Trapezoidale, a regeneration project financed by the Port Authority and inaugurated in October 2023, as a leisure space surrounded by expensive shops, restaurants and reception centres, which clearly do not gather to Palermitani. The activists received a notice of expulsion from the city from one to three years (Redazione 2024). In the July 2024 Festival of the patron saint Rosalia, a Festival that has become a main attraction of the city, a banner suspended above the crowd of participants recited “Santa Rosalia, touristification is the new plague, where did my home go?” (Gainsforth 2024). These events tell a very different story than the one portrayed in the previous sections of hospitality and welcome. Also, they tell a story that hardly started with the new right-wing administration, despite evident different approaches. These events show a territory of not so latent conflicts and longer-term, unresolved issues, which today manifest within a city with increasingly unaffordable housing and one of the highest unemployment rates in Italy (Ufficio Statistica 2022).

Below, a collection of pictures taken during my stay try to pull together some of the difficult to grasp calls that come from the walls of the city: shouting about *meridionalismo*[2] (Fig. 7,8,11); the state's and municipality's incompetencies (Fig. 9,10,11,12); solidarity with migrants and against the border regime (Fig. 13,14); and protests against tourists and 'the rich' (Fig. 15,16,17).

Figure 7 SICILY IS NOT ITALY

[2] *Meridionalismo* (which might be translated as Southerness) is a political stance with regards to Gramsci's 'Questione Meridionale' (Southern question). As the latter was eminently concerned with the Italian internal disparities between North and South, and the Northern discourse and politics against the *Meridione*, the South, meridionalists traditionally opposed discrimination and stereotypes about the South, while embracing a romantic view of the Bourbon domination preceding the unification of Italy in 1861. Today critical Italian scholars like Carmine Conelli, Claudia Fauzia and Valentina Amenta (see bibliography section) are embracing *meridionalismo* in a critical way, as a decolonial, intersectional political practice of reappropriation, while repositioning the Southern Question within the broader European colonial history.

Figure 8 Italian translation from 'El sur tambien existe – Letras de Mario Benedetti'
'with enduring hope the south also exists'
(translation from : from http://www.paularcher.net/translations/mario_benedetti/el_sur_tambien_existe.html)

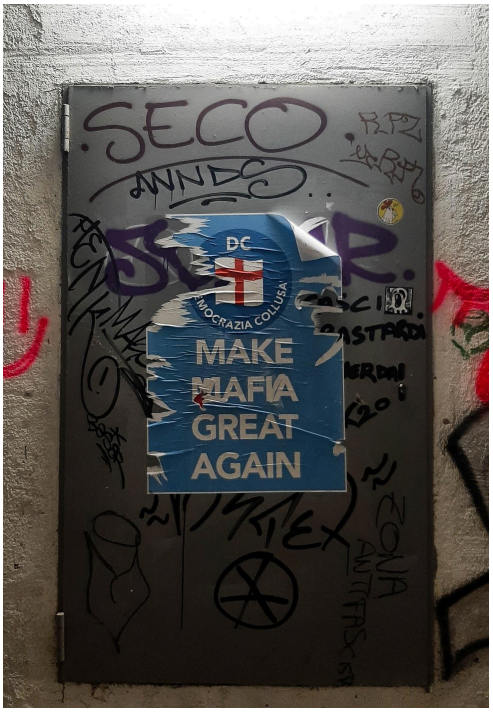

Figure 9 MAKE MAFIA GREAT AGAIN. These parodistic posters have started to appear during the electoral campaign for local elections in 2022

Figure 10 Ripped poster against the current right-wing Italian government: 'Government led by Meloni is a government of repression'. Below the stencil: DO NOT VOTE GO TO THE BAR. These stencils have become frequent during the local elections in 2022

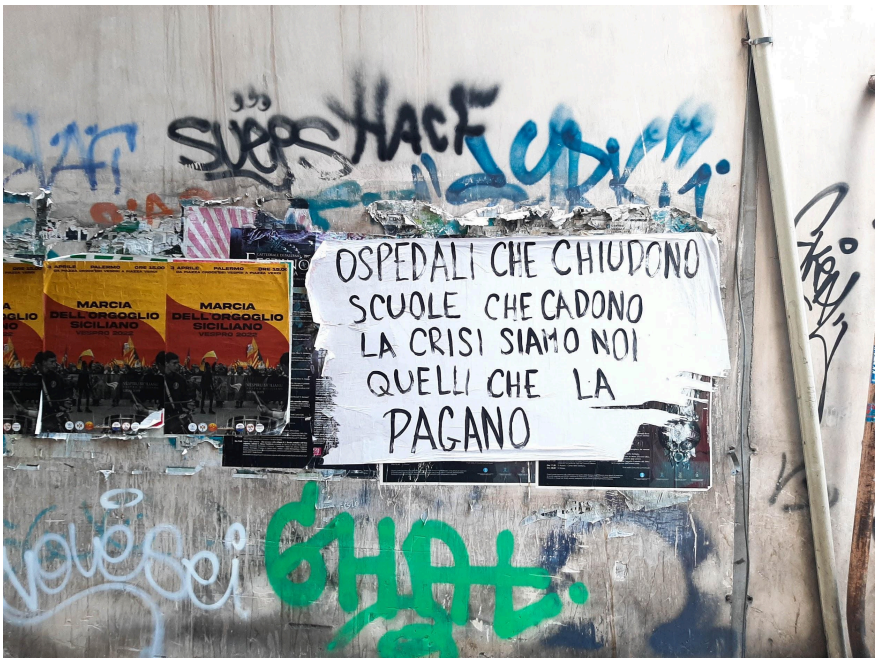

Figure 11 Poster of the March for the Sicilian Pride (left) and banner (right) 'HOSPITALS SHUT DOWN SCHOOLS COLLAPSE, THE CRISIS, WE ARE THE ONES WHO OAY FOR IT'

Figure 12 Banner written in Sicilian '(they) INCREASE TAXES, (they) HALVE SALARIES. THEY HAVE TO THROW BLOOD' (meaning they have to suffer a lot)

Figure 13 'THE GOVERNMENT KILLS IN SUMMER TOO' (This is a revised quote from the Italian movie 'The Mafia Kills Only in Summer'), below '630 DEATHS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN IN JUNE ONLY'

Figure 14 ABOLISH FRONTEX; ABOLISH BORDERS; STOP DEATH IN THE SEA; BLACK LIVES MATTER ON EARTH AND ON SEA; TEN THOUSAND PIRATE SHIPS; NO JAIL SHIPS

Figure 15, 16, 17 TOURISM IS COLONIALISM! GO HOME!; firebnb; EAT THE RICH

3.3 Ethnographic methods

In the following I consider the main ethnographic methods used within this project. In particular, I discuss the choice of crafting a 'processual' multi-sited ethnography mainly built on participant observation and both informal and formal conversations. I reflect on the positionality issues, especially concerning being a Palermo-born, white researcher working on non-white populations within an over-researched and over-represented city. I also address the blurry boundaries that come with in-depth participant observation and the ethical issues raised within the project.

3.3.1 Research questions

Keeping in mind the overarching question/reflection, **how and where is it possible to 'negotiate' a racial capitalist system from 'within' the state?** the following sub-questions have guided the project:

1) **How does the European racialised border regime embed itself within everyday life in Palermo? And how is it navigated by racialised migrants?**

3) **How do racialised migrants claim space for their own political and affective expression in Palermo?**

4) **What can urban everyday encounters in Palermo tell us about the conscious and unconscious, relational understanding and racialisation of the "black other"?**

3.3.2 Writing a relational ethnography

As stated in the introduction, this work builds on a relational ethnography, interested at looking not at single objects, specific communities, defined places, but at the ambivalent entanglements of places, human trajectories, politics, discourses, at different scales, in the way they might be made sense of and can tell something through their contingent coming together. In this sense, relational ethnography here is not understood simply as a set of practices and choices through which the researcher focuses not anymore on a bounded, almost a priori defined subject as in traditional ethnography, but on relationships and processes (Desmond 2014): the 'relational' implies here a mode of thinking and a mode of seeing, it implies an epistemological approach to reading space - urban space in particular - which is inspired by the work of authors like Doreen Massey (2005), Abdoumaliq Simone (2010), Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift (2002), Michele Lancione (2016), as explained in more detail within chapter 2 (section 3.5: a relational approach to borders and cities).

When it came to the writing of the empirical chapters the bigger question was that of how to allow for these multiple stories and fragments to come to the fore and speak to each other. How to translate a mode of seeing and thinking the city through the operation of writing it? In this sense, the empirical chapters are structured in fragments and derive. Describing vignettes as a 'form of fragment writing', McFarlane explains how these are 'a form that is often more impressionistic than analytical, performing a relay of glimpses into issues that matter on their own terms, but where that mattering tends to deepen not through extensive prose but via the juxtaposition of issues in other vignettes', a form of writing 'more concerned with multiplicity than the singularity of focused discussion' (McFarlane 2021:87). In this sense, writing through fragments can give a sense of 'the cinematic quality' (2021:88) and the ambivalences that make up the urban.

Within this thesis I make use of the term 'fragment' for a series of vignettes, five in total, introducing each chapter, or multiple sections within a chapter (such is the case of chapter 4). These fragments are imagined as bits of storytelling, narrated from my own perspective, of moments I experienced in Palermo. Moments that I found relevant to start a conversation

in the way they pulled together several strands. *Deriva* (pl. *derive*), on the other hand, is an Italian word that describes the dragging of a floating or submerged body by a fluid in movement as related to a fixed surface. The chapter then is articulated through *derive* of strands of thoughts and pieces of arguments that start from the fragment, then drift away from it. Though the fragments' numeration start over at every chapter, I imagine the five of them as also going from 1 to 5, in a sense also potentially, though fictionally, happening at the very same time, each of them peeling a layer, with these layers being partial and far from resolved. Each of them being part of that multiplicity of stories-so-far that make up the urban (Massey 2005), which then can tell something especially when intersected, when juxtaposed and read together.

3.3.3 A note on terminology

Throughout the empirical chapters I use the term migrant to refer to anyone who is on the move in Palermo from somewhere else. Racialised migrant is then used to refer to the non-white migrants I encountered. This choice comes from the fact that I did not want to relate the term migrant to the non-white population only, nor to a specific mode of movement - in the case of the project for instance, the 'illegal' movement across the Mediterranean. I seek to normalise migrant as a non-pejorative term that defines movement only, refusing to resort to the vast array of labels and categorising - digital nomads, expats, and so forth - that are usually made up to create a classed and racialised distance with other types of ('undesirable') movement. At the same time, as all migrants are indeed not treated equally, the adjective 'racialised' was used to put the accent on the racialisation of certain kinds of mobility and of people on the move from the ground of Palermo. These terms are used when I refer to the entire categories, otherwise other more punctual descriptions are generally used, normally the name of the person and their origin: e.g. Bai is introduced as a young Gambian man and Leonie as a young Swiss woman. Also, throughout the text, when speaking about groups of people I at times refer to 'black migrants' or 'non-white migrants', instead of the more generic 'racialised migrants', when talking specifically about the black communities inhabiting Palermo and mainly coming from West Africa in the first case, whereas the term 'non white' encompasses also North Africans. Still, when I am referring in general to migration across the Mediterranean or to the construction of the 'black other', that is, when I am not referring to specific individuals or groups, but to concepts, I retain the

word ‘black’, in its analytical conception, to underline the historical, colonial link between Italy and Africa, a link that has been - and is still - recursively concealed, but increasingly retrieved by postcolonial authors writing about contemporary migration (The Black Mediterranean Collective 2021; Hawthorne 2022). As connected to this, I am aware that the participants, whose experiences are narrated within this work, do not refer to themselves as ‘black’ when speaking about processes that racialise them, but they refer to themselves as ‘migrants’ or ‘foreigners’. An example in this sense is when they talk about the difficulties with finding housing (4.2.3). Still, I believe it is important to point out the fundamental fact that the people talking are indeed non-white - and especially black - migrants coming from West and North Africa, within a country where the historical racism against black people is systemic but not discussed as such.

3.3.4 Researching an over-researched topic in a over-researched city

Authors across the West, such as Bhambra and Santos (2017), Bhambra (2014, 2016b), Oswin (2020), Roy (2016, 2020) and Kobayashi (2014) have recursively exposed the historical mutual constitution of external cultural, political and economic reasons and an academic production which is still shaped by a “persistent Eurocentrism” (Roy 2020:2019; Collins 2022 specifically on migration studies), and which has historically contributed to the reinforcement of the politically useful concepts of modernity and race as analytical tools to order the world (Kobayashi 2014). Within such a frame, postcolonial approaches and decolonial practices in migration studies are built against an academic production that is still blighted by ‘methodological nationalism’ (Bhambra 2016a) and ‘colour blindness’ (Roy 2019), within an academic environment ‘that is still predominantly white’ and founded on “white supremacy as the dominant racial formation” (Derickson 2017:237).

Ahmed (2007) observes how “Whiteness is only invisible for those who inhabit it” (157; Peake 2009), and, referring to situations where black people enter mostly white public environments, she writes how “The fact that we notice such arrivals tells us more about what is already in place than it does about ‘who’ arrives” (ibid.). In a sense this project forced me to reflect on race the other way round: I did not fully understand my whiteness if not once I increasingly realised the overall whiteness of the population involved with migration-related activities in Palermo. Although within my ethics application I had

expressed the importance of avoiding 'performing whiteness', this was specifically related to the unconsciously embodied set of assumptions that comes from an intersection of my specific life background and the (wrongly) normalised and interiorised norm which racialized others are usually measured against (Peake, 2009), which could have led me toward a judgemental or patronising attitude. The fact that I was - and am - a white woman doing research on black people barely crossed my mind.

In Palermo I started navigating the discomfort of being a white researcher in a context of white researchers, students and journalists actively seeking stories of migration, alongside all the other mainly white subjects from the city or somewhere else composing the infrastructure of solidarity. The four young men I finally interviewed all had experiences of being interviewees, their names exist at least on one press article, their stories circulated and eviscerated. In Palermo I also met a black former PhD student, with his own history of arrival as well as his very dry recounting of his recurring thoughts about leaving the academy as it is often hard for him to move freely due to his status. His knowledge about Africa, migration, the economy of borders, as well as his ability to connect deeply with the black community in Palermo were far deeper than mine and yet I am the one attempting to write something about it.

For these reasons, my participant observation was conducted with a constant, reflexive autoethnographic sensitivity on my side. This is intended as constant self-reflection on my approach to participants, as I entered the field not as a scientific observer (Lanne, 2016), but as an "epistemic subject" (Lancione and Rosa 2017:138), bringing to the ground my own biography, positionality, new power relations, but also just human chemical reactions to people and places (Lanne 2016). Fieldwork conducted through autoethnographic awareness (Butz and Besio 2009; Lancione and Rosa 2017) might open up a commitment to creating a dialogue between equals and to constructing knowledge not through participants, but rather alongside them (Askins and Pain 2011; Benzon and van Blerk 2017; Lancione 2017). Although this attempt at creating a dialogue among equals and avoiding extractivism has been of fundamental value for this research, also considering its premises and the will of bringing racialised migrants' experiences to the forefront, this commitment to co-production risks to remain so, if it is not accompanied by a constant awareness, acknowledgment and negotiation of the differences and power-relations that still affected the relationship

between me and the participants. These were not just related to the researcher-participant relationship, but also to the immeasurable distance of backgrounds and everyday life experiences. In this sense, I tried to approach this project in a way that I could, at least in part, understand. That is, by engaging with people around my age with whom I could share at least moments of everyday life. Getting to know them and bringing to the fore their experiences not just as related to their histories of arrival and everyday struggles, but also considering their recollections and reflections of reasons for coming to Europe, and their affective relationship with the city and its different inhabitants. This helped me in a way to switch my perspective.

As migration to Europe is today portrayed around loss and death with *barconi* (Italian pejorative slang for migrants' boats) filled with black suffering crowds, and as even within critical literature it is hard to find more complex accounts of arrival, my intent was that of avoiding reproducing, at least in part, that hopeless brutality (Derickson 2017), on which much white solidarity work is focused on (Danewid 2017). Working with people I could encounter more easily and find a common ground with - especially considering this as my first ethnographic experience of a certain dimension - has helped me to avoid simply reproducing a re-colonizing extractive relationship between researcher and participant, which keeps the latter in the position of a vulnerable individual who needs to be given a voice (Sultana 2007; Kobayashi 2013), instead bringing to the fore the participant as an actively involved subject in the production of knowledge (Butz and Besio 2009).

3.3.5 Entering the field

Before leaving for Palermo, I had gathered a list of associations and groups to contact, as a way to start introducing myself to people. Some of my emails remained unanswered: once in Palermo I discovered that some groups were weary around newcomer researchers and their potentially extractive practices. In this sense, I learnt quite fast that within the solidarity network two things were important: 1) being active and actively participating in the network's events and activities; and 2) being introduced by gatekeepers or brokers. Other groups promptly replied in a welcoming tone. My reflection on this is that it was not casual: Centro Astalli is used to having people in transit - volunteers, trainees, groups of students. Moltivolti also offered from the beginning their space for my working time. Likewise,

Moltivolti's activities are particularly centred on outward recognition, they are used to host students and researchers, it is part of their politics.

Once in Palermo, I first met two Professors from the University of Palermo that one of my supervisors had put me in contact with. Through them I met two PhD students - one of them being a PhD student from Palermo who had studied in Milan and worked on issues related to touristification and housing. The other was a French PhD student who had just submitted her thesis on hospitality in Palermo. The first one became a constant interlocutor throughout my stay and even further, the second one was my first gatekeeper into the solidarity network: she "sent" me to talk with the founder of Porco Rosso, with a photographer working on migration, with a teacher from Itastra - the school of Italian for foreigners - and with a member of the Bayefal group. Additionally, I contacted two persons I had met in 2018 - two former PhD students, one from Palermo, the other one from Bologna, but studying in Manchester - both involved with SOS Ballarò, a public assembly mediating between the neighbourhood and the municipality.

The links with the French PhD student, who had been, throughout her stay, a member of Porco Rosso, and with one of my 2018 contacts, widely known for his activism within the city, have been of fundamental value for accessing the network. Also, the experiences they shared of doing research in Palermo led me to reflect before getting involved with the activities of specific groups, as it could have been problematic in terms of "free speech" during the writing process. In this sense, towards the end of March 2022, one month after my arrival, I started volunteering at Centro Astalli, the centre for refugees that is part of the Jesuit Network. The choice of engaging with this space - shaped around a mainly humanitarian approach - instead of more political spaces, such as the leftist oriented Porco Rosso, depended also on an ease of access in the early stage of my stay.

3.3.6 An ethnography of fragmented moments

Later in chapter 5 I mention how one of the racialised migrants I encountered would talk about 'being out' as the best way to meet people and be offered opportunities, in his cases related to jobs. There is no better way to describe my approach to Palermo. 'Being out' constantly and taking part in the various activities and events organised by the different groups soon became the best way to make myself seen, heard, recognised, and approached

by others: I was visible. This was fundamental, also in terms of setting my political orientation within the network. The 'being out' consisted in taking part in various events which did not necessarily revolve around migration. The Friday's 'Aperitivo senza un motivo' (Aperitif without a reason) held in Porco Rosso; the events revolving around the electoral campaign held in May 2022 - events sustaining Massimo Castiglia, former President of the historical centre's district, and Franco Miceli, the candidate for Major and potential successor of Orlando - but also the discussion roundtables before and after the loss in the elections. Inaugurations, such as those of the 'Casa della Cooperazione', another ARCI, of a former Moltivolti's employee's restaurant, of the reopening of Moltivolti (which is described in chapter 4). Events such as the Antiracist Mediterranean, a soccer festival; the Festival of Migrant Literatures; the Sole e Luna Film Festival; the Ballarò Buskers; Migrant Art. Street demonstrations; assemblies of different kinds and in different places within the network; festivities such as the Ramadan's Iftars and the Gambian Association annual festival; book presentations, film projections.

All these events took place in the different groups/associations' spaces, but also within other public spaces. Though not all of them were strictly connected to my topic, they were all traversed by the micro-community constituting the network, therefore attending - in various ways - gave me time to observe places, interactions, orientations, discourses and so forth. This vast array of moments exceeds a simplistic definition within a bounded area of the city. My fieldwork, then, took shape around a multi-sited ethnography, processually built on a collection of places which were not pre-defined (Denzin, Norman 2020; Falzon 2009) - touching points within the different boroughs of the city-centre.

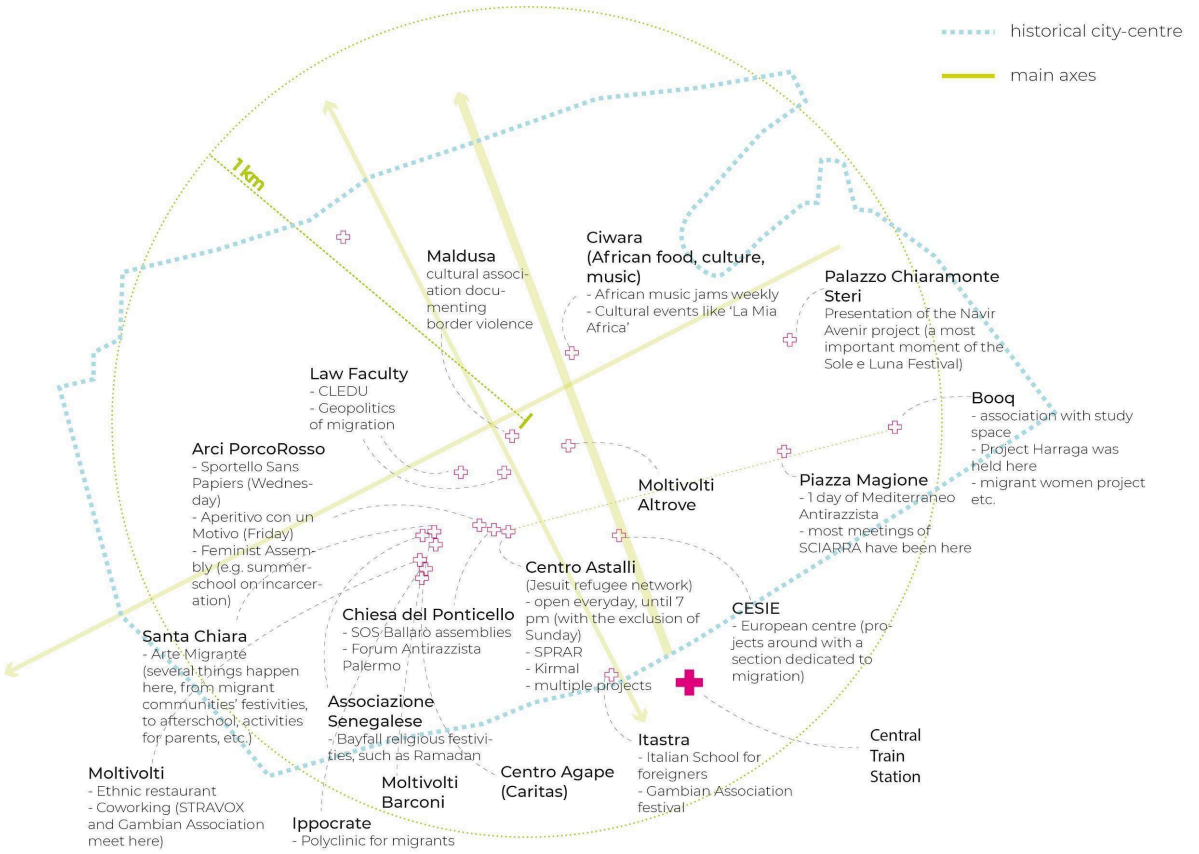

Figure 18 The solidarity network in Palermo

The map in Fig.18 above provides a glimpse of this, pointing to some of the spaces I experienced. Along these public moments and the volunteering activity, more intimate moments increasingly added to my experience of the city. The time spent in the kitchen of Kirmal outside of my volunteering time; the conversations started within a collective of researchers and other 'interested' parties that changed place every time, from a house in Ballarò, to Moltivolti's 'South room', to several squares across the centre's boroughs; the nights out with friends at Ciwara and in the other spots of the *movida*; the meetings, coffees, lunches, dinners and long conversations with people of the network, with Palermitani friends and, almost from the very beginning, with several people on the move, some of whom I engaged with just a few times, even only once, some becoming part of my everyday life in the city. As a way of simplifying Table 2, shows the number of hours divided per place, though a table can hardly make up for all those moments framed through pictures, fleeting encounters, quick notes and quick chats.

TYPE	PLACE	HOURS	CHAPTERS
Job desk, breakfast, bazaar (volunteering)	Centro Astalli	219	4,6
Arte Migrante (volunteering)	Santa Chiara	12	6
Ramadan's Iftar, events	Piazza Santa Chiara	8	5
SOS Ballarò assemblies (activism)	multiple locations	12	5
SCIARRA (activism)	multiple locations	2	6
Geopolitics of Borders (teaching assistant)	EPYC (European Palermo Youth Centre)	18	5,6
CLEDU seminars	CLEDU, Piazza Bologni	12	4
Reopening, meals, meetings	Moltivolti	10	4
Assemblies, Friday's Aperitivo, presentations	Porco Rosso	15	4
Events, presentations	Booq	6	
Tuesday's Aperitivo	Maldusa	8	6
Festival 'La mia Africa', Sunday's jam sessions	Ciwara	6	6
Ballarò Buskers	multiple locations	10	
Festival of the Gambian Association	Itastra	3	6
Navir Avenir, Sole e Luna Festival	Palazzo Steri	3	4
Antiracist Mediterranean, assemblies	Piazza Magione	8	4,6
	tot	352	

Throughout my stay I kept track of brief moments, perceptions, encounters, chats, events - but also ideas about what to do, how to move on, in different ways. A board diary was always with me to write down my thoughts, but the more the days passed the more my life in Palermo became quite hectic, therefore I relied a lot on recording my notes on the phone, either through audios or brief typed down notes, whereas my written notes became more

frantic, as the time to sit down started to shrink. Additionally, I collected photos and videos as a way to help the process of recollecting places and atmospheres. Regarding written and recorded notes, I ultimately decided to put together an electronic board diary, in order to have everything in one place, to facilitate the process of analysis.

Still, although within the chapters I kept close to the material I have recorded in some way, the increasingly blurred boundaries between research, private life and the role I started having within the network, as well as the increasingly blurry relationships with participants, who became in many cases friends, led to a point where the boundary between data collection and my everyday life became blurred. Ethically speaking, despite everyone in Palermo knowing that I was a PhD student and despite everyone having at least an overall idea of what I was working on, the more the above mentioned boundaries became blurred the more I started feeling discomfort with writing down conversations that had been shared clearly more as friends, than as participants.

Also, there were spontaneous moments which I could not bring myself to see as information: Hope's story, for instance, portrayed in the fragment opening chapter 4, was written all at once, not immediately after each meeting, but after the whole thing had happened. Although I had an extremely clear and lucid memory of the meetings, I drew upon all the voice texts shared with Hope herself, with the different volunteers and lawyers to whom every time I gave an update of the situation as prompts and reminders. Though during the process of experiencing that moment I was not sure it was ethical of me to use that situation as data, afterwards I realised how important it was to tell that story, if only for the fact that migrant women's experiences in Palermo are so difficult to bring to the fore with their multiple added struggles, as reported several times throughout the thesis.

In retrospect, I think that a balance can be found: by maintaining anonymity, every conversation can add knowledge, perspectives, shades that, even if not used through direct quotations, can still influence the way a discourse is shaped or sustained, while avoiding the uncomfortable extraction generated by the inevitable power relations. The ethical concerns related to this practice are going to be discussed in the last section of this chapter.

The blurry boundaries also related to my role in Palermo. As a volunteer in Centro Astalli I became involved as an activist with SOS Ballarò on the issue of crack dealing and

consumption and the lack of services within the neighbourhood (episodes related to this experience are brought up in chapter 5). Through the network of activists I became acquainted with, I was invited to volunteer at events such as the Ballarò Buskers festival, Arte Migrante, the cleaning of the informal market of Albergheria, the Antiracist Forum reopening assemblies. Through my network of friends - other researchers, activists - though it was a brief experience, we created a sort of moving roundtable, which for several meetings allowed us a space for discussing our understanding of what was going on in the city, from our different perspectives and in a politically charged way. All of this added depth to my experience as well as to my understanding, at the same time it added complexity and messiness to the way I related to the field and the idea of having to leave at a certain point.

Still this very fragmented identity, different experiences as a researcher, an activist, a volunteer, a person on the move just enjoying life in Palermo, allowed for the 'relational' in my ethnography to come to the fore - pulling together places and people without enclosing them in the space of a building, a square, a neighbourhood. This jumping from one place to the other, following clues, allowed for a broader and more intertwined understanding of how migrants inhabit the city, for instances of the overlapping of politics and leisure within some communities, and a greater appreciation of the space produced by the solidarity micro-community in Palermo.

3.3.7 Volunteering time at the refugee centre

Throughout my first stay in Palermo, I volunteered for six to eight hours per week at Centro Astalli, the refugee centre. Although in the thesis I chose to focus on a 'better off' population (explained later in the chapter), the experience in Centro Astalli gave me constant insight into *some* experiences of the most disadvantaged migrants, the majority in Palermo. In Centro Astalli I volunteered during breakfast, the clothing bazaar and, more consistently, at the job desk. Through volunteering at the centre for refugees (though not all users were refugees or asylum seekers) I engaged mainly with migrants who, independently from the length of their permit, navigated a more precarious life in Palermo. At the job desk I engaged mainly with women and men who, despite whatever level of education or work experiences they retained in their home country, in Palermo were looking for low skilled jobs, mainly in manual work or the social care and cleaning sectors, as that was the only option available to

them. Countries of origin were also quite diverse and reflected the bigger communities in Palermo, with users from West Africa (mainly Nigeria, Ghana, Gambia, Ivory Coast), North Africa (mainly Tunisia and Morocco) and Bangladesh being prevalent. Their experience gave me an insight into the everyday struggle of the majority of migrants in Palermo, especially more vulnerable categories, such as women, elderly and subjects with mental health issues or addictions. Managing the data and documents of the job desk gave me a broader, if not always clearer, understanding of the permit system, as well the kinds of profiling procedures that are required for racialised migrants to access places like that centre. Within the centre I also met volunteers - younger and older - social workers, trainees, civil service volunteers and so forth, some of them from Palermo, some of them from elsewhere in Italy and Europe. In this sense, the refugee centre has been a first place to observe many different relationships. This also enabled the capture of interactions which were difficult to observe elsewhere in the network, for instance those between migrants and older Palermitani volunteers.

Through direct experience at the job desk, I could appreciate the limitations of the migrant support infrastructure: the often scarce ability to have a concrete, widespread impact due to the limited preparation of the volunteers, myself included: the only training I received before starting at the job desk was to shadow the actions of one of the other volunteers in the room. The experience within such a space, imprinted on a humanitarian approach, where migrants' behaviour had to be shaped around gratitude (often provoking fits of rage on both sides, especially during breakfast time), gave me a very different idea of what it means to be a non-white migrant in Palermo, compared to the time I spent in other locations of the network.

3.3.8 Semi-structured interviews and informal conversations

For the writing of this project my attention has been drawn at a point to a specific group of black migrants, those I refer to as belonging to an 'in-between' generation within chapter 5. This group is made for the most part of young men, aged between mid-twenties to mid-thirties and hailing from West African countries, with a few people from North Africa. They all arrived in Sicily through the Mediterranean route, in different stages from 2012 onwards, and all have entered the country as asylum seekers and/or minors. People

belonging to this group today are either studying (high school or university level), or working, usually both, and they are all active within the solidarity network - as activists, volunteers and/or as mediators. Their status varies from those who still have permits as refugees (with different people having different renewal lengths), to those who have now obtained a long permit to stay. Focusing on this group was fundamental in terms of challenging the common and dominant portrayal of first arrival migrants as simply vulnerable and passive victims, pushing for a more complex understanding through taking into account a group of first generation refugees who challenge the tight label of 'forced migrants' and are in relatively stable positions within the society. From an outsider's superficial perspective, these young men do not appear as marginalised. On the contrary, they seem to be well settled within the Palermitan society, and yet they constantly have to negotiate multiple sets of racialised bordering practices, also within the solidarity network and despite their better positions.

Importantly, these better off migrants I engaged with were mostly male. The difficulty in accessing and encountering women with a migratory background, outside of places like the refugee centre, was constant throughout the fieldwork. I met most of the people I built relationships with through engaging with public events within the solidarity network, where women were mostly absent. When asked about this evident absence, male migrants would usually reply that women have 'different lifestyles'. In fact, most young migrant women in Palermo, as I could see at the job desk, are usually with children, and some of them have to care for old relatives. They invariably have to balance their domestic duties with precarious jobs within a city that offers scarce resources and services.

Table 2 pulls together - in an anonymous form - the more extended conversations I took note of in my research diary. Aside from four audio-recorded interviews, the other conversations were mainly documented immediately after the conversation had happened, either writing them down in the diary or audio-recording myself. I often took notes of very brief sentences that immediately caught my attention during spontaneous conversations. Throughout the empirical chapters the direct quotes come either from the audio-recorded interviews or from short sentences that I could recall with accuracy. The choice of not taking notes while the conversation was ongoing depended especially on the often spontaneous ways these conversations took place.

Name	Age/Origin	Type	Organization?	Date	Chapter
Sara	30s - Palermo	ic, sn	Volunteer/Centro Astalli	3/4/2022	4
Fazel	50s - Afghanistan	ic, sn	Former member of Moltivolti	19/03/2022	5
Giorgia	30s - North Italy	ic, sn	Former member of Moltivolti	19/03/2022	6
Andrea	40s - Palermo, living in Bologna	ic	Member of a Cooperative for refugees in Bologna	14/04/2022	4
Khaled	mid 20s - Tunisia	ic	Volunteer in Centro Astalli and working as cultural mediator	17/04/2022	5
Mbaye	40s - Senegal	ic, sn	member of the Bayefal	24/04/2022	5
Hala	40s - Tunisia	ic, sn	former cultural mediator	24/04/2022	5
Madi	mid 20s - Ivory Coast	ic, sn	cultural mediator in Lampedusa	17/05/2022	5
Seka	mid 20s - Ivory Coast	ic	former employee at Ciwara	17/05/2022	5
Abou	late 30s - Gambia	ic	member of Kirmal	9/10/2022	5
Leonie	mid 20s - Switzerland	ic	volunteer in Centro Astalli and Project Harraga	11/7/2022	6
Adama	30s - Ivory Coast	ic, rc	cultural mediator with Doctors Without Borders, activist	18/12/2022 30/12/2022	4,5,6
Saro	30s - Tunisia	ic, rc	cultural mediator	15/12/2022	4,5,6
Awa	30s - Senegal	ic, rc	former cultural mediator, activist and waiter	21/12/2022	4,5,6
Bai	mid 20s - Gambia	rc	former activist and cultural mediator, university student	30/12/2022	4,5,6

In the case of the four audio-recorded interviews, I first sent to the participants an Information Sheet (Appendix 1) that I had prepared prior to leaving and already submitted for ethics approval, to inform them about the scope of the project and issues related to confidentiality and consent. Consent was verbal and audio-recorded.

In the four audio-recorded interviews there are some points that I would like to highlight. As I decided to do these interviews towards the end of my stay, I had already built a rapport with the interviewees, which led to them being extremely open about the stories they shared, even when it came to delicate political opinions or personal events. At the same time, it was interesting to observe how at least three of the interviewees had already been interviewed on other occasions and were in a sense used to the practice. I noticed how there was at times a performative way of approaching the interview, especially in terms of what the interviewee thought to be relevant or not. To make an example, Saro, just before we started the interview, was telling me about a recent argument with his mother back

home in Tunisia. His tone was annoyed, but when we sat down at a table in a bar and I switched the recorder on, he immediately changed attitude, tone, even posture.

My questions in all four of the interviews would touch upon the same issues, asking further questions depending on the answer. I asked everyone how they had got to Palermo, how they felt about the city, what kind of job they did in the city, their experiences with housing, activism and how they spent their free time. Interestingly, the question regarding how they had arrived in Palermo usually prompted a much longer conversation that did not start with arrival in Palermo (or Italy), but with departure and fragmented movement across Africa and then Italy (and Europe at times), between the moment they left their own country and the moment they finally stopped in Palermo (Fig. 19).

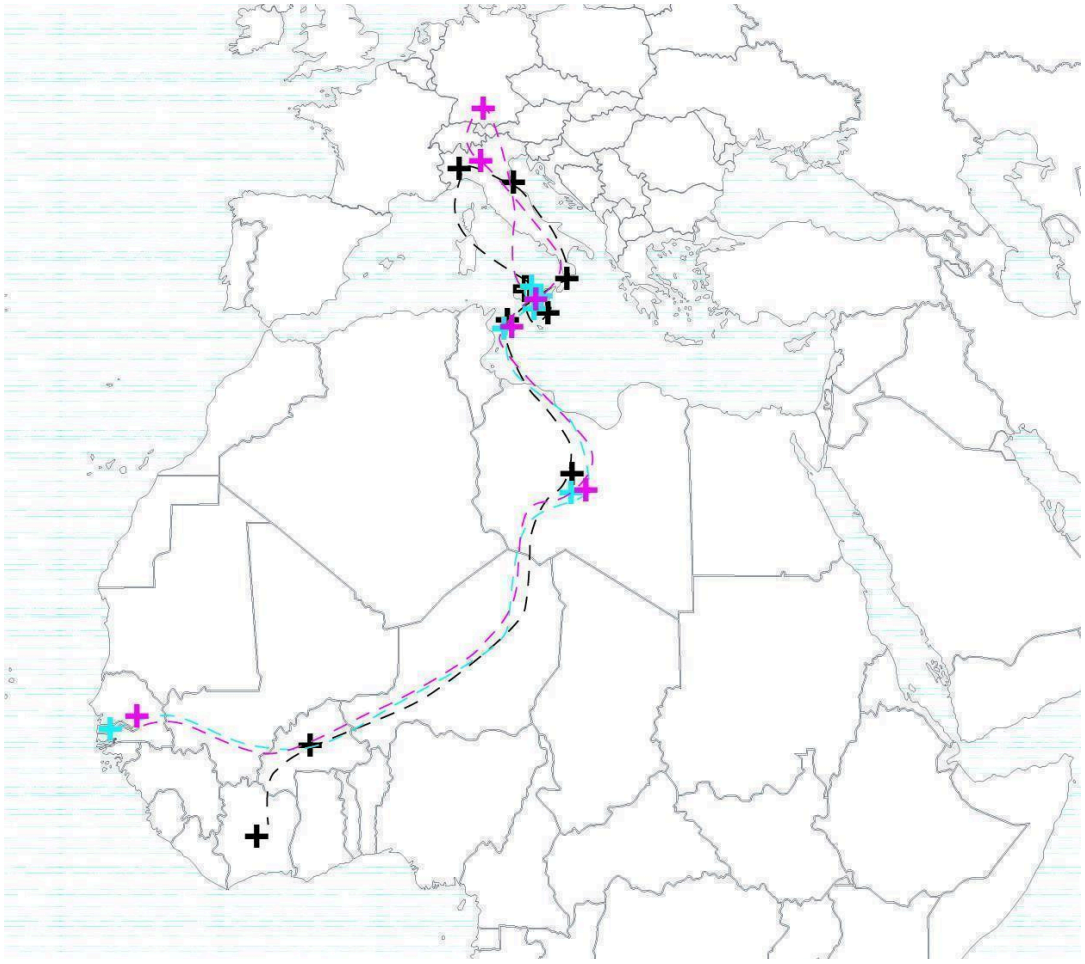

Figure 19 Movements: three trajectories before Palermo

The question on housing was prompted by the field, as I was increasingly surrounded by people - Palermitani, but also white and non-white migrants - denouncing the lack of affordable housing, the absence of contracts, the non-regulation of short-term stays, which

allowed some owners to rent at higher price when the tourist season kicked in. This made me curious about how these better-off racialised migrants were facing this issue, and whether race was an additional component within an already precarious situation. Regarding the few recorded interviews, the choice is complex to articulate. First, as mentioned before, I realised that there was always a level of performance within formal interviewing processes. I did not want to push for the participants' time: with several of them, I already had answers to my questions as we had known each other for some time and the interview felt more like a means to provide data 'scientifically', rather than an actual opening up of new insights. Finally, Table 2 also shows some longer conversations I had with non-racialised migrants on the move.

All interviews and conversations were conducted in Italian, aside from the interview with Awa, which was conducted in English (chapter 4,5). I translated all the pieces of conversation present within this project.

3.4 Non-representation choice

Throughout my stay I collected pictures and videos as a form of exploration. This material helped me during the fieldwork, but especially during the process of analysis and writing, to capture moments and recollect places, people and atmospheres. Still, I decided not to include pictures within the thesis. This choice has been an ethical one: as Palermo has become an over-represented city, especially when it comes to its multicultural spaces, I decided that I did not want to contribute to the proliferation of these images. Instead, the pictures I have used (mostly within this chapter) are those portraying the city-centre's walls and the numerous political graffiti and manifestos, through which I wanted to show the multiple ways in which Palermo's walls speak about the ongoing symbolic processes beyond the more institutional murals contributing to the municipality's discourse of peaceful coexistence. These images are important because they aided my understanding of the dynamic local context and the ongoing contestations and struggles of the city. When not specified otherwise, then, all the pictures within this thesis were taken by myself.

3.5 Ethical considerations

As explained in the previous sections, the more I delved into Palermo's everyday life, the more the distances between myself and what I was observing, and the people I was engaging with, became blurred. When it came to using material which had come up during spontaneous conversations with people who were not taking part in a 'declared' interview, my reflection was always on whether that information, if shared within this work, might have been problematic for the person sharing. My reflection is that several pieces of information, no matter whether they were gathered informally/spontaneously or formally, for instance through audio-recorded interviews, might be problematic if not treated carefully.

As the micro-community I talk about throughout the chapters is a relatively small one, within a relatively small part of the city, it is possible that a person who knows the context might be able to identify participants. This is particularly relevant as the interviewees expressed their critical opinions openly, especially concerning the political work of associations in Palermo. On the other side, I am sure that interviews would have not reached that depth of sharing if it was not for the fact that they came after tight relationships had been established and my role as researcher, my political views and actions had been clearly positioned within the network. I think that this shortcut – being entrusted with information due to the strong relationship with the participant, with the participant's identity being potentially guessed – which in my opinion can only partially be solved through attentiveness during the writing process and anonymity - furthers the responsibility on how to use that information that I have been entrusted with. My reflection on this is: first that participant observation carried out without actively delving into the field might stay on the surface.

A fundamental issue, which became more relevant the more I went towards the end of the fieldwork, was that of *leaving the field*. Although everyone was aware from the beginning, and then constantly reminded, that I was going to leave, the main problem was that of leaving ongoing activities that were connected to my project, but also beyond it.

"Speaking of mobility. I'm leaving, I got involved, there are things that I am dealing with and no one else, and I am leaving. I'm not being self-centred." I wrote this sentence while

reflecting on my active involvement within the SOS Ballarò assemblies, which started around the issue of crack dealing and consumption within the neighbourhood and the whole city. As I started taking part in the assemblies, my role was often that of connecting with the migrant associations, as well as speaking for them as non-white members were often absent during the first meetings (this process and its reasons are explained in chapter 5). The same happened for the meetings started with the collective of people mentioned in chapter 6, as it was made of several individuals on the move.

A recurring question then, which was also often discussed during the roundtables with other researchers and activists, was that of what politics can be generated by people in transit. Without being self-centred, things of course go on, perhaps taking different forms and in different groups: since I left Palermo the Movement Right2Be (chapter 5,6) has grown consistently and now shouts loud. A new collective against touristification has also risen in the last months, created by some of the people I have met. Still, I realise that this work cannot rest solely on academic knowledge production purposes. In this sense I have been constantly discussing with my supervisors ways to bring this work back to the community I have engaged in Palermo, in order to share my findings and contribute locally to ongoing discussions on exploitation and extraction. In this sense, I have initiated conversations with some of the groups in Palermo, where I think it might be interesting to start a reflection starting from the findings of the thesis.

3.6 Conclusions

Within this chapter I have presented the context of Palermo and the methods on which this thesis is built. The context section pulls together the complex framework of a conflicted city, but also the complex positioning of migrants and hospitality discourses, more than politics - at least considering the municipality's doings - within this framework. The methods presented - a multi sited ethnography of a collection of places within Palermo's historical centre, built on participant observation and formal and informal conversations with participants navigating the solidarity network and micro-community on the move of this part of the city - are aligned with the relational approach to migration and cities, that this thesis has tried to build practically - in terms of methodological design, but also writing - and theoretically. In this sense, a fundamental point was that of avoiding strict, a priori framings,

trying instead to work through a messy fieldwork which processualy and spontaneously unfolded, following the people I encountered.

CHAPTER 4 - WHAT IS (NOT) RACIAL CAPITALISM? NEGOTIATING THE MESSY ENTANGLEMENT OF MULTISCALAR RACIALISED BORDERS AND MULTIPLE SOLIDARITIES FROM THE GROUND OF PALERMO

4.1 Introduction

From the urban ground of Palermo, this chapter explores how European and Italian politics and practices around black migration across the Mediterranean intersect with local contexts, solidarities (also transnational), and politics of enfranchisement rooted on the idea of hospitality. On the one hand, the chapter focuses on the interplay and apparently stark contrast between the enactment of a state's border regime - rooted on the hyper-mobilisation, containment, confinement, differential inclusion of migrants, whose autonomy is constantly hampered (Tazzioli 2020; Tazzioli and Garelli 2020) - and a local dimension of support and solidarity made of a vast array of actors - students, researchers, activists, practitioners, volunteers. These actors are actively involved with filling the gaps of the local administration in terms of service provision at the urban level, and with disseminating knowledge and awareness within and across Palermo.

All of this is embedded within a society where, far from exceptionalisms, racialized borders, embodied racialised assumptions and restricted options exist and are daily navigated by migrants. Within this interplay, the grey role of support emerges, as embedded within an apparently inevitable interplay with the same institutions that foment repression, and as crossed by power relations that can reproduce racial hierarchies by allowing more space, voice and relevance to the benevolent act of saving and to the white saviour than migrants themselves and their multiple everyday struggles. In this sense, I argue that it is difficult, at least from an urban perspective, to operate clear cut distinctions between those forms of support filling the gaps and those creating cracks (Dadusc and Mudu 2020).

Going beyond a dichotomous narrative that seems to clearly split Western reactions to migration into either repression or hospitality/solidarity, or into bad and good forms of solidarity, the chapter offers a more nuanced and complex understanding of a play that is

rigged at the roots, where genuine support inevitably coexists with a pervasive racialized system that can turn also forms of solidarity into just another face and expression of racial capitalism, especially when migrants' rights and mainstream debates are still stuck in the sea, on the mere right to stay alive.

The chapter articulates around three brief fragments, narrowing down on brief moments/experiences that open up for a broader discussion on the different, at times overlapping faces of solidarity in Palermo, and how these are navigated by migrants. Centring the attention on these fragments allows us to explore the embeddedness of both the border regime and solidarities within a multiplicity of other ongoing processes in the city. The first fragment follows a young woman, whom I have met while volunteering at the job desk in a centre for refugees, in her trips to Palermo to find a new lawyer. The second fragment is centred around a public event during a festival where a French Design Group presented a project aimed at creating a European fleet of hospitality and pursuing the biggest aim of inscribing 'hospitality' within UNESCO immaterial heritage. The third fragment focuses on the reopening of Moltivolti, a prominent reality of solidarity in Palermo, reflecting on the loud reaction of support expressed within the city but also from abroad, manifested through a crowdfunding campaign and the mayor's words that have presented the project of Moltivolti as a major example of the cultural change of the city.

These three stories, read together, allow to consider the everyday, often contradictory, interplay between the institutional border regime's everyday violence, intersected with a lack of opportunities generated by several forms of overlapping urban exclusions (e.g. available jobs, housing), and the tight network of 'spontaneous' support created in Palermo. It allows to observe how multiple scales of institutional politics - e.g. national politics of confinement and local projects of emancipation - intersect with local and transnational activism of non-institutional realities; the power of words and images as they circulate and attract people, events, consolidate imaginaries; the eminent role of the act of benevolence, reinforced through media discourses. Within this chapter I will not consider migrants' associations, if not in a marginal way. This is not to deny their presence or importance, but I will talk about how migrants position themselves within this system in the next chapter.

4.2 Fragment 1 \ Hope

I join Hope in front of Centro Astalli, where I first met her, a few months earlier, at the job desk. The Centre is ten minutes walking from the Central Station. She will get there after a commute of one hour from the small village on the coast where the shelter house she currently lives in with her kids is located.

It is a Wednesday afternoon in December, it starts to get dark and the centre is quiet. When she gets to the square facing the centre we wave hi and hug each other in the middle of randomly parked cars. She holds tight onto me, thanking me over and over again. I always stiffen a bit when she does that, I would like to make her understand that I am as clueless as she is, I am just hoping to be able to help her find someone who can actually do something.

We start walking, she asks about my family, I ask about her kids. Her youngest (of four kids) is one year old or something. Hope is three years younger than me and I can never help but think that our lives could not be more different. I have always wondered what she might think of me, but never asked.

In less than a minute we walk past Porco Rosso. As every Wednesday, they are open, hosting the 'Sans Papier' desk. The place gives entirely different vibes than the square of Centro Astalli, packed with cars and dirty. People seem to be just hanging out there, talking with each-other, someone sitting on the bench next to the entrance, someone standing.

We go up the steep Salita Raffadali, around some work in progress, in less than 5 minutes we're finally in the monumental Piazza Bologni. We are in the middle of the historical centre and it is beautiful. We go towards the Department of Law and enter the building, there are lots of people hanging there. I stop a guy I know and tell him we have an appointment with one of the lawyers, he asks me to wait and goes to check.

I wait with Hope, I see she's worried, but also kind of excited. She dressed up and combed her hair with evident care. She is hoping greatly. Ebrima, a young man I met at Ciwara, comes out of a room, he is a law student, but I am not sure whether he is here to volunteer or to be assisted. He is having troubles with the renewal of his permit and I have seen his expression becoming tougher in the last months. We hug tightly, I introduce him to Hope, he is nice, makes her laugh. He leaves in a few minutes, right before the lawyer comes out.

Hope and I introduce ourselves to him, then we follow him and a small bunch of other people to a room upstairs. Up lots of stairs. We enter in a common university office, not too big. It is warm. We sit around a table, Hope and I are sitting next to each other, the young man I know is sitting next to me, the other two young women next to the lawyer, who is sitting in front of us.

The lawyer asks us whether we know the Legal Clinic and explains in a few words how it works, then asks Hope if she wants to tell them why she came there. She doesn't speak immediately, looks at me, she is a little bit shy. 'Just tell them what you told me' I suggest, smiling.

Then she starts. I already know the story. She used to live with her kids and husband in a small city close to Palermo. Her husband was violent towards her - just once she says - but hurt her and she denounced him at the local police office. In August she was put in a shelter house with the kids, she does not like the place, she says her kids are not happy there. More importantly, she cannot bring her kids outside the structure, not even for a walk. She feels like the kids have been taken from her and cannot understand why she is being punished when she did not do anything. The lawyer asks what I had asked myself the first time, if she has got herself a lawyer and she tells him that she has one, but they have not been answering the phone for months.

The lawyer asks whether she has some papers, something from a judge about her case. She shows them the judge's resolution that put her and the kids in the shelter.

The lawyer starts explaining things. We talk in English the whole time because Hope has been in Italy since 2017 but hardly speaks Italian. While he is talking to us, he also turns to the young man and women, who, I understand, are all students. They mainly listen and take notes. At the end of the day they will all gather with the other students and lawyers and discuss the cases of that day.

The lawyer explains to us that what happened to Hope is standard procedure. After a denunciation, the judge proceeds to put the 'victims' in a shelter to protect them. He tries to explain to Hope that this is not something against her because she is a bad mother, but it is just how the Italian legal system works. Regarding the fact that she cannot take her kids out

of the shelter he says that he needs more information from the court, but only Hope's lawyer can ask for it. He asks about the kids' age, whether they were born in Italy or not. Three between Nigeria and Libya, one in Italy. Hope shows her children's permit of stay, she is worried about the youngest as she was told at the shelter that her husband only can request a permit of stay for him. The lawyer is perplexed, he explains that this is not true, she has the right to request it. Hope is not easily convinced, she strongly states that she was clearly told she couldn't and the lawyer has to repeat a few times that in fact she can. She does not understand, I intervene telling her that either there was a misunderstanding or for whatever reason they did not know what they were saying, but the lawyer is telling her that whatever she was told, that was not correct. She stays silent with her eyes wide.

I ask the lawyer what can be done, as we have come there especially because Hope evidently needs someone who is actively working on her case. The lawyer says that if Hope wants for her case to be followed by the CLEDU this can be arranged, but he tells us that it is better if another lawyer follows her, a woman possibly, who has more experience with these cases and who might be a more sensitive listener to another woman's story.

Hope needs another appointment, another Wednesday, another lawyer. I am given the potential lawyer's contact, I have to call her and set the appointment.

At the end of the meeting one of the students – I think she is from somewhere in North Europe - asks Hope whether she can sign a paper to allow them to discuss her case, once anonymized, for formative (training) purposes. She smiles encouragingly.

Out of the department it is already dark. We go to sit on a bench in the square. I am annoyed. I had already told the person I had taken the appointment with what the story was about, I think they could have already asked for a female lawyer, but maybe it was because we were a bit late and they were busy? Part of me thinks this has been a useless waste of time, everything will have to be done again, but I don't say any of this to Hope, I see that she too had expected something more.

We would come back in a week's time, Hope would tell the whole story again, in front of a new lawyer, and then another one, who finally would take her case. Again, there would be students actively taking notes to discuss the case at the end of the day. We would then

discover that another standard procedure in case of domestic violence is to put a social assistant to observe for some months whether the relationship between the mother and the kids is healthy, that this decision can be appealed against by the lawyer and that Hope's former lawyer, apparently, had never nor appealed nor informed her of anything. She had never seen or talked to someone introducing themselves as a social assistant either, nor was she aware that someone was meant to do that.

4.2.1 Deriva 1 \ Lucky enough: dispersed containment of the Italian border regime VS proximity of the solidarity network

Hope's issues were not simply – and that would have already been enough - having to cope with domestic violence, a life with no job, no home and four kids to maintain, as all of this had been heightened by having not been, until that moment, lucky enough to have a good lawyer, lucky enough to find someone - within the police station, or within the shelter - who could or wanted to explain her the situation. She was just stuck in a limbo of non-transmitted documents and information and people who either did not care or did not have the time to. In Palermo I have come to understand how, for a migrant, luck, resourcefulness and having a network are a true 'survival starter pack'. If luck starts with getting to Sicily alive, once arrived, it is about ending up in the right place, and if not, meeting the right person who can take you out of the wrong one.

Hope had come to me at the end of her second appointment at the job desk, I had made her laugh: I would speak in English although I could not[3], trying to use some very basic Italian sentences from time to time, cheering her up when she understood them. After the meeting I had talked with her about the importance of learning the language to increase the chances of finding a job and encouraged her to enrol in the free language course held at Centro Astalli. I had told her that things would have settled and that she had to be positive about it. That was the moment when she asked me whether she could talk to me for a moment and asked for help. As simple as it could be, we liked each other, and she decided she could try and trust me. On my part, I could not provide help directly, still what I could give was empathy, a bit of my time and my network. I first contacted one of the lawyers of the

[3] The job desk in Centro Astalli should be accessed only by people who have a basic level of Italian, although in practice people are still made to come, with the hope of finding low skilled jobs that do not require communication skills, such as dishwasher or cleaner.

refugee centre, but they could only take asylum cases. Then I contacted a person I knew who volunteered at the CLEDU, she asked me a few details to understand whether CLEDU or the Sans Papier Desk in Porco Rosso was more suitable, then booked me an appointment. Centro Astalli, Porco Rosso, CLEDU are all just a few minutes walking from each other, and a couple more from the central train station, that is, the main access for migrants getting to the city.

A volunteer in Centro Astalli, when I visited the place for the first time, had named this way of using the network as 'partnerariato sociale' (social partnership), a system employed by local administrations to delegate social service provision to the third sector. These places are not coordinated by the public administration. Centro Astalli is part of the Jesuit network for refugees, an international catholic organisation; Porco Rosso belongs to the circuit of 'Circoli Arci', a national leftist network of associations active on the culture and political front, CLEDU is a legal clinic born within the Department of Law of the University of Palermo. They all have different statuses, different means, and are hugely counting on voluntary and activist work to get on. Together with the other associations, they create a network of free resources, offering counselling, medical help, advice, mediation, help with bureaucracy, which are fundamental for migrants as they might encounter multiple barriers in their everyday access to institutional services. This network is characterised by a spatial proximity of very different solidarity actors, that defies the national enactment of the border regime through scattering migrants in various types of centres in secluded places.

In fact, if Hope's confinement was somewhat extraordinary - she was past beyond her arrival, occurred in 2017, not hosted within a reception centre, but within a shelter for mothers and children hosting both local and foreigners - her hopelessness of being cut out of society, with no clear idea about what was going on or what to do, are common to the histories of other people I have met who have described their arrival to Sicily. Within all these stories, a fundamental common factor is the role of luck to get out of confinement and immobilisation.

Bai, a young Gambian man in his late twenties, arrived in Lampedusa by boat in 2016, then he was moved to Agrigento, where the police gave him a piece of paper - the so-called 'Foglio di Via', a notice to leave the country autonomously within fifteen days - with no

explanation whatsoever, about either the meaning of the content or Bai's right to appeal. The police just brought him to Agrigento's train station and from there he was on his own. A volunteer in Lampedusa had given him a phone number, which led him to Porco Rosso, in Palermo.

> "*So, I got to Lampedusa, then Agrigento. From Agrigento I had a 'foglio di via'. An expulsion to leave Italy within 30 days and from there, I slept for one night in Agrigento, then I came to Palermo and in Palermo I called a green number that they had given me in Lampedusa. They gave me this number, in case I had problems. I could call this number for information. I met F. in Porco Rosso, they were the first people I met at my arrival. [...] They explained everything that was in the 'foglio di via', but he told me that I could appeal. (he said) We take a lawyer, talk with a lawyer, we do the things and then you have to ask for asylum.*"[4]

Bai did not want to ask for asylum in Italy, in truth he did not want to ask for asylum at all, as he had left his country to study in the UK, a place where he already knew the language and thought he could integrate more easily: a friend had suggested that he undertook the Mediterranean route, as getting a student visa to study in the UK from Gambia was almost impossible, especially for economic reasons. In the end he asked for asylum, as reaching the UK was too difficult and he did not have money, money that was hard to get as he was residing in Palermo 'illegally', suspended between the risk of deportation for not fulfilling the expulsion notice and the lack of status. He slept for six months in an all-male dormitory in Palermo, the 'Missione Biagio Conte', famous because of his founder, Biagio Conte, who died in 2023 - a laic missionary who spent his life caring for the marginalised people of Palermo (a mural portraying him in a saint's guise stands in the 'popular' neighbourhood of Brancaccio). Biagio Conte dormitory has often come out in migrants' words as an inevitable step into the city for people waiting/looking for a better solution. Bai stayed there during the procedure of asking for asylum. A former user had once described that dormitory to me as a place where one would get drunk on the strong smell of human lives packed in a single huge room, though he acknowledged the missionary's good heart and his attempt at keeping people away from the street. He would stay out the whole night when possible, to avoid the stench.

[4] From recorded interview, 30th December 2022

After getting the status of refugee, Bai was sent to a centro d'accoglienza (reception centre) , most probably a CAS (Centre for extra-ordinary reception) in Corleone, a town one hour away from Palermo, where he stayed for almost one year, before asking to go back to Palermo.

> "*In Corleone the centre was outside the city, because it was a hotel in the countryside, in the mountains. We would go to the field to play football, then back [...] to (go to) Palermo I used to take a bus. Some of my friends are still there, yes [...] I am here because I didn't find what I looked for in Corleone, to study, and there were not (options for studying). I came back to Palermo through Porco Rosso and G*."[5]

Saro was a minor when he got to Italy from Tunisia, in 2011. He wanted to go to France to reach a family member, but as a minor he could not leave Italy. After staying seventeen days in Lampedusa, in a reception centre that was so packed that people would sleep outside, he was moved from a centre for minors to another, where he would share the space with other migrant minors and with local minors who had committed crimes.

> "*When I turned eighteen, because I was studying, the court authorised me to stay within the community until I turned twenty-one. When I got this letter from the judge […] I started asking for my rights, I asked for the pocket money, which they had never given to me and clothes – I should have got new clothes, they would give me used ones […] Nuns ran the community, when they heard that I wanted to speak with a lawyer, that I wanted to denounce, they started writing that I messed around, that I created problems, and so forth. The judge decided to send me to another community, in Agrigento. I don't remember the place exactly, but it was a remote place, in the mountains, in a children's home. I got there, it was full, people would argue with each other, there was an alcohol ring and a drug ring and so forth. I stayed two days, then I went to the social assistant, I said 'this place is not for me, can you please send me somewhere else?' […] the first day already they had stolen my books, my clothes [...] When I got to the [new] community they saw I was eighteen and that I was Tunisian, and they had had bad experiences with Tunisians and they imagined that I was like them too. So they would not accept me. They told me 'you cannot stay within this*

[5] From recorded interview, 30th December 2022

community because you are eighteen, tonight you can stay here but tomorrow we will bring you back."[6]

Within Saro's story too, benevolent casual figures as well as friends have been his way out: a nice employee within the local administration who asked him about his life and confronted her colleagues about what was happening in the centre, a friend who directed him to what he described as a 'centro sociale' in Palermo and through which he was able to find his first job as cultural mediator.

Awa, a Senegalese man in his thirties, recalled his time in the first reception centre, in Piana degli Albanesi[7]. There were 33 people and he was part of the second group of migrants staying in that centre. He mentioned how the three operators running the place, who came at first with old cars and bicycles, after one year of his permanence in the centre had come out with new cars. "*They all have a new car!*"[8] he exclaimed at one point during the interview, with the expression of who knows better.

He told me about how he had gone to the office to enquire about their situation:

> "*You are running this place. But we don't have nothing. [There is nothing] you can give to us. It's just food. Sleep. Food. Sleep. [...] Me, I've not come here for food. And it's something I need. Yeah, but I didn't see it here. Why not school here? Why you didn't want to show us what was going on?*"[9]

In the centre, Awa and other eight people refused to eat, as they were daily served cold pasta, which was later discovered to be expired. They started a fight which attracted journalists and the police. Speaking about what happened next, after the centre was instructed to employ a chef, Awa said "*He cooked good. But the problem is…our problem, we just waited every day, every day, every day, every day. If someone's sick, you call the boss. They say no, I'm far away. You can call these guys and then call the ambulance. We go to this doctor, and many people get sick, but they give them a far appointment, and we say this got to be done. This one is not right.*"[10].

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[6] From recorded interview, 15th December 2022
[7] The one of the story has been shut down and is not the same of the one still existing there.
[8] From recorded interview, 21th December 2022
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid.

Speaking with old people around the village Awa had heard that the centre's director had been in jail for crimes related to Mafia, he didn't have a job and had been put there, where he had tried to involve his friends. Awa's journey was complicated by his fights within the centre, after which he was sent with other people to a reception centre close to Vercelli, in the North of Italy, from which he fled to reach Germany where he stayed until re-expatriated to Italy, just to discover that his residency and his documents where in Palermo and had never been transmitted to Milan. Once there he was sent to CLEDU, where the process of acquiring his documents and asking for a permit to stay started.

Corleone, Piana degli Albanesi, Madonie, Camporeale, Santa Cristina Gela (Fig. 20) are some of the names of places where reception centres have been created within unused buildings or hotels, scattered throughout the province, far from the city and often also outside of the small inhabited centres, close to which they raise. These centres have different names, although Bai, Saro and Awa referred to them with the generic label of 'centro d'accoglienza' (reception centre).

Figure 20 reception centres mentioned in the chapter

Depending on whether migrants are waiting for a decision about the request for asylum, or the request has been accepted but the refugee doesn't have means to provide for themselves, or if a request has been made, rejected and there is an ongoing procedure of appeal, or, again, if the asylum seeker is a minor, reception centres have different names

which changed over time following different legislatures. Still, in Italy most of these reception centres are CAS (Centri di Accoglienza Straordinaria Eng. Centres for extra-ordinary reception): these places work in practice often in the same ways, they are opened through participating in bids and should attain certain standards, but especially thanks to their dispersed location, unless something relevant happens such is the case of Awa or Saro's story, they go easily unchecked, with pervasive corruption and lack of care, poorly prepared personnel. Migrants are dispersed and stuck, entangled in waiting. As in the case of Awa's or Saro's story, when they react, they can be dispersed again. Local press and associations such as Borderline Sicilia have routinely denounced the Sicilian reception system and many centres have undergone procedures for corruption of this economy created by migration (Platania 2022).

Within the stories of Hope, Bai, Saro, Awa, luck is fundamental because to get to a better condition they have to count on their own resourcefulness, but also on someone else's humanity. These stories are stuck in the sense that the space where these people are negotiating their lives is not a space of rights, but a space of human kindness that can happen or not within a racialized regime of containment and immobilisation. This comes out not only in the personal ties that can allow someone to move from one place to another, but also in the arbitrariness on which rights are accorded. Despite everything, Saro as a minor had been granted a right to stay within the reception system until he finished school. Awa and Bai were kept in the centres without being able to access schooling, although that should have been a basic right and rule of the place.

I will explore this in further depth in the next chapter, but what Palermo and the network of solidarity could provide to them was a 'safe space' of places, all close to each other and all very close to the central train station, which is the main access for migrants to the city. What this network offers is an increased chance of humanity, increased chances in general, for meeting people, finding jobs, being heard, to a certain extent.

4.2.2 Deriva 2 \ Beyond arrival: getting lost in the cracks of the border regime, between institutional and everyday borders

Within Centro Astalli, a SPRAR (then converted to SAI) hosted thirty something refugees, all male. Although the Italian system is predominantly centred on the CAS network described in

the previous section, SPRARs were imagined as the core of reception, with paths tailored on hosts towards inclusion in the host society. I would meet these men in the mensa, during lunchtime, or walking around the city centre, eating at the Bangladeshi diners in Via Maqueda or drinking a coffee in a bar. I met two of them at important demonstrations around the city, shared a lunch within the SPRAR itself during Christmas time, eating the pizza of one of the guests, who was practising to become a pizza chef; I programmed a haircut - although in the end we did not manage to do that - with another young man who was practising to become a hairdresser. Like them, many other people hosted in this SPRAR were either studying or doing some kind of professional internship, as well as language courses and so forth. Even though that SPRAR too had rules of time that had to be respected, the place was located in the core of the city and there was much more chance for life outside of the SPRAR's walls.

Still, luck of meeting the right people such is the case of the stories of the previous section, or ending up in a better place and being in the city, as opposed to being segregated somewhere in the countryside, are not per se a way out, opening up for a better life.

Hope had a 'permesso per protezione speciale' (special protection), which is accorded when the international protection cannot be assigned to the person requesting asylum, but the judge still believes there is a need for protection from repatriation. In Hope's case, most probably, this need was the four kids who were born and already living in Italy. Hope had been registered at the Job Desk in the refugee centre in 2021, but had not showed up for more than a year. She did not speak Italian if not for a few words, did not have any job experiences, the only fact that I could read on the register of the job desk at the refugee centre was that on the year of registration she had been attending a course of Italian language as part of the project 'Women and girls safe space' at Centro Penc, a non-profit centre of ethnopsychology. What had happened between 2017 and 2021 and between 2021 and 2022 was and remained - at least to me - a black hole. The last time I heard from her she had started working with the lawyers in CLEDU, but every time she would send me a voice message repeatedly telling me that she needed a job. Without a job she was not able to find a house, without a house she could not hope to get out of the shelter, for how much she and her kids hated that place. Not only that, the care for her children made it hard to come to Palermo for her different appointments, for courses, and so forth.

Like Hope, many other migrants would transit through the job desk in Centro Astalli, or one of the other places of the 'infrastructure' of services, bringing a whole set of issues that a job alone could not solve.

Eric is a Ghanian young man I met during my first month in the refugee centre. He lived at the Biagio Conte dormitory, came into the centre for breakfast and a quick shower. I remember how he would look down, muttering words in English. A young Spanish woman volunteering with me once told him in a friendly manner 'Come on, I know you speak perfect Italian!', he smiled briefly, softly, saying 'no' with his head. The volunteer had told me that he didn't use to be like that.

I met him again after months, after I had accompanied Hope to CLEDU the first time. He had just finished talking with a lawyer at the Sans Papier Desk in Porco Rosso. I stopped by to talk with him, he looked like another person, all clean with happy and lively eyes. He held a folder with his documents. I had told him how he looked different, that I was happy to see him like that, he told me that months had been rough, but he was better now. In a week's time I met him at the job desk in Centro Astalli, where with shock I discovered several things: first of all, Eric had Italian citizenship, then he had come to Palermo from Sheffield (UK), where he had gone when he was a kid. He had a brother there. Eric never told me why he had decided to come to Palermo, although I often made jokes about what I found to be a curious choice. In the UK he had worked as a receptionist, as a waiter, as a technician for a radio. He had been volunteering.

After that time, I would meet him again at night, asking for a coin in the areas of the movida. He would not find a job. I met him the last time in May 2023, when I went to Palermo for a couple of months. My fieldwork had already ended. He told me that he had not found a proper job yet and he was doing small things around the city, for instance he worked as an unlicensed car-park attendant. An activist and friend of mine from Porco Rosso and Maldusa saw the two of us talking and later asked me whether I knew him and if I could try and tell him to go back to them. He had stopped going to Sans Papier, the activist told me that they had seen him with no good people in Ballarò.

Sara, a woman in her late thirties from Marocco, had barged in the centre, pretending to get a job. When I explained to her how that place worked, that the first time we would have

written a curriculum vitae and the second time we would have looked for jobs, but it could have taken time, she just snorted and started being loud. I told her to calm down, to explain what the problem was. She had come out of a violent relationship and had been rough sleeping for three nights. She didn't have anything, no money left, not even her clothes. She was angry because she was tired, frustrated and afraid.

Sara was also very smart, spoke perfect Italian. She had been working as a carer for an old woman who had passed away a few months earlier and was now looking for a job as a 24h carer, so to have board and lodging, which is an option usually sought after by women with no close family. I went to talk to another volunteer to understand what to do, she was bothered: Sara had not been proper. She could not come and pretend, there were rules for everyone. But no one had really stopped and asked why she was that angry. As we were at the end of the day, I stayed a bit longer to write the CV and send a few requests. Then talked with the volunteers at the information desk and they suggested a female dormitory not far from there, part of the same mission of Biagio Conte. I told Sara to spend the night there.

After less than half an hour from the end of our meeting I found myself in front of the dormitory's door with Sara, because the dormitory was not accepting her in. I wasn't allowed to enter and apparently there was no one there I could speak to, neither the director nor someone else. The keeper kept the door open just enough for us to have a conversation and said that the woman could not enter at that moment because the director was not present. I wasn't given the number so that I could call myself but I had to leave a written message, thanks to the help of a Palermitan woman hosted in the dormitory, on which I left my name, my number, and a brief note explaining the situation. I should have been contacted by the director when she was back, in order to then call Sara and tell her she could go and register. No-one called me, but in the end Sara went to check and was able to register. I met her the next day, at breakfast in Centro Astalli, she told me that the place was awful and she wanted to stay there as little as possible, but she was calmer and after not too long she was able to find a job, thanks to a friend of hers.

Later I started talking about the female dormitory, located in the very centre of the city, run by nuns and part of the famous Missione Biagio Conte, and stories came out - both of former users and practitioners - of bullying, evangelization, exploitation. A lawyer in Centro

Astalli asked me about this, as a client of hers had reported the same issues. Still, to do something about such a situation, within one of the very few structures - the only one in the city centre - which offer this kind of service in the city, is not an easy task.

Through the stories of Hope, Eric, Sara, my point is to stress on the multiple, fleeting lives that move through both borders and the solidarity network in Palermo, going in and out of these, navigating restricted options. These stories do not reach mainstream circulation and front pages and offer a less polarised and more layered understanding of the articulation of human lives, solidarity and forms of dispossession, which are not only racialised but also gendered.

As a volunteer at a job desk for migrants I would send requests on requests for low skilled jobs - usually in the care sector for women and manual jobs for men. Education level and experience accumulated prior to coming to Italy would usually be useful to fill the CV but counted almost nothing in the actual research for a job. Many people had spent years going from one job to another, sometimes with contracts, sometimes not. For young migrants with a good level of Italian, a second language and without 'inconveniences', such as children to care for, the most attractive jobs were those in the tourism or catering sector, filling the demand for cleaners, dishwashers, receptionists, waiters and waitresses of the multiple bed and breakfasts, bars and restaurants of the increasingly touristified economy of the city-centre.

Within a city with a long-standing lack of adequate public transport, almost everyone would ask for the location of the job place, in order to understand whether it was easily reachable by the few working lines, as many people do not have a driving licence or own a car. Most young women coming to the job desk would have kids and ask for jobs with a number of working hours that was difficult to meet: they needed to work, but only during their kids' school time because then they needed to be with them as they often didn't have someone who could look after them (very few people have family ties in the city), nor they had proximity services where they could leave the children. These issues talk to very practical and basic, but fundamental aspects and needs of everyday life that were hardly and seldom met. Finally, the refugee centre was at times traversed by old migrants who were increasingly finding it difficult to find a job in the first place, then one they could actually still

manage to do. Again, the case of women working as carers for older people is interesting: many of them, in case of job proposals requiring care for 'allettati' (bedridden persons), would openly ask to get information about whether the family had all the necessary, such as hoists to help the person from the bed to the wheelchair, as many women lamented how they would often be required to just do all the heavy work on their own. This specific situation intersects with the historical devolution of care to women and increasingly migrant women, as Italian ones are increasingly getting employed, and the framing of the job as a cheap one.

4.2.3 Deriva 3 \ Everyday borders: the example of the racialised access to housing

Even for those migrants who are 'more settled', meeting everyday basic needs can be hardened by their racialised migrant status. In the following Bai, Saro and Adama, who are respectively a nursing university student the former, cultural mediators the latter, talk about the difficulties in finding a house in Palermo, due to their being migrants.

Bai explained that:

> "*Finding a house has been a little hard. You know, the problem is that people are untrusty, they do not trust migrants, they think we cannot pay the rent and all the rest. Still, when I found this house, it happened then that I wanted to leave, but the owner told me 'come on, io ti voglio bene, stay here', even now when I say I want to go, he asks me to stay.*"[11]

In his experience, the general difficulty with finding a house was counterbalanced by the good relationship established with the person who finally rented him a place.

Speaking of a friend from Morocco whom he met within the community for minors where he had stayed prior to get to Palermo, Saro explained:

> "*[...] and he has a house here in Palermo, so when I wanted to come here he told me to go and live with him, so it has never been a problem for me…even though then I have looked for houses through Italian friends, perhaps they will talk with people they know, maybe someone who has a house, someone who might put a good word, how*

[11] From recorded interview, 30th December 2022

do you say, 'know that this person will pay you, they are people you can trust' 'like a guarantor, right?' 'yes, guarantee, and maybe in these cases people accept. But it is a bit difficult. Nowadays finding a house for a foreigner is a bit hard, because I heard a story about a foreigner who had a paycheck of 1800 euro. They say 'yes, yes, it's ok', then they say 'no, we rented it'. There's also a friend of mine here, he's famous everywhere in Palermo, (name), who has a restaurant. We found a house online, I spoke to an Italian friend 'yes, the house is available', the day after she went with him, they talked with him, they said 'it's ok, tomorrow we'll let you know', and the day after they said that the house was for someone who came before him and blah blah. So it is a big problem to find a house in Palermo nowadays."[12].

Within Saro's words, the importance of having a good network is fundamental for granting oneself a place. A friend who was already lucky enough to find a place, an Italian guarantor who 'puts a good word'. It is interesting the way Saro makes examples of people with a good income, in a way debunking the idea that the problem with migrants might be only about not being able to pay rent.

Finally, Adama, explained is difficult journey to find a house, which ultimately ended with a finding a place, but without a contract and without the possibility of transferring residency, thing that affects all the bureaucracy management, which are a fundamental part of migrants' lives:

"*About this (finding a house), it's been really hard, but I haven't found a house where I definitely want to stay yet. I live here close to Vucciria, but I am without a contract. I've been living here for about three years, I haven't got a contract […], I don't have the residency either, I have my residency in Catania, the owner here won't allow me to have my residency here, so every time I have to go to Catania for administrative stuff. So, ehm, in Palermo everything is nice, but the problem is that finding a place for rent is a problem, a serious problem. First, because if you are a foreigner – even though Palermitani are very open and available – if you are a foreigner, this problem is always there…even though they were available at first, they start changing their mind. Then, even if you find a place...most places don't want to do a contract, so in*

[12] From recorded interview, 15th December 2022

Palermo finding a house is a really serious problem. A serious problem indeed. I am the one talking now, but many other friends of mine are in the same situation, so on this I can guarantee you that it is a problem [...] They think that perhaps foreigners won't pay the rent regularly, they won't be able to do it, or they will destroy the house, there is all this stuff, yes."[13]

Finding a house for rent in Palermo has become extremely difficult for many people, with an overlapping of issues between rising prices, empty expensive stock and

many apartments converted to Airbnb houses. Still, Bei, Saro and Adama are describing a situation where the access to the right to housing is mediated by several factors, with some of them being structural to the city - in 2014 Palermo was the "Capital of black rents" (Fornaro 2014) and it still holds the third place in Italy for numbers of black rents (15%). In the last years the press has regularly denounced the phenomenon, especially connected to students being rented apartments without a contract and often lacking basic compliant systems (Occhipinti 2023). This structural issue is heightened by the migrant status of the potential tenant, who needs an Italian guarantor, a friend, and for whom having a contract is fundamental for a permit renewal or upgrade.

What is interesting about these accounts is that when these three young men were talking, there was no anger in their voice, but a sort of acceptance or understanding of how things are, an understanding of the racialised assumptions of the local owners. The evident racism that does not allow to be accepted as a tenant, as in the example of the man with the paycheck of 1800 euro who could not find a house, coexists with a description of locals as 'very open and available'. Interestingly, later in the interview, I observed that then we could say that in Palermo there was racism, Bai just practically replied that "Racism exists also in Gambia" .

There are more violent, although not recorded, accounts of housing experiences. For instance, a friend from Tunisia found chains blocking the door of her dilapidated apartment with no water and electricity, after two months of unpaid rent. Still these accounts are fundamental because they are not about those migrants who indeed might find it hard to

[13] From recorded interview, 30th December 2022

pay a rent each month, but young men who are considered to be ‘well settled’ in Palermo and who are nevertheless framed as different, not able to behave properly, not equals.

If the majority of protests led by the associations, both those led by locals and those led by migrants, are usually centred around the moment of migration, the right to cross the Mediterranean and get to earth alive, the multiple deaths, the repressive or passive response of Italy and Europe, housing is the one issue on actual rights of migrants as citizens once in the city that is being currently and heavily discussed in the city. In March 2023 a huge protest, by the name of ‘Palermo Capital of denied rights’ (LiveSicilia 2023), mentioned in Chapter 4, mobilised local and foreign inhabitants and the associations. They asked for legal times for civil registration, issue of identity card and change of residency, all procedures that right now can take up to two years.

The racialised access to housing is starting to be increasingly discussed, especially thanks to Associazione di Vento, which has launched an awareness campaign and produced a short movie on the subject (Cane 2023) to spread awareness. During the 2023 Ballarò Buskers, a most important festival in the city, Lamin Drammeh, a Gambian actor and musician living in Palermo performed ‘Just a bed dream’, about denied rents to migrants. The local press is starting to denounce the current situation, shedding light on realities that have been there for everyone to see, but hardly addressed: ‘We are seeing in Palermo, a city renowned for its hospitality and tolerance, a situation of grave emergency’ (ilMediterraneo24 2023). Dritto e Rovescio, an Italian political talk show has aired an episode on the tent city in Piazza Kalsa, by the title of ‘Palermo, la città dell’accoglienza che non c’è’ (tr. Palermo, the city of hospitality that is not) , using images of migrants rough sleeping, interviewing some of them mentioning how ‘Africa would be better’, finally asking a couple of local people whether they find the agreement with Albania a good one, being given an affirmative answer, as Palermo does not offer anything to anyone. And yet, the tent city has been in that very same place for years, despite this turmoil being relatively recent, posing an interesting question on the timing, potential instrumentalization and eventual links with the change in administrative representation of the city.

Despite the ‘extra-ordinary’ solidarity narratives surrounding the city of Palermo and the existence of a tight network of support, these three *derive* have tried to look at very

ordinary enactment of the European and Italian border regime, following histories of containment, immobilisation and hyper-mobilisation (Tazzioli and Garelli 2020), but also looking at how borders are urbanised, intersecting with other forms of dispossession (Georgiou et al 202), which are always racialised, but also tightly connected to local structural shortages, highlighting the importance of considering migrants' differential inclusion within Europe from a situated perspective (Giglioli 2021; Merrill 2011).

4.3 Fragment 2 \ A European fleet of hospitality

I get to Moltivolti when the meeting has already started, Kouassi has invited me to join earlier that morning. We are sitting on the tables outside. I take a place and attune to the ongoing conversation, between Kouassi and his friends, whom I do not know, and a French young woman. They're talking about a project that the collective the woman is part of (Collectif PEROU) is going to present in a few days at the Sole e Luna Festival, the 'Navir Avenir', a project of a ship specifically designed to save people in the sea. I listen. The woman is asking the guys what they would think would be essential on that ship, and they reply, tapping on their own experience as migrants who got to Italy by boat. Mediators, translators, enough bathrooms, more than anything: information. They explain that sometimes ships are so packed with people that there are impossible waiting lists even just to access a toilet. Information is still the most important thing: sometimes people get to a 'safe' harbour and they are not even sure whether they have just been brought back to Libya. I am sceptical and slightly put off by the fact that this project is meant to be a 'nave ammiraglia europea per salvare vite umane nel Mediterraneo' (European flagship project for saving human lives in the Mediterranean). Why would the same Europe of FRONTEX build a ship to save those very lives it is so hardly trying to push back? And a very pretentious, quite arrogant part of me is just looking at Kouassi and his friends, wondering how THEY cannot see the problem. But it is not that they do not see it, of course, they LIVE the problem daily and are very much aware of it, they're just being pragmatic about it. One of the guys tells me he gets my point, still when migrants decide to sail they fear for their own life, the moment they see the rescue ship is the first moment they allow themselves to breathe again, but for a short time, because the next phase - made of fear, loss, not knowing what is happening, whether you made it or not - is yet to come and starts exactly on the rescue ship. So, ideals are good and important - they tell me - but the practical fact is the moment of the

ship, which can last several days, and would be a fundamental starting point for reception, instead of being a sort of obscure limbo. If people are really going to make this project real, that is more than welcome. To that, I could not really reply.

After three days I joined Kouassi for the project's presentation. I find myself in a polished conference room of an historical building, Palazzo Steri, a room packed with white people, photographers, and a number of black people that I can count on one hand. The project becomes clearer: this ship, which is meant to become a fleet of ships, is part of a project that aims at making 'hospitality' part of UNESCO immaterial world heritage. Presenters, aided by an Italian interpreter, talk about the ship as the pavement of the Mediterranean. They have been working with refugees in Marseille to define the needs, in terms of spaces, of professionals, of gestures needed on the ship. This massive and ambitious project is going to be funded through European artist-in-residency schemes, two of which have been hosted in Palermo, in its design phase, then through crowdfunding campaigns, private funding, then the hope for a big European investment, is going to become real. Several questions are raised afterwards: isn't the project of a European fleet conflictual and contradictory with the politics of the same Europe that finances FRONTEX? How is this project going to manage the intrinsic power relations of the 'act of saving'? How does it avoid simply reproducing the 'white saviour' attitude? How is the ship going to be legitimised when crossing borders of those European Countries that do not want rescue ships?

Towards the end a local activist and Professor from Palermo stated:

> "*[...] the relationship based on help is infused with power. Those who help, who care, are normally in a position of advantage and get advantage from this position. For instance, they create artists' residencies, for instance they get fundings, for instance they are acclaimed for being good. And then the question is in which ways can we get around, subvert - at least reduce - the consequence of building an action based on help, rescue, care. [...] Celebrating hospitality means celebrating a gesture that is usually done by that part of the Mediterranean that is also that which blocks and acts through helping by impeding.*"[14]

At the end of the presentation, an elegant man sitting in the frontline stated:

[14] From recorded event, 7th July 2022

> '*The project is brilliant [...] Today's answer, the gestures, is brilliant because never ever UNESCO would have recognised, for its criteria, forms, rules, hospitality as such. [...] So gestures are the instrument to get to the candidacy and are the chance of bringing together all the complexity brought by the technological dimension [...]. Thank you.*'[15]

Then he started clapping, quickly followed by the rest of the audience. Hospitality as an exercise of technology and of bringing together the perfect crew of 'artists, jurists, geographers, artisans, physiotherapists…', hospitality as a project built through artists' residencies across Europe. Hospitality as a loud project entirely based on the moment of saving lives in the sea.

Figure 21 The flyer of the presentation of the 'Navire Avenir' project

The event flyer (Fig. 21) says:

[15] From recorded event, 7th July 2022

"*To sustain acts of rescue, care, benevolence, friendship that develop in the moment of encounter with whom is looking for refuge in Europe, as a reaction to the climate of violence.*

To transfer these acts to the next generation, who will know migrations 100 times higher as announced by current climate, pandemic, economic and geopolitical upheavals.

To inscribe these acts in the intangible cultural heritage of humanity and, in doing so, to put hospitality at the core of the pollical and cultural project of the XXI century Europe, making it finally breathable.

We are building the Navir Avenir (lit. Ship to happen), a catamaran 67 metres long and 22.50 metres wide, a pioneer tool for rescuing in the see, a medical shelter, a Mediterranean public square, a hub for researching desirable futures.

We are creating the first ship of an extraordinary European fleet, a joint work designed by us tireless citizens, survivors, sailor rescuers, medical personnel, researchers, writers, dancers.

We declare ourselves a tireless and permanent shipyard, and we invite you to take part with us to celebrate the inauguration of the Navir Avenir on the coasts of Marseille, a beautiful day in 2024 (an inauguration where the numerous European municipalities that at that time will have adhered to the project will be represented, and where it will be possible to hear from a minister of culture, from representatives of the European Union and of the general director of UNESCO)"

4.3.1 Deriva 1 \ Is it really possible to create cracks within a racial capitalist system beyond exceptional spaces?

The fragment above is an interesting example of what migration is generating looking at the other side of repression. The white polished room of Palazzo Steri filled with white people talking about creating a European fleet of solidarity and inscribing hospitality as an immaterial world heritage had something surreal about it. The surreality of it, which seemed

to be not considered by the migrant activists who had been providing information in Palermo, but who had not been invited to speak for themselves during the actual event, and who were in a sense just practical and content with the attention provided by the project on a pressing issue - a project of which they did not necessarily know all the shades - was in a sense underlined by all the questions raised at the end of the presentation, which pointed to the very grey area this project was moving into. At the same time, the presentation was an event, one of many occasions where in Palermo hospitality is celebrated, while also providing for the city's self-image.

This face is not that of the repressive border control and management, it is not even possible to encapsulate it within a merely humanitarian apparatus. The context of the whole project 'Navir Avenir' speaks to those grand projects of solidarity that seem to centre attention more on the white saviour than on migrants themselves. I think it is also an interesting example, also reflecting on the words of the activist speaking towards the end, on the numerous opportunities opened around migration, from the 'solidarity' side, to cities, groups, individuals.

Moving away from the 'exaggeration' offered by the Navir Avenir, within this section I want to observe the multivarious network of reception and solidarity in Palermo as comprised with many different actors, operating in different ways, to make a reflection on the difficulty of operating clear cut distinctions between solidarities filling the gaps and those creating cracks (Dadusc and Mudu 2020), when everything and everyone is recollected under the state (Danewid 2024).

The Legal Clinic of Human Rights (CLEDU) - where many asylum seekers and refugees like Hope seek free legal help - was born in Palermo in 2016 within the Department of Law and today it is an association on its own. Within it, lawyers, Master and PhD students and volunteers work together to provide free legal services to the migrant population, especially asylum seekers. Twice a year it stages a series of seminars free and open for anyone who wants to attend, and especially aimed at those people who are interested in becoming a volunteer, with these seminars touching on the international and national legal system regarding migration and specific themes.

Over the years, within the University of Palermo, two Master Degrees and two PhD paths have been started around the themes of migration, human rights and social justice, also promoting summer and winter schools potentially attracting students from elsewhere. Differently from the other departments within the University of Palermo, which have been moved to the 'Cittadella Universitaria', close but outside of the historical centre, the Department of Law, where most of the activities mentioned above are located, has always remained at the very core of the inner city, becoming part of the 'infrastructure of services for migrants'. A research centre within the University – 'CIR migrare' – revolves entirely around activities of research and monitoring of migration, mobility and human rights. Two other main research centres outside of the University, the Istituto di Formazione Politica Pedro Arrupe, a centre for social studies founded by Jesuits (the only one located far outside the city centre, although its activities spread through the city) and CESIE, a European centre inspired by the sociologist Danilo Dolci, also have research branches connected to these themes.

My intent here is not to make a list, but to point out how research in Palermo has been shaped by the 'issue of migration'. These realities are involved actively in the territory (such is the case of CLEDU), but are also involved with disseminating knowledge and practice, through seminars, conferences, summer and winter schools and so forth, both within and outside Palermo. They create connections with international partners (other universities, international projects, etc.) and pull together students, practitioners, volunteers who are not just from Palermo or Sicily, but also come from other Italian regions or other nations entirely (which is quite a new trend, considered that historically educational mobility has gone the other way round in Sicily). This system trains and keeps updated a community of potential scholars and practitioners who are a fundamental element in balancing the violence and complexities related to the migrant status.

Taking the example of migrants asking for asylum, as it emerged from conversations with practitioners, even coming from elsewhere in Italy, the main difficulty of working with migrants in Italy comes from a complex and intricate politics of ever-changing laws, also due to unstable national governments (where migration is often a major driver of political debates, as it is generally happening in other parts of the 'West'). This translates, especially in Italy, in never-ending bureaucracy and long procedures which are usually not

accompanied by clear practices for application, leading to a high level of arbitrariness delegated to the region, the 'questura' (the Italian local department of public security), the single operator in taking a decision about whether someone is allowed to stay or not, with operators who hardly keep themselves up to date. Within such a system lawyers specialised in migration are of fundamental value. They spend time updating themselves with the latest changes and interpretations of norms. Lawyers have to spend time in developing an in depth relationship with the assisted, as it takes time to understand someone's history, often traumatic, especially when the two persons speaking usually come from entirely different backgrounds in terms of cultures, values, sets of meanings. All of this to be able to write the right history, a history painful enough, but also true and tailored enough to make the commission say yes. If I am talking about lawyers who are specialising in migration matters, the same goes for other professionals such as psychologists, who should flank language and cultural mediators and whose presence is often not clearly mandatory for the state procedures.

But the whole city, especially its city centre, has indeed become a huge case-study, as Palermo has become a prominent place from where to do research around migration, both institutionally and independently. During my stay I personally met and talked with several PhD students researching migration from different perspectives and disciplines and coming from several Western universities. During a meeting within Circolo Arci Porcorosso, where the Sans Papier Desk is held - a legal desk which, differently from CLEDU - today is open more broadly to the neighbourhood's inhabitants seeking help for basic needs - I openly asked what members thought about the number of researchers around the city. They drily replied that they did not like people who came to Palermo for a safari, and that they had stopped answering altogether to researchers' emails, although in the years they have hosted a number of researchers who have then become affiliated with their reality. As an activist of Porco Rosso has explained later, the main problem was about people passing just briefly and using places like theirs as a tank for potential interviewees.

The issue of researchers and journalists just crossing Palermo briefly, extracting data and leaving came out quite often when talking with migrants too. During 'Mediterraneo Antirazzista' (Antiracist Mediterranean), a recurring event hosted to raise awareness around the abandonment of parts of the city and intended as a meeting between diverse people

(from which the name), a guy from the Ivory Coast approached me and we started talking. When he asked me what I was doing in Palermo, I responded that I was there for my PhD, to which he immediately replied 'don't tell me you too are working on migrants', laughing and going on to tell me that if I wanted to interview him I had to pay him first. The young non-white migrants whose experiences are described in the following chapters have all experiences of being interviewed by different journalists and researchers.

Aside from students and researchers observing and trying to disseminate their work within the Academia, independent researchers and activists who have been working for years in Palermo disseminate knowledge outside of the academic circuits, providing data on the migrant population in the city, contesting local and national politics and discourses.

In this sense, for instance, Porco Rosso has been providing a report since 2021 about the activities of the Sans Papier Desk (giving important information about the numbers and needs of those who get to the desk). They have also produced, together with Alarm Phone and in collaboration with Borderline Sicilia and Borderline Europe, the report 'From sea to prison' , in which they expose the criminalization of migrant boat drivers within the broader Italian illegalization of migration. Maldusa, a social promotion association recently born with projects and working spaces both in Palermo and Lampedusa, is dedicated to contesting border violence through articles, events, demonstrations. The 'Forum Antirazzista' pulls together actors belonging to the different associations: they organise demonstrations and allow for a circulation of knowledge and initiatives from the different groups, also helping to coordinate actions and statements. Still, even within these more political spaces, grounded on initiatives that are openly opposite to the state's border regime, the distinction between filling gaps and creating cracks is a difficult one: thinking back to Bai's experience, as described in the first section, although he had no interest in remaining in Italy, in the end, the only help that Porco Rosso could give him was to help him through the asylum request procedure, inevitably complying to a forced localization imposed by EU regulations, and going against Bai's will of proceeding further to the UK, which attempt would have been of course framed as illegal.

The different realities described within this section vary a lot in terms of affiliations and scope, but as a network they are tightly interconnected, with many people being affiliated to

more than one group/association/organization. Affiliations are important, because these different places also have different financial sources and speak different languages. The newly born Maldusa, for instance, has as sponsors international organisations such as Pro Asyl, United4Rescue and Medico International, all involved with the defence of human rights, whereas CESIE has more institutional partners. CESIE's projects, as a 'centro di studi e iniziative europeo' (European centre for studies and initiatives), are financed by the European Union. In the picture below, a postcard from one of the events presented in Santa Chiara, and funded by the European Union's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, states 'INCLUSIVE EUROPE. Diversity doesn't create borders. It allows them to cross' (Fig.22), which also points to the grey role of European involvement, creating only apparently weird clashes between mainstream politics and local actions.

Figure 22 Postcard of an event funded by CESIE and hosted in Santa Chiara

During my volunteering time at the refugee centre, a project was active at the job desk, financed through the 'Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali' (Ministry of Labour and Social Politics): "Comunità resilienti - Misure integrate per l'inclusione di persone in condizioni di fragilità economica e sociale" (Resilient communities: Integrated measures for the inclusion of people in economic and social fragility), for which € 896.387,33 (80% covered by the Ministry) for 18 months. In practice, the reinforcement of the job desk was part of the project, together with courses of Italian language aimed at specific fields - tourism, catering and construction -16 hours in total, repeated twice; a course for family

assistants, all releasing a certificate of attendance and the possibility of activating traineeships. Although some courses have been quite participated, like the catering language course and the family assistant course and a few traineeships have been activated, what was striking was how every newcomer at the job desk was automatically part of the project, just for entering the office. They would become an incremental number that would then become a quantitative figure of how much the job desk was used and needed, fundamental to support eventual further requests for fundings. Also, the courses were in practice re-positioning migrants in the only job sectors available to them.

The complexity of this network points to the multiple battles led on the ground of migration, to the different grey alliances that are needed, usually for economic reasons, in some cases, to the transnationalism of solidarity, to the huge apparatus of jobs and opportunities - in research, social care and so forth - that has been created around the illegalization of migration and the fight against it. Looking at this network from Palermo, an interesting question is also about who is the 'other' in Palermo, who is the migrant in a city where migrants stay, at least at first, because they cannot choose otherwise, in the face of a body of people from all over Europe, who mobilise to Palermo by choice to work on migration. The other question concerns who actually benefits, within the city, and in a widespread way, from the solidarity network? The point of this chapter is that the treatment of migration as an emergency, as an exception which requires exceptional means, often delegated to non-institutional providers, opens up for an 'exceptional economy' made of non-institutional job desks, education and inclusion projects, courses of different kinds, traineeships, and so forth, with migrants jumping from a project to another, accumulating certificates of attendance, while balancing their daily lives.

In this sense, the clear-cut distinctions operated within critical border scholarship between, for instance, repression and solidarity, patronising humanitarianism and empowering solidarity (Dadusc and Mudu 2020; Garelli and Tazzioli 2021; Tazzioli and Walters 2019), fade within more complex, interrelated relationships, which need to be foregrounded in order to avoid, also within the urban realm, reproducing the focus on a mere friction between good whiteness and bad whiteness (Danewid 2017). In the case of Palermo, the former would be represented by the municipality's stances, the network of solidarity, the multiple events; the latter by a repressive state and politics that seem to operate somewhere else and not within.

4.4 Fragment 3 \ The reopening of Moltivolti

"A Palermo "BarConi", la gelateria gestita da migranti" (De Luna 2023)

Towards the end of May 2022, the local press promotes the soon to be opened BarConi[16], the latest project of Moltivolti[17], a well-known social enterprise and ethnic restaurant within Ballarò, the spatial core of the city's promoted multicultural diversity. These headlines pop up on my WhatsApp chats, accompanied by the 'facepalm' emoticon, they become soon a topic for chit chat in front of a beer, in my case often sitting at the table of another place owned by Moltivolti, but located in a more posh area of the city-centre - Altrove, literally 'elsewhere'. Barconi, whose name "aims at transforming a negative element to charge it with positive values'" (PalermoToday 2023) is the facto owned by Moltivolti, but run by three young migrants, one of them arrived to Italy by boat, the other two having taken a very normal flight to Palermo, as they explained during an interview with the international magazine Marie Claire (Galati 2023). "All is born out of solidarity. Or out of empathy. Or out of what we call more trivially humanity" (De Luna 2023) is the incipit of an article from La Repubblica, a mainstream national newspaper.

Only a couple of months earlier, on the 3rd of April, after a fire had condemned the place, Moltivolti's space had reopened, thanks to a huge crowdfunding campaign launched by Libera - a famous Italian association that deals with fights against corruption and the mobs, which has its premises within Moltivolti's coworking area -, that had enabled the reopening after 63 days only.

The reopening had been a huge day of partying, with the entire restaurant fully booked, the presence of the former Major Leoluca Orlando, the nearby square of Santa Chiara full of people enjoying music, beer and delicious, free Afghan lamb and Sicilian 'sfincione' cooked and offered by the restaurant's Afghan chef Shapoor - who now runs his own place - and his family, who had recently come to Italy after being rescued from Afghanistan following the US retreat, especially thanks to a crowdfunding campaign launched by Moltivolti and 'the

[16] BarConi is a word pun. It is the plural of barcone, which is a word the means 'big boat' and is commonly used by the Italian press to refer to the boats crammed with migrants that cross the Mediterranean, but BarConi is also Bar+Coni, where Bar means "bar" and Coni means "cones" in the sense of ice cream cones, referring to the intended use of "Barconi" as an ice-cream shop.

[17] Moltivolti means 'Many faces', as it will be explained better later it refers to the attempt of focusing on the humanities of migration and not on the numbers.

generosity' of the community and of Italian people, as the local press reported. On the occasion of the fire, a Vanity Fair's article stated "Palermo, a fire destroys Moltivolti, who saved an Afghan family" (Coviello 2022).

On the reopening day, Major Leoluca Orlando expressed the following words:

> "*An experience (that of Moltivolti) that for nine years has been intertwined with the life of the city. The Chart of Palermo, the Council of Cultures and the experience of Moltivolti point towards a model of civil coexistence, also internationally acknowledged [...]. The many contributions for the reopening have been a confirmation of the cultural change of our city in the last years. Palermo defends the only race that exists, the human race, respects everyone's identity and defends those rights, which are too often violated and mortified by the state's laws, the importance of these rights we have discovered also because of the suffering of migrants. The Experience of Moltivolti confirms that Palermo has built an alternative to uncivilised behaviours and inhuman laws*" (ANSA 2022)

"*C'è un sacco di gente. No stranieri*" (tr. It's crowded. No foreigners.) is the only thing that I have briefly noted in my diary that day. At least to my perception, no non white people were there, aside from Shapoor and his family serving food, Moltivolti's waiters and members of Giocherenda, who were engaging children in playful activities.

4.4.1 Deriva 1 \ The exceptional act of saving lives: solidarity within local practices of enfranchisement

The fragment above leads to a yet another dimension of solidarity, which is that of the blatant event of it, especially in the way these events are circulated elsewhere, shaping and reinforcing imaginaries, which in places like Italy create a stark divergence between mainstream politics and discourses and local, exceptional, apparently alternative actions and thinking. The aim of this last section is not to portray these display of solidarity as meaningless, but to point to the language of them, to the way they still keep an inevitable hierarchy between those who help and those who are helped, not just on moral grounds, but also in a very material way, in terms of subordinating migrants and migrants' actions within the event of solidarity. Another aim is that of opening up on the potential difficulty of

contesting from within, given the mutual need and existing interdependencies for instance, and on how it can be easier to focus struggle against overarching politics from afar or against openly repressive and racist politics, than engaging with a constant, everyday small fight 'among friends'.

Moltivolti is a social enterprise for profit, founded in 2014 by people coming from nine different countries (Senegal, Zambia, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, France, Spain, Gambia e Italy) in the heart of Ballarò, one of the four quarters of the city centre, famous for its complex coexistence of people from different countries and socio-economic backgrounds, and historically a first step for migrants into the city due to its cheap prices and increased possibility of informal jobs. As an enterprise for profit, Moltivolti uses the income from its economic activities (Moltivolti's restaurant, Barconi's ice-cream shop, Altrove's bar and Sopra's luxury guest-house) to finance a series of social projects. Scrolling through the website, there is a list of these: a co-working area which hosts several associations, including a few highly politically active migrants' associations such as the Gambian association and Stravox, a meeting room which is possible to book for free for meetings, assemblies and informal gatherings.

In recent years Moltivolti has started hosting an array of courses, training (of language, IT, job orienteering) and intercultural labs, targeted at people from different origins and backgrounds, especially young people (Ballarò is a neighbourhood with high level of unemployment and school dropout). A list of the services provided within the premises of the enterprise can be found in the website: a help desk for people who want to start their own association, a proximity desk to direct people towards the different services present on the territory, activities with schools centred on debating 'migration and right to move', 'European politics on migration and the impact on peoples' lives', 'best practices of hospitality in Palermo' . Although a post on Facebook from the 9th of August says 'Moltivolti. Not a touristic place' - probably as a response to the growing concern among citizens with regards to an unregulated tourist economy - the enterprise is indeed a place that gathers tourists and foreigners in general, selling an 'ethnic experience' in a more 'European packaged' way if compared to other less polished ethnic options in the neighbourhood. The place also runs an initiative of responsible tourism called 'attraverso i miei occhi' (through my eyes), with migrants guiding tourists through places around the

neighbourhood, told through their own perspective and experience. This initiative is framed as a “formazione” (Cutuli S 2022), that is training.

Moltivolti's waiters, both non-white migrants and Palermitani, wear a black t-shirt with the words ‘La mia terra è dove poggio i miei piedi’ (tr. my land is where I put my feet on) and ‘NO BORDERS’, printed on the front and on the back respectively. The interiors of the restaurant host a huge world map with a red fil rouge connecting places through migratory routes around the world, showing where people come from.

The local consensus around Moltivolti is undeniable, as well as its role as a flagship project and a landmark in the neighbourhood and in the solidarity landscape of Palermo are evident. During my stay I was given several appointments at Moltivolti, several students and researchers used it as a remote working place, many schools and meetings related to projects of inclusion were held there.

Interestingly, on the 8th of April, Porco Rosso hosted a gathering with the aim of collecting support for the Istituto Gramsci, an important cultural association located in the premises of Cantieri Culturali della Zisa, outside of the city centre, which was at risk of being evicted by the administration. A member from the Istituto was expressing his disappointment, as they had tried to contact the administration and the Major several times, without success. Having to pay a fee that they had not money for, Istituto Gramsci was trying to raise funds, but it was difficult, because of the relatively scarce public attention and because within the Cantieri Culturali della Zisa (a huge reconverted post-industrial site that hosts a number of associations and events) - he said - there was not the same strong companionship between the different associations as it could be seen in Ballarò.

The interest about this story is both the perceived strength of the relationship between the different associations in Ballarò, but also the relevance accorded by the administration, as shown also through the Major’s words during the reopening of the restaurant. Moltivolti has been recognised nationally and internationally. In 2022 it received a prize as finalist for ‘Premio Cittadino Europeo 2022’ (Prize European Citizen 2022), in 2021 the prize Angelo Ferro (a prize for innovation in social economy). Within an article released for the press journal ‘Corriere’, one of the co-founders stated ‘We tried to join the obstinacy of who in the South resisted and did not leave with the ambition of who landed here from far away, at all

cost, despite everything' (Cavallaro 2021), in a sense pivoting on a common ground between disadvantaged Palermitani, who resisted leaving due to the lack of opportunities, and black migrants risking their lives across the Mediterranean in search of a better life.

Within a local political manoeuvre that has collapsed political actions and stands (e.g. the Chart of Palermo, the Assembly of Cultures) and economic practices to attract nominees and events (UNESCO, Manifesta, Capital of Cultures), both of them strongly centred on ideas of support for human rights and affirmation of citizenship, and promoting a self-image of a multicultural society, Moltivolti represents the perfect expression of this process.

Within the enterprise's co-working area several associations are hosted. Among these, the Gambian Association and STRAVOX, two politically and socially active associations of young migrants in Palermo share a desk there. I asked a couple of friends involved with these associations why they had not tried to find a place for themselves, and both of them replied that they had been looking for a place and had been trying to get in touch with the administration, but they had never received a reply. One of them commented that with the new major, the right-wing Roberto Lagalla, he thought it was probably going to be even harder to get a meeting. Within Moltivolti, they have a free space that they can use as a base for their activities and meetings without paying a rent, which is fundamental, given that these associations are usually funded through the self-financing of its members, all young people studying or working and sending money back home. For these associations, places like Moltivolti, with a developed experience in writing bids, are fundamental partners: for instance, the Gambian Association has been helped by Moltivolti to get funding for their activities for two consecutive years, by being put into contact with an international sponsor. Members of these associations are also aware of how associations like Moltivolti are needed as partners, for instance, for successfully writing a bid as they often do not have the same skills of people who literally work for that, or of how Moltivolti is important even just as a name written on the bid to be taken into account, thanks to the broad recognition that such a place has.

The example of Moltivolti is interesting for the broad reach of its words and projects and the way they are able to circulate, on the one hand legitimising a local politics that has been more about imaginaries than actual politics and policies, on the other hand adding to the list

of exceptional acts of solidarity and 'humanity', which keep migrant struggles, dependencies, subordinations untackled, both locally and nationally. During the interview, Bai significantly stated, referring to the Mayor's actions:

> "*[...]Orlando has done many things, going to the protests on immigration, on the sheeps that get here…just to do it, it's not like he has actually done something. Palermo…there are bad people and there are good people, but it's not as they say. Absolutely not. It's just a matter of speaking, but not a matter of doing [...]*"[18].

Bai's words speak to the way at least some forms of solidarity in Palermo seem to operate more as marketable feature outwards, or in the way they seem - in general - to be rooted on a concept of solidarity that is instrumental for something else: for instance, the restructuring of a city economy, politics of cultural enfranchisement and repositioning within the European context. In this sense, again, it is perhaps useless to focus solely on the economy generated by migration around control, security and humanitarian provision (De Genova and Tazzioli 2022; Tazzioli and De Genov 2023, Dadusc and Mudu 2020), whereas it would be more interesting and politically relevant to broaden the gaze to the whole sets of opportunities that also 'acting in solidarity' might entail for the white saviour, within a context of differential allocation of rights and voice.

4.5 Conclusions

In this chapter I have tried to look at the complex ways in which migrants' suspension (Tazzioli and Garelli 2020; Tazzioli 2018, 2020a) through different forms of containment, immobilization and hyper-mobility is urbanised (Georgiou et al 2022), reflecting on how migrants' differential inclusion as exploitable subjects is affected by the specific Italian and Palermitan context. In the first case, considering a framework of dysfunctional management, that does not look beyond the emergency (Avallone 2018; Colucci 2018, Galdo 2018; Accardo 2018); in the second case, considering the specific structural shortages of the city (Giglioli 2021 more broadly on Sicily). This has been done, in the first section of the chapter, by bringing migrants' experiences of the reception system to the fore.

[18] From recorded interview, 30th December 2022

Contextually, the rise of non-institutional actors involved with supporting human rights and filling the gaps of the municipality in addressing the multiple needs that newly arrived people face, mirroring broader tendencies (Georgiou et al 2022), has been observed. In this sense, the solidarity network is considered 1) for its fundamental role in filling the gaps, though being inevitably under-resourced; 2) as a contextual field of opportunities – economic, research, study, moral - for the different actors who engage with these realities. Attention is posed on how existing within the network of solidarity does not necessarily entail a way out, both taking into account personal trajectories of people continuously moving in and out of the solidarity network, but also considering the everyday borders encountered by relatively 'well settled' migrants, who continue to strategically negotiate their presence and place within a racialised access to the city. A point is made on how, within a European broadly racialized, neocolonial management of migration, migrants' struggles are not negotiated on a field of rights but on one of luck and accorded humanity. This point is fundamental, especially within a city like Palermo, portrayed as a safe-harbour, to debunk easy distinctions between repressive states and solidarity cities (Bauder 2021; Bauder and Gonzalez 2018; Bauder and Juffs 2020), as the two are tightly interrelated.

In the second section I have focused on how contemporary politics based on a dualism of repression and solidarity are also able to generate economies around migration, beyond those usually considered (De Genova and Tazzioli 2022; Tazzioli and De Genova 2023, Dadusc and Mudu 2020), and grounded on support. Some of these economies in Palermo brand solidarity in an instrumental way, for purposes that are related to local manoeuvres of economic restructuring and cultural and political enfranchisement. By adopting the risky language of the white saviour, a language that is then circulated and amplified by media, de facto they maintain attention on the exceptional act of saving, usually brought on by white people, and on the mere right of the migrant of being considered human (Tazzioli and Walters 2019; Danewid 2017). This is particularly interesting to consider from a place with its own history of struggles as seen in chapter 3, as it highlights the complexities of generating "an ethic of solidarity" based on the "shared, intertwined histories that arise out of the colonial past and the neo-colonial present?" within an all-encompassing racial capitalist system.

Although it seems that migration simply splits the Western world into two categories, repression and support, the chapter points to a more nuanced and complex system where support itself can, if not aliment, at least be a more sly side of racial capitalism, existing in relation with it, creating jobs and opportunities for the exceptional saviour, within an unfair framework of a game rigged at the roots.

Within this system, migrants can be exploited multiple times, not only by institutional containment and repression, but also by becoming the pretext for economies built on selling exceptional images, such as that of a safe harbour and a city of hospitality. This framework does not deny positive relationships among people of course, but considers them as not sufficient within a system where nation-state citizenship and related rights - for how much the concept can be limited and contested - are still the fundamental prerequisite to equality (Hawthorne, 2021).

CHAPTER 5 - HOW 'IN-BETWEEN' MIGRANTS NAVIGATE EVERYDAY BORDERS AND PALERMO'S NETWORK OF RECEPTION/SOLIDARITY

5.1 Introduction

Following authors who have looked into migrants' counter manoeuvres at the borders (De Genova and Roy 2020; Genova 2021; Tazzioli 2020a, Tazzioli 2018, Tazzioli 220b), this chapter explores the everyday negotiations of racialised borders, putting migrants' own experiences and understandings at the forefront (De Genova and Tazzioli 2022). In particular, the chapter follows the experience of migrants who belong to a sort of 'in-between' generation: they have experienced the violence of arrival but they are not newly arrived anymore, and their access to Palermo's society has been somewhat 'facilitated' by taking part in the network/infrastructure of reception/solidarity, either by being taken charge of by one/multiple organisations or by taking part in projects (usually both). These migrants are in their mid-twenties to their late thirties and mostly arrived following the Arab Spring or after the so-called European "migration crisis" in 2015, risking their lives to cross the Mediterranean. They are all active within both the reception system and solidarity network in Palermo, through activism, volunteering or working. It is important to note that with one exception, the people I am going to talk about within the chapter are men. This is due to the wider presence of young male migrants in recent waves of arrival (usually from West Africa), the different possibilities that male and female migrants pursue in Palermo, especially when it comes to engaging with public space and events, and the easier accessibility to the male population during fieldwork (see chapter 3).

The first two sections of this chapter observe how migrants perceive and understand their own participation within the network of solidarity by focusing on: 1) on experiences of activism within migrant associations, especially considering how migrants perceive these in relation to white realities; and 2) on migrants working within the reception system, focusing on the role of cultural mediators and on the case of a 'multicultural enterprise' which was born from a project launched by a partnership of several white solidarity realities based in Palermo. The third section steps back from the infrastructure of migration, to focus on the choices and reasons for staying in Palermo and migrants' perceptions of the city. It looks at how restricted options related to the migrant status, as well as the initially forced

localization in Palermo, intersect with practical, 'mundane' and affective lifestyle choices - which might often be based on the same qualities that other migrants, not categorised as such, seek when moving to South European countries - but also with these young men's process of growth. In fact, most of them have reached full adulthood and independence, and created their own community, once they got to Europe, and in Palermo specifically.

These three sections are introduced by a fragment, in line with the previous chapter, portraying an Iftar during Ramadan in 2022, organised by three different migrant associations in Palermo. The fragment portrays a moment of coming together, sharing and community care, but also political space, foreclosing some of the major themes discussed within the chapter.

5.2 Fragment 1 \ Celebrating Iftar: sharing food as an act of care and claiming space of belonging

On the 24th of April 2022 I approached Piazza Santa Chiara to meet Mbaye, a young Senegalese man with whom Coline, a French PhD student from Marseille and former activist of Porco Rosso, had put me in touch with. Mbaye is a member of the Bayefall: back then I did not know what that meant, but later I learnt that Bayefall is a movement, a way of life rooted in an anti-colonial spiritual philosophy originated from Senegal, grounded on ideas of sharing, non-violence and working the land understood as spiritual improvement. Importantly, in Palermo the Bayefall had come together especially in support of all those migrants accused as boat-drivers, their experience fundamental for the drafting of the report 'from sea to prison', mentioned in chapter 5. Every year in the last six years the Bayefall in Palermo had been collecting money through crowdfunding campaigns to provide the Iftar, the meal that breaks the fast at the end of the day during Ramadan, for those who cannot afford it, with the cooperation of the Senegalese Association and the Gambian Association.

Mbaye is always very busy and I have tried to get a coffee with him a couple of times, without success. People have told me I could find him at the Senegalese Association, helping with the preparations for that day's Iftar. It is almost sunset, I go past Moltivolti restaurant, where a few people are having a coffee or aperitivo, and get to the square. We are at the heart of Ballarò: on the one side, the monumental complex of Santa Chiara is closed; the

Senegalese Association is at the ground floor of a small, three-storey building at the centre of the square. Behind it, in the closer Piazzetta Sette Fate, the wooden benches and bushes around the old water tower are the only remains of a project of bottom-up, participatory planning between the neighbourhood's associations and nothing less than Airbnb, in 2019. The association's walls are painted light blue, the small wooden door is open and above it a board says 'Associazione Senegalese'. The small square is often closed by cars, but this time the space is almost free. There are few black people setting a table in front of the door, Mbaye is outside, giving instructions. I approach him immediately, introducing myself, mentioning Coline. He greets me, then says simply "'*Prima si lavora, poi si parla*"[19] (we work first, then we talk), pointing with the finger at the door at his back. And that's it. I see Modou, a young man, member of the Gambian association, who works in the kitchen of Centro Astalli while studying to become a nurse. Earlier we were together at Porco Rosso during an event supporting the NGO ship Iuventa, accused by the government of aiding illegal immigration. I say hi, tell him that Mbaye has sent me to help but I have no idea what to do, Modou welcomes me within the association and I shyly follow him inside.

The place is made of two relatively small rooms, a small toilet and a food pantry. Usually this is an almost empty space with very little furniture, but today, even though the first room is relatively empty, the second is thriving with a make-shift kitchen made of huge pans on electric stoves on the floor and people all around chatting, brewing, stirring. The food is almost done, as well as the Touba coffee. We start packing dishes of rice and Senegalese stew working as an assembly line. It smells amazing. A guy separates the plastic dishes, one puts in the rice, another adds the stew. I cover the dish with tin foil that someone next to me rips and passes along. I put the dishes, once sealed, on a table where someone else picks them to bring them to the table outdoors for people to collect them. I am the only woman and white person there with all these young guys actively working, while laughing and chatting cheerfully in so many different languages: I catch some English words and Italian words, but also dialects that I do not know. There are people from Senegal, from Gambia, from the Ivory Coast and other places. They make jokes about each other's country. At first they do not talk in Italian, but then the guy ripping the foil starts talking to me and when the group understands that I am Italian they switch to it. They ask me where I am from, what I

[19] Sentence from field notes, not recorded, 24th April 2022

am doing in Palermo, I ask them what it is that they are cooking and they start explaining the recipes, while we go on packing dishes. "*Do you know Touba?*"[20] they ask me, I say no, and they explain that it is the way they make coffee in Senegal, sugary and spicy. A young man pours some coffee in a plastic glass and passes it to me, telling me to try it. I taste the coffee and my tongue is hit by the sweet flavour of cinnamon, cardamom, and nutmeg. I tell them I love it, and they start laughing. I drink a sip in between packing dishes, until a man who looks like the oldest in the group approaches me from behind, takes the coffee from my hand and puts it on the table next to me: "*Prima si lavora, poi si beve*"[21] (we work first, then we drink) he says flatly, pragmatically, then proceeds to count the dishes on the table and leaves again. The guys are pranking each other: one of them, Seka, is talking about wanting to get married and the others are laughing. They call him a kid, but in an affectionate way. Seka asks about someone's sister, "*I would never let my sister marry you*"[22] the other replies, and they all laugh again. I ask him how old he is and he says that he is 23. At one point I ask why they are all men, Seka bursts out laughing and points at me "*e tu cosa sei?*"[23] (and what are you?). Fair enough, I think, but they explain that women are busy. They mention a woman of their community who is an amazing chef and who a few days earlier had gone there and prepared delicious food. Still, the other times I went to Iftar and then to other events organised by those associations in that place I hardly met black women. On the other hand, the same as me, other white friends and activists, usually young women, would go to help with the preparation and stay there to have dinner.

The older man comes back, he counts the dishes on the table, then counts us and tells us to stop as we are done. We finish packing the remaining dishes, then the guys start leaving the room and go pick their own dish from the table. I am ready to leave when the old man stops me with his serious face and puts a dish in my hands. He tells me the dish is mine as I gave them a hand. I had not expected that - I thank him and take my dish outside. Some people have just collected the food and gone back home, some others are gathered in groups, they're eating and drinking together, talking and laughing while music is playing from a speaker. There is a young woman sitting on a bench, on her own, everyone else is chatting in

[20] Sentence from field notes, not recorded, 24th April 2022
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid.

groups and my social anxiety kicks in. I am standing with my dish in my hands, feeling stupid. I approach the young woman with a shy smile. I ask her if I can sit next to her and she smiles back, making space for me. I tell her jokingly that I wanted to make friends with the only other woman in the square and she laughs. We introduce ourselves to each other and start chatting about the food and the surroundings. Her name is Hala, she's in her 30s, she's Tunisian and speaks perfect Italian, with a strong Palermitan accent. I did not know about this the first time we met, but Hala was born in Italy, had studied in Italy and had been staying in Italy most of her childhood and teenagehood. She had then gone back to Tunisia, before she turned 18, which had meant for her to lose her right of getting Italian citizenship and to enter the precarious, endless bureaucratic loop of short permits that she had to balance together with a job that she liked, but gave little money, precarious housing and important health issues, all of which was taking a toll on her mental health. But that time Hala was just being a very interesting and smart woman, with whom I immediately connected, maybe because we both shared short hair and masculine outfits. Hala asks me what I do in Palermo, I tell her that I am working on my PhD and explain it briefly. We start talking about politics in Palermo, about hospitality, migrants and so forth. She says she doesn't like those who want to give her the floor, who engage in rhetoric and just want to be photographed. She says conflict exists in Palermo, but no one talks about it. Bullying, illness, violence.

Next to us, a group of young men are having their dinner, while talking about the forthcoming administrative elections. They talk in Italian and are complaining about not being allowed to vote. Activists in Palermo had been talking in a heated manner about the inevitable end of the era of Leoluca Orlando and what having a right-wing administration would have entailed for their activities, but, until that evening, I had not really thought about what the migrant population thought about that, especially considering that they had no choice but to wait and see. At a point a black man arrives, he seems a bit out of place, I see him exchanging a few words with some people, then he leaves a few flyers for the upcoming elections and leaves. The man is part of the 'Consulta delle Culture' (Assembly of Cultures), an assembly formed of leaders elected by the different foreign communities present in Palermo, holding consultative – non-decisional - power and instituted by Major Orland in 2015. When the man leaves, Hala looks at me with a half-smile "*you know how I*

call them?" - she asks - "*Consulta delle Sculture*"[24] (Assembly of Sculptures). When I tell her that I was not expecting for these very young people to be this engaged in such conversations, she just nods "here no one interrupts us for stupid things, this is why we can talk about politics". In the meantime, Mbaye approaches us, he greets Hala, he calls her "Bayefall sister", then takes a seat and joins the conversation. He tells me he knows philosophy, although he never studied, because he has it in his blood, as he is a Bayefall. Mbaye is used to speaking to crowds and you can see it from the way he passionately engages us: "*Now that there is war in Ukraine, no one sees those dead in the sea anymore, why is that? Is it because there are no more blond people? If barconi came filled with cat and dog puppies, they would meet a better fate!*"[25] he says sarcastically, bursting into an empty laugh. Hala remembers a South Tunisian man who had saved a kitten, considering with a bitter half laugh how the kitten was saved and the man sent back to Tunisia. Both Mbaye and Hala agree on the fact that humanity has long died. We go on talking for a while, then Mbaye leaves to join other friends, I stay a little bit longer with Hala, we talk about Palermo, she suggests a shop where I can find ready to make Touba coffee, we exchange numbers and, before leaving, we hug.

5.2.1 Deriva 1 \ "We create our own associations, so that we are there first person for our own problems"

The convivial moment of sharing food after breaking the fast had been a pretext for migrants, mainly from different West African countries, to come together, celebrate and talk. Instinctively I had compared that moment with what I was experiencing when volunteering during breakfast time at the Centro Astalli, the refugee centre, where everything from the spatial setting to the gestures of the old volunteers framed the moment of sharing food as just provision. This was different, it was not about the provision, which was indeed happening, but more about gathering together to share an important moment and space. As I learnt later, while reading through the website of the Bayefall in Palermo, this practice comes from a common community endeavour of self-organising to provide food during Ramadan for those who either cannot afford it, or do not have the time because of working hours - a community practice that the migrant associations had decided to bring to

[24] Sentence from field notes, not recorded, 24th April 2022
[25] Sentence from field notes, not recorded, 24th April 2022

Palermo[26]. Aside from giving me a sense of a practice of solidarity and an ethic of care which was not rooted in 'help', but based on common values, that moment in Piazza Santa Chiara had also provided a moment and a space for talking and sharing ideas, safely and openly, without mediations and without cameras.

The words of Mbaye pointed to a very clear understanding of where the migrant coming across the Mediterranean is positioned within the Western world: behind the white Ukrainian refugee, behind domestic animals. Hala's words, on the other hand, were hitting home, to Palermo, with her vague words depicting a violent scenario of subordination and of voices given and taken, presumably by locals, and showing a distrustful attitude towards 'more institutional' migrant's organisations - and migrants who are part of those - her joke pointing to the uselessness of the Assembly of Cultures, whose members are depicted as 'sculptures', still and motionless, but also good as a showcase. My point here is not to judge the actual assembly, with which I had only fleeting and indirect contacts, but to point to Hala's perception which, as soon it was revealed, was a recurring one, about the complicated nature of migrants' political voice and involvement in Palermo. In the following, I build on the experience of Adama, a young Ivorian man working as intercultural mediator for Doctors without Borders, and Bai, a Gambian young man studying to become a nurse, both of them involved with migrant associations. The aim is that of exploring the complex perceptions of the role of migrant associations, suspended between the acknowledgement of the fundamental role they cover in terms of support, political activity and alternative ethic of care, and the perceived limited capability rooted on practical limits and perceived subordination of decisional power.

Associations led by young non-white migrants in Palermo are very active, they offer support and mediation to newly arrived migrants, also collaborating with more structured (white) realities; looking at their social pages it is possible to see how they are involved in several education activities, raising awareness and promoting human rights in schools around Palermo for instance; they are very active in self-organised protests against national migration politics, as well as in local protests and various events and demonstrations. Recently, associations were born with the clear intent of taking space and voice back, such as Stravox and the MovementRight2Be, which, differently than associations such as those

[26] https://ragazzibayefall.webnode.it/l/ll-ramadan-e-la-distribuzione-del-cibo-baye-fall2/

created by the Gambians or Senegalese , are not community based. RightToBe, in particular, pulls together members of the different migrant associations, aiming at coordinating their actions, with the clear intent of networking throughout Sicily, and possibly also within other urban realities of the peninsula. Within the communication circulated before their first meeting, held in May 2023 in Santa Chiara, they had written: "*We don't want to stay silent anymore in front of our daily challenges and we want to be the ones bringing possible solutions to the difficulties we are forced to face daily*"[27]. RightToBe was also born as a response and in dialogue to the national movement Non Sulla Nostra Pelle, whose members they met during April 2023 national mobilisation in Rome.

Talking about how Stravox, the association he is part of, came to be, Adama explained:

> "*This association was formed by foreigners [...] there are people of different origin, different nationalities, there are also Italians. [...] It was born, because we thought about something to take the 'situazione straniera' [foreign issue] in our hands, first person, so that there is not always the need to start from an Italian, then calling foreigners. The most absurd thing is that Italian people find themselves talking about the 'cosa africana' [African matters], the 'cosa straniera' [foreign matters] with no foreigners. They say 'we want to do, we want to help', but with no foreigner, so, Stravox on the other hand was meant to do stuff on our own: we create our own associations, we take part in things, so that we are there first person for our own problems, it was created like this. And now it's working well, because the people at the forefront are very active, determined, so we can say it's working. [...] We are involved with many things, both protests, to make ourselves heard, we apply for calls, we won several calls [...] regional calls and things like that, projects. Besides, if someone gets in Palermo and they don't know…they don't know where the questura [central police station] is, or where the different services are located, when they contact us, we give our availability to provide someone who can accompany the person, or also for mediating [...]*"[28]

On the other hand, Bai's voice is tired and bitter when he talks about migrant associations:

[27] This sentence comes from a call to adhere to the movement circulated before the first open assembly held on the 28th May 2023

[28] From recorded interview, 30th December 2022

"*All of these associations…now, I'm not part of any of them anymore. Porco Rosso, Gambian Association, Moltivolti, Stravox [...] I'm not part of them, because…no no no no, let's not talk about this*"[29].

Bai has been in Palermo since 2016, he was actively involved with the creation of the Sans Papier Desk in Porco Rosso, of which he had been one of the first users, and of the Gambian Association. When I asked him whether he could tell me about his involvement, his struggle was clear. I told him that he did not have to talk about that if he did not want to, but when I made a comment about how the newborn Stravox seemed interesting in the way it pulled diverse people together with a stated aim of speaking for themselves, he burst out: "*Yes, it was born like this*" - he offered – "*but in the end it is run by Europeans!*" . When I asked him what he meant by saying that, he went on explaining how many of his former activist colleagues were in reality managed by some local white activists:

"*They are the ones who say 'do this, let's ask for projects, projects like this, European projects[...] They themselves [referencing to his former activist migrant colleagues] do not know what is the value of the association. [...] They don't know anything about the association, what it means to want to help a person like me. They don't know it, they're there to get €50, €100 [...]*"[30].

Even though he has been detached from the activist and political world in Palermo, Bai is passionate when he talks about the role that a migrant association should have, as no-one but migrants can truly know and understand what a newcomer really needs, and how it would be important to put all the associations together, to make them collaborate.

"*All of these [white associations] only ask for European fundings, that's it, this is why they have all these associations. I did not agree on this, if we have to ask for European funding, it is something that us migrants have to do, if we want to use our name as an association [...] we have to manage everything from the beginning [...] If we ask for money our objective is to go and give information to the young men hosted in hospitality centres, to mediate if they have to go to Questura [central police station], to Prefettura [prefecture], if they have to do Commissione [the hearing*

[29] From recorded interview, 30th December 2022
[30] From recorded interview, 15th December 2022

migrants have to sustain when they apply for the refugee status], to translate, to tell them that studying is very important, to make them enrol in schools, this was our objective. If now we see many young men coming from Germany, France to Palermo to renovate their residency permits, but they don't have a place where they can have their residency - it is a problem also just to bring a piece of paper to questura to say 'I live here and I want to change my document'. They didn't have it and we thought about having a place [...] where people can go to [...] we can rent a place where we can make the residency for these young men [...] but how can we finance it?".

Bai then gave me a poignant look, making his last, fundamental point:

"*and if we ask for money, if me and Francesca [pointing at me with his finger] ask money in the association, we ask for European fundings and then money comes and YOU manage the money, and even what is my thought about what to do, you don't give me this chance?*"[31]

Adama and Bai's takes on developing political voices and solidarity actions in Palermo are quite different. There is a common point on the need for migrants to take matters into their own hands, which is also a main point on which the newborn RightToBe is grounded on. The image of white people emerges in the form of generic 'Italians' or 'Europeans' who talk about African matters, who initiate things, run and manage them, as suggested by Adama and Bai. White advisors emerge in the way they want to give migrants the floor, they want to be photographed, as reticently reported by Hala. These images portray these young migrant perceptions of their cause being exploited, or in the best case, of them being cut out from their very own lives, struggles, politics, or made a secondary voice within it. These complex relationships speak to the difficult and unbalanced power relations that inevitably subtend the relationship of solidarity (De Genova and Tazzioli 2022), which stem from the different actors' very different positioning within the racial capitalist framework.

If Adama is genuinely excited about his association's ability to change things in this regard, Bai has a very different take on the matter, expressing how that association too 'in the end is run by Europeans', who dictate the rules about what to do. The disappointment with which Bai blames his own activist friends, who don't know 'the value of the association' and who

[31] From recorded interview, 30th December 2022

are there only 'to get €50, €100 ', resonates with the same frustration and contempt that Hala reserved to the members of the assembly of cultures, to whom she referred to as being just 'sculptures'. The newborn RightToBe's main scope is that of becoming "*a connection between all the associations and communities when problematic situations happen (rents, work, discriminations, etc) in order to find solutions faster, or, if necessary, to organise demonstrations or other forms of protesting*"[32] and it is not aimed at newcomers only, but at the migrant populations in general. Bai's conceited list of the most pressing, usually bureaucratic, issues that newcomers face in their ordinary lives points at the continuous movements of newcomers between the different town offices to carry out procedures related to the residence permits, this is also a point made by Adama, who also speaks about the importance of organising protests to make migrants' own voices heard. These very practical and pressing issues seem to be counterbalanced, in Bai's perception, by a conceited run of white 'advisors' for funding, which are then not for migrants to manage, pointing to restricted decisional power in practice and consequent restricted means for what are perceived to be fundamental needs.

Interestingly, Bai continued to make reference not to migrants but to 'ragazzi' (tr. young people, meant in an affectionate way), when he talked about newcomers. In fact, newly arrived migrants in Palermo are young people, as Bai was when he got to Palermo himself. As we have seen in the previous chapter, Bai's path towards the exit of the reception system has been made possible by the connections he made in Porco Rosso, which allowed him to get the refugee status, to find a house, and to enrol in high school. Many of the young migrants taking part in the different associations had a similar path. When Bai talks about his friends and colleagues, blaming their subordination, he uses the words 'sono fatti da' ('they are made by'), exposing the highly complicated nature of these relationships: as well as Bai, these 'ragazzi' have created important personal relationships and friendships beyond help, which is why they have inevitably developed a sense of gratitude, which makes being critical about existing local, internal power structures difficult, with these power structures being an interesting overlapping of racialised limits as well as paternalistic/generational ones. In this sense, within these different relationships of acting in solidarity, genuine friendship and

[32] This sentence comes from a call to adhere to the movement circulated before the first open assembly held on the 28th May 2023

alliance can coexist with that patronising and potentially disempowering action that is often only assigned to humanitarianism (Tazzioli and Walters 2019; Dadusc and Mudu 2020).

During an informal conversation with Modue, a young Gambian man and former member of the Gambian Association, who has now moved to the North because he could not find a job in Palermo, I noticed how he was uneasy when talking about the 'interferences' of white advisors: on the one side he recognised the interference as strategically necessary, for instance for applying for fundings as these people often had the skills to do so, or for networking, recalling how the association had received important fundings by one international organisation that Moltivolti, in that case, had put them in contact with. These advisors are often perceived as great entrepreneurs because of their abilities in winning money or designing projects, as Abou, another Gambian man part of Kirmal, a multicultural enterprise of catering based in Centro Astalli, mentioned when talking about one of the advisors who had designed the project won by his group. At the same time, Modue lamented, embarrassedly, the inability to properly manage the money, as well as the redundancy of the projects he had taken part in. He reflected on how these were useful for newcomers to start getting settled, but fairly useless after gaining a basic knowledge of the place and language, as there were not options, for instance, for learning how to create a curriculum vitae, how to go through a job interview, and so forth. In short, there was little centred on how to cope with something beyond arrival and basic knowledge for inclusion.

Thinking in terms of how migrant associations relate with other associations present in the same territory, an interesting event happened in autumn 2022. The 'neighbourhood assembly' SOS Ballarò, made of citizens, activists and in general people interested in the neighbourhood, after a long period of inactivity, resumed its meetings to discuss the increasing presence of crack in the city, particularly visible in Ballarò. The aim was that of organising action against the absence of proximity services and the new right-wing administration, as well as the regional government, accused of negligence on the matter. Through word of mouth, people were invited to the first assembly: I was told about it by a member of Centro Astalli, where I volunteered at.

At the first assembly none of the members of the migrant associations were present and when I asked why, a social worker from CESIE replied that they had been contacted but were

all busy with an event at ITASTRA, the school of Italian many of the young migrants have engaged with at a point in their life in Palermo. For the second meeting, only Modou was present: I had asked him to come that same day when we were in the kitchen at Centro Astalli. When we left the meeting, he told me that these meetings were just a waste of time, lots of words and no action. And yet, a protest was organised and several members of the different migrant associations, Modou included, actively took part in it, alongside the other associations and citizens, bringing their own banners. Still, when the moment came to circulate a letter written by SOS Ballarò to the administration, in order to collect the signatures of all the realities who had participated in the protest, the first draft of the letter did not show the name of any of the migrant associations, as none of them were listed to be contacted. Again, I raised the point and personally contacted the Gambian Association, Stravox and Giocherenda, whose members I recognised from the pictures of the protest, in order to collect their signatures. When I asked one of the activists of SOS Ballarò how that was possible - I was in transit and not a stable member of the community, therefore it was strange to me that I was the one pointing out their absence - he replied that this was how networking worked, that next time they would have been contacted, in a way confirming that this practice was somewhat new.

This was an interesting experience, not much for the migrant non participation in the meetings as well as their presence at the protest, which can have several reasons: many of these migrants balance multiple tasks during the day and it made sense that they did not have time to take part in every meeting, which usually lasted around two hours. Modou, for instance, had come to the meeting in between his work shifts. The fact that Stravox, Gambian Association and Giocherenda had not been put within a very long list of associations and organisations which had been recalled participating in the protest might be explained by their absence within the list of people who had been contacted in the first place to join the protest. In either case, my perception of the event had been that those associations were not perceived, even unconsciously, as groups in their own right with a stake and interest in local matters that were not directly taking into account matters of migration.

5.2.2 Deriva 2 \ migrants working for migrants: how migrants navigate jobs within the solidarity network as a best option in Palermo

As seen in chapter 4 through the experience of Saro, Adama and Bai, navigating basic needs in Palermo, such as finding a house, is made complicated, especially in the absence of a white guarantor, even for those who can provide a contract and evidence of working and stable income, due to racialised assumptions about migrants' inability to pay regularly and potential disrespectful attitude towards the housing unit, with this overall distrustful attitude towards non-white migrants being acknowledged with a sort of resigned and practical understanding. As also hinted at in chapter 4, when it comes to job options, again these are restricted, even in the presence of a residence permit of some sort, with offers available mainly in the care sector, manual sector and catering, because of the barriers imposed by educational levels, which are often either absent or not recognised, but also language barriers, especially for newcomers. These barriers make migrants a perfectly exploitable work force for historically precarious sectors characterised by exploitation, low income, high fatigue and working hours, and frequent absence of legal contract (De Genova 2013; Mezzadra and Neilson; in the Italian context see Avallone 2018; Giglioli 2017). Still, some of the migrants I have encountered were pursuing better jobs, better paid and more stable, which they were able to find by growing up/participating in the local network of solidarity.

In the following, focusing on migrants working within the infrastructure of reception and solidarity in Palermo, my aim is to explore in a layered way how migrants exploit these economies to pursue a better life and escape exploitation of the system previously described, as well as the contextual contradictions and limits that arise from this positioning. In particular, I am going to explore 1) the experience of migrants working as cultural mediators and 2) the case of a multicultural enterprise born from a project launched by a partnership of solidarity actors based in Palermo.

5.2.2.1 “This is how my career started”: working as cultural mediators within the solidarity network in Palermo

When I asked Saro what he thought about migration politics in Italy, he interrupted me before I even finished the sentence to say that migration management in Italy was a business:

> “*Can I tell you something? The truth is, not everything, the politics in general, immigration is a business, a big business for Italy, I’m telling you, it is really a business, it starts above and gets to the [hospitality] centres. But I have to tell you something, out of respect to those who do good things: there are people who care for migrants, who do the right thing, but the majority doesn’t care for migrants, they only care for money, earning money out of the poor people coming here and looking for a better future.*”[33]

Another Tunisian young man, Khaled, with whom I had been volunteering at Centro Astalli, used to say the very same thing, that immigration in Italy is a most profitable activity “*because if you do something for migrants, Europe will give lots of money*”[34]. His understanding of ‘projects for migrants’ was that people involved are mostly low paid volunteers, with most of the money getting stuck at the top, making few people rich. In both cases the reference was of course to national and international migration politics and consequent reception system with its local enactment through cooperatives, organisations and all those groups which, in general, managed money to provide services to migrants.

And yet, both Saro and Khaled were building their future in that sector. In fact, both of them had been employed for years as cultural mediators and interpreters in one or more cooperatives/organisations/associations. Although requirements may vary, to work as a cultural and language mediator, a middle school diploma and training are often sufficient. Most young migrants I have met, even though they had not proceeded further, had enrolled in school to get a middle school diploma through a compensatory year. Regarding the training, courses are offered by several institutions/organisations, but sometimes jobs are obtained through the network after developing enough experience: Saro, for instance had

[33] From recorded interview, 15th December 2022
[34] From fieldnotes, not recorded, 22nd April 2022

got a certificate through a professional institute; Khaled through participating in workshops, projects and courses within non- profit associations such as CESIE; Adama had successfully applied to a call from the local branch of Doctors without Borders. Considering the pool of low skilled jobs, mediation can be a good resort in terms of earnings, timing and workload, without the need of getting into high school (although some calls from international organisations, like those from the UN, require at least a high school diploma) or further education, counting on skills which come from first-hand experience. For the three of them, the existing solidarity infrastructure in Palermo had been a perfect pool of opportunities, thanks to the participation of a tight network of circulating human resources, for instance hypermobile lawyers volunteering between different organisations within the city and across the SAI and CAS in the province, who might direct mediators to several opportunities. "*This is how my career started*" said Saro when explaining this process:

> "*So the good thing is that the more people you meet the more possibilities of finding a job you have, the more friends who can point you to many things. As I said before, when I went to an event I met a person for another job, always related to migration, and I found this small job*"[35].

During my stay in Palermo I helped both Saro and Khaled with updating their CVs: both were a long list of more or less precarious and temporary positions within local organisations, such as cooperatives (SAI and CAS) across the province, and international ones (UNHCR, Doctors without Borders, Red Cross). Volunteering activities abounded, together with training within the local/transnational network (e.g. Centro Astalli, Porco Rosso, Maldusa, CESIE), with courses on developing specific knowledge in working with vulnerable subjects, potential victims of border violence, torture and human trade. When I met them, both were volunteering and working within several realities at the same time. Still, Saro, Khaled and Adama related to their occupation as intercultural mediators in different ways. Khaled, when I met him, had just started teaching Italian to non- accompanied minors at the CPIA (provincial centres for adult education) Nelson Mandela, he was very proud of that job as he loved working with young people. However, he would often tell me how he wanted to leave Palermo and work as a children's entertainer, asking me to tell him if I were to hear about job opportunities in Turin, and he would often show distress at the idea of remaining in the

[35] From recorded interview, 15th December 2022

Palermo circuit. On the other hand, Saro was content with his position: during the update of his CV, I had noticed that between 2021 and 2022 he had worked on board a quarantine ship for the Italian Red Cross - quarantine ships had been long denounced as a new form of incarceration allowed through health securitization due to Covid 19 -, and yet Saro, although he recognised the absurdity of the situation, also highlighted how that was a great moment in terms of secure money and work: the Red Cross paid well and on time. When we arranged the interview, Adama had just been in Lampedusa with Doctors Without Borders, the organisation he had been working with for several years, and his mood was low: going to Lampedusa was always hard and that time it had entailed seeing dead bodies that had been retrieved and had to be identified. He was used to that by now, but explained to me that although they could meet a therapist whenever they were involved with such activities, in order to unload, it was a one-time only thing, with no continued therapy provided.

Adama was not the first person I met in Palermo whose mental health had been affected by the activities involved with mediating in particularly distressing environments. Awa, a young Senegalese man I met the first time when he worked, without contract, as a bartender in a posh cocktail bar of the city centre while waiting for the renewal of his permit, one evening was sitting in front of a Bengalesi minimarket, with a beer in his hand, alone, his usually cheerful smile gone, and his eyes darker and sadder. When I asked him what was going on he just told me that he had come back from Campobello di Mazzara, a town in the province of Trapani, which has become infamous for the very harsh conditions of many migrants living and working in the surrounding countryside. He had accompanied activists and lawyers to the informal settlement to act as mediator and had been confronted by a group of young migrants regarding his better status, with this experience taking a huge toll on him.

Going on talking about his future plans, Adama said that he was planning on moving away from Palermo - he needed a job with a good income to support his plans back in his hometown. He explained how his current job with the Italian Red Cross paid well, but he did not want to work with migrants anymore, and in Palermo there were no opportunities beyond that. He reminded me of a young man who had come to the job desk one day, with experience as a mediator but insisting on looking for a job or traineeship as a welder, adamant that he did not want that old job anymore.

Of course the role of the intercultural mediator is fundamental expertise within the reception/solidarity network, and apparently in Palermo it does provide a chance to get out of the vicious circle of precarious, low skilled jobs. Aside from the practical relevance of the role, mediators can establish trust, also because they often share the same background with newcomers. The first-hand experience was often mentioned by Saro and had a primary place in the way he introduced himself within his CV, but it was also at the core of Bai's reasoning around the importance for settled migrants to create their own associations and space where to provide for newcomers. Both Bai and Khaled would stress how their role was important not only to explain procedures related for instance to permits or jobs, but also to make newcomers aware of their rights, to push them to ask for those, to pursue education, and so forth. At the same time, the option of 'working for migrants' as a best opportunity to navigate Palermo and its restricted options, configures itself as still one other restricted option. Finally, in terms of emotional approach to the job, I think it is important to consider that although Saro, Khaled and Adama had gone through rough experiences upon arrival, the two Tunisian young men had arrived before the so called 'refugee crisis' and through their words it was possible to feel a level of detachment from the mainly West-African population currently coming to the Sicilian shore. Both of them would reserve very harsh comments towards other Tunisian people, who in their view did not deserve help, while framing black migrants as poor people worthy of help.

5.2.2.2 Kirmal: 'the first multicultural social enterprise' in Palermo

The first time I visited Centro Astalli a volunteer introduced me to the multiple services and activities taking place there. Among the rest, she told me about Kirmal, the group of young migrants dealing with the kitchen at lunch and dinner time. She introduced the 'ragazzi Kirmal' as born out of a project launched by Centro Astalli, she told me how they had been providing 120 meals each day between Ballarò and Noce (two neighbourhoods in the city) to sustain families, both local and not, throughout the pandemic. Kirmal was not the only activity of this kind: the courtyard of the centre hosted a carpentry workshop run by a Tunisian man who had started his activity after taking part in a project of professional training.

When I started volunteering at the job desk, every Tuesday towards midday I would start smelling a delicious aroma coming from the ground floor. On a Thursday afternoon in June, I reached the kitchen to wait for a group of students who were going to have lunch at the mensa at the end of a tour around the 'informal market' in Albergheria. Abou had the lunch ready already and was preparing dinner for the young men hosted in the ex-SPRAR, now SAI. I asked him whether I could stay there and help, he told me I could and from June 2022 onwards I started going from time to time, mainly to chat with the Kirmal, while doing simple things such as washing rice, peeling carrots and other simple activities that I could do without being a nuisance to the others. Oftentimes I would just help with bringing prepared dishes on the top where the people would come to collect their food - with Femi reminding me not to go and fetch dishes with finished food, otherwise users would grow accustomed and we were not there to serve them. Other times I would clean the dishes - although Modou would often try to stop me, as I was not paid and therefore, as a visitor, I should not wash dishes. Every day Kirmal would cook delicious food for the young men hosted in the SAI close to Centro Astalli, who would stop and eat there at the tables in the room next to the kitchen. As the Bayefall in Piazza Santa Chiara, they would entertain a very different relationship with the users than that established by the older local volunteers. They would also cook daily take-away meals for those users of the Centre who had a specific card that meant they were entitled to the free meals. Abou would often tell me how the food he was given when he was hosted in that very same SAI there, in Centro Astalli, was awful and usually consisted of cold pasta, whereas he really put an effort and love into whatever he made. Many times I stopped to have lunch there, when the young men from the SAI left and some volunteers of the centre came to get some food themselves.

Aside from catering for the refugees in the centre, Kirmal would also take up jobs elsewhere, using the kitchen in Centro Astalli as a base to provide meals for students' activities, events held by the same centre or by other organisations, etc. In early September I accompanied Abou to Borgo Rizza, a small, abandoned village close to Catania where a design and research studio from Palermo had organised a summer school bringing together national and international students, employing Kirmal to provide lunch and dinner over the weekend. Abou was the only one of the whole group available but he nevertheless accepted the job, and I joined him to help him with the cooking. Throughout the weekend we peeled and cut

and cooked non-stop from Senegalese mafè to huge potato omelettes that Abou would skilfully describe as a traditional Senegalese dish despite a student pointing out to the extreme resemblance with Spanish omelette.

Kirmal is a start-up usually presented as the 'first multicultural social enterprise'[36] that was established in 2021 out of the project 'Voci del Verbo Viaggiare - Accoglienza Mediterranea' (Voices of the Verb Travel - Mediterranean Hospitality), financially sustained by the Fondazione Con il Sud, a private non-profit organisation "*born on the 22nd November 2006 from the alliance between bank foundations and the third sector and volunteering world, to promote social infrastructuring of Southern Italy, which is paths of social cohesion and networking best practices to ease development in the South'. In particular, a network of several third sector and volunteering organisations have partnered, led by Centro Astalli Palermo*[37]*, to apply to the call 'Iniziativa Immigrazione*"[38], a section of Fondazione Con il Sud aimed at migrants' inclusion within Italian society. As it is possible to read from the project board, the proposal, for which €300,000 had been allocated, aimed at creating a social start-up in the sector of experiential tourism in Palermo, while easing socio-economic integration of young people between 18 and 35 years old, both migrants and non-migrants.

> "*The newborn enterprise will offer products and services of 'Mediterranean hospitality': management of tourists houses in collaboration with VisitSicily [...], experiential tours, services of intercultural catering, social mensa, home cooking, narrative dinners and multimedial exhibits connected to the creation of a 'Diffused Museum of Migrations'. Active involvement of migrants, whose stories will become an attraction lever for experiential tourism, is expected. Overall, the intervention should guarantee the work inclusion of 10 migrants within the new social enterprise that is to be created.*"[39]

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[36] https://www.esperienzeconilsud.it/vocidelverboviaggiareaccoglienzamediterranea/2021/06/10/la-prima-impresa-sociale-multiculturale-legata-al-turismo-nasce-kirmal/

[37] The complete list of partners is: CLINICA LEGALE PER I DIRITTI UMANI – CLEDU; COMUNE DI PALERMO; CONSORZIO ARCA; ISTITUTO D'ISTRUZIONE SUPERIORE STATALE 'FRANCESCO FERRARA'; ITASTRA / UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI PALERMO – DIPARTIMENTO DI SCIENZE UMANISTICHE; MARE MEMORIA VIVA; NEXT – NUOVE ENERGIE X IL TERRITORIO; PLURALIA; WONDERFUL ITALY

[38] https://www.esperienzeconilsud.it/vocidelverboviaggiareaccoglienzamediterranea/scheda-del-progetto/

[39] https://www.esperienzeconilsud.it/vocidelverboviaggiareaccoglienzamediterranea/scheda-del-progetto/

Also due to the pandemic, the project, which should have started in 2020, had been launched in 2021, with fewer activities than expected, and mainly focused in the end on the social mensa in Centro Astalli and occasional 'cene narrate' (dinner where the dishes are introduced by a theatrical moment/explanation regarding its origins) within events mainly organised in Centro Astalli.

In the end, Kirmal brought together six people out of 100 participants, whose initials also gave the name to the group. When I started engaging with them, two members - the only Palermitan member and a young Italian woman of Vietnamese origin, who were also the only two people with background experience in catering - had already moved on. Another member left the kitchen to pursue other interests. Of the three original members, two are currently studying at the university, although they are both still working in the kitchen. A new member has come and gone, and recently a new trainee has been taken in through the project 'comunità resilienti' in Centro Astalli, aimed at creating opportunities of internships for young migrants. Abou is in his early forties and is the eldest in the group, he is married to a Palermitan woman and has a small child. When he talks about Kirmal, he feels very proud of the project: back home in Gambia he did an entirely different job, but he loves cooking, and he is fond of the project and feels lucky for the opportunity he had, showing scarce understanding for those members who have decided to move on. He is always thinking about new opportunities and new jobs to take on. He talks and thinks like an entrepreneur and since the first time I met him he has been talking about finding a new place for Kirmal, to open a proper restaurant, but he had not found a place yet, as money was not enough, and opening a proper restaurant would require skills and resources that at the moment he did not have.

Kirmal for sure has been an important opportunity for its members, and yet they were not necessarily interested in pursuing a job in the catering sector. Kirmal is yet another project where the exceptional outcome, in this case the birth of a 'multicultural start-up', celebrated and showcased for the leading roles of migrants within it obfuscates the everyday struggle for carving out a decent life as a migrant in Italy, and in Palermo. Of course Kirmal has provided a project to build on for Abou, and a stable income for those members who are studying and have to maintain themselves, in the absence of a family supporting them (as many times they are the ones supporting family elsewhere), at the same time it is a project

where scope and means had already been established and designed by someone else, within a broader Southern development where migrants can have a place within the current leading economy of tourism, exploiting the exoticism of their experience. And yet, this enterprise comes with all its limits for its members: a double strand bond with Centro Astalli, which hosts Kirmal in its kitchen and for which Kirmal provides food on a daily basis. In July, tired of the users coming for free meals who wanted to use the space of the mensa, reserved to the young men hosted in the SPRAR, or to organised groups coming for lunch from time to time, , they attached a piece of paper on the front door, stating in Arabic, Italian, French and English: "*This is a restaurant. Entry is forbidden after 10:00 a.m. Take-away meals are available with the red card. Eating indoors is not possible*"[40].

The experiences recounted within this section explore further the concept of migrants' exploitation and differential inclusion within the European labour system (Danewid 2024; De Genova 2013; Mezzadra and Neilson 2013) by expanding them to the everyday life of relatively better off migrants, who are nevertheless made to work within specific positions. Though, on the one side, these restricted options intersect contextual shortages (Giglioli 2017; Merrill 2011), the role of race is also foregrounded, in the way, for instance, migrants' stories become exploitable as a marketable feature such is the case of Kirmal, while foregrounding the action of the good whites.

5.2.3 Deriva 3 \ Affective perspectives of the city and future projects

In the following I am going to focus on 'mundane' reasons and perceptions for staying/coming back to Palermo, a place that for most migrants is at first a forced localization, not a chosen one. By doing so, I want to momentarily shift the focus from the everyday racialised struggles, despite these being ever present, to see how these, together with consequent, sometimes forced again, life choices, interlace with complex as well as ordinary perceptions of places and people, aspirations, processes of growth, lifestyle preferences, frustrations, renewed understandings of home.

In 2022 the UK National Geographic placed Palermo in the top five world destinations from where to work remotely: "*With a healthy, relaxed lifestyle, warm Mediterranean climate and a lower cost of living than most parts of the UK, Sicily's scintillating capital, Palermo, offers*

[40] Excerpt from field notes, 7th July 2022

young professionals a real slice of la dolce vita" (Mcintyre 2022). Of course, this package is offered to young professionals on the move, migrants who travel the world with fancier labels, such as digital nomads (see McElroy, 2024) and remote workers; in general people on the move whose job opportunities, accessibility to housing and other rights to the city are seldom questioned, and whose choice for moving is mainly based on lifestyle opportunities and preferences: cheaper life, better weather, vibrant society.

And yet, despite the constant struggle for a decent life, and despite racialised restricted options and opportunities, several people I encountered would provide these very same reasons for staying in Palermo, and not elsewhere, for instance places where perceived better organisation and perhaps family ties might provide easier access to resources. During a casual conversation at the job desk with a black woman in her forties who had been staying in Palermo for years and who was looking yet again for another job as carer, she told me at one point that she had to stay in Palermo because of her son, otherwise she would have already left for anywhere else. For instance, she had several friends in Milan, in the North of Italy, and she had gone once there. Still, she remembered how at the train station she had stopped a woman to ask for directions: the woman had simply opened her arms, with no words, and moved on. In Palermo, the woman said laughing, people would take you and accompany you. Fazel, an Afghan man running his own restaurant, has been in Italy for twenty years, eleven of which he had spent in Palermo. He had been throughout Italy, working as farmer, dishwasher, caretaker, most times without a contract. He had lost jobs and homes consequently several times. He had been rough sleeping, experienced being robbed in the street and had spent years before getting his residency permit. And yet, although he had relatives settled both in Germany and the UK, he immediately told me how he would have never gone there: he had immediately wanted to stay in Italy, because he liked the weather, the people, because, he said bluntly at a point, "Italy is not Europe"[41]. These are interesting examples of migrants' practices of ranking the European space (Tazzioli and De Genova 2023), in a way that also extends beyond simple economic reasons.

When I asked him what he thought about Palermo, Adama replied:

[41] Sentence from field notes, not recorded, 19th March 2022

> "*So the people, Palermitani. I found many people with open minds and available. If you ask for information, if you need something, you don't know where to go, they are very helpful [...] they're people with open minds. Why? Because I saw a mixed society [...] Many mixed couples [...] Then the city of Palermo is dynamic [...] and you don't sleep early, I like staying in the 'movida' a lot, and also, I like spending time outdoors, I don't like staying at home. I found Palermo to be like this, thus I felt in the right place.*"[42]

Adama's words pointed to several interlaced strands. A perception of people's overall availability, which resonated with the anecdote of the woman at the job desk - both reproducing a commonplace trope about Southern openness. A perceived open mindedness that Adama immediately connected with seeing/experiencing a mixed society, for instance several mixed couples, a comment which seemed to relate more to belonging as a black person to Palermo. Finally, Adama mentioned the 'movida' in Palermo, the nightlife. In fact, I would often meet him at nighttime, strolling down Via Discesa dei Giudici, a street of pubs, or in one of the squares in Vucciria, hanging out with friends around Ciwara, a Senegalese restaurant famous for its jam sessions and dancing nights. Interestingly enough in Adama's words the understanding of racialised barriers in accessing housing laid out in chapter 5 coexisted with a perceived open and welcoming city. Talking about his future plans Adama had expressed the will to move from Palermo, the reason being only economic: he did not want to work with migration related jobs anymore, but he needed stable money - as he had applied for obtaining the Italian citizenship - and a good amount of it: he was contributing to the studies of numerous siblings, and had also invested, back in his mother's village in the Ivory Coast, in a piece of land where he and his brothers were helping making school buildings. Adama explained that he could not go abroad, as he had been advised to stay in Italy throughout the application process, a process that he told me would have lasted around three years: he feared that spending time abroad might have invalidated his request "*with the wrong judge*"[43]. Therefore, he was planning on going to Bolzano, in the North of Italy, where he would join friends who were earning good money working in transport or in retail.

[42] From recorded interview, 30th December 20*22*
[43] Sentence from field notes, not recorded, 18th December 2022

Even though Adama planned to return back to the Ivory Coast at a point in his life, he said that he would always go back to Palermo, as Palermo had been his home. When talking about his hometown he explained how in the last years he had gone regularly to visit his family, but had soon realised how he was not used anymore to certain practices: he was now used to being on his own, whereas back home he was the older brother and had to take care of everything and everyone. He told me how, when he moved back the first time, his mother and siblings had moved to a new house. Once arrived, his brothers had told him that he had to go and introduce himself to the neighbourhood and when he did not do that, one evening, the neighbours came in themselves bringing food, after which, he eventually went to their places to introduce himself and thank them.

What is interesting in this story is how multiple feelings and needs interlace in Adama's words. On the one side, a feeling of belonging related to the lifestyle that he can enjoy in Palermo, as the place where he has created his adult life, his independence and community of people/friends, also escaping (in some way) the everyday burden of taking care of others as well as the community's expectations. On the other side, his future plans back in his hometown and for his personal life. All of this is encapsulated within trajectories dictated by the migrant status: the need to leave Palermo to find a different job, the need to stay in Italy to sail straight. As Adama was planning on leaving Palermo to pursue better job opportunities elsewhere, the same had already happened for two other friends. Seka, the young Ivorian man I had met during the iftar in Piazza Santa Chiara, had left to join his girlfriend in Germany, where he had applied for another permit, as he could not find a proper job with a contract in Palermo. In the same way, Modue had left Palermo to go to the North of Italy, where he had found through some friends a job in the countryside with a good stipend and the possibility to register his residency, fundamental for the renewal of his permit and his attempt at getting a long-stay permit. Both Seka and Modue would come back to Palermo whenever possible to meet their friends and whenever we talked about the city, they would always long for that place they called home.

Saro too emphasised social life when talking about the city, underlining the possibility of engaging with many different people:

> "*So the thing that I like about Palermo is that every day I meet people. [...] Many people notice it, every time I go out with a friend, I meet at least - at least - three people that I know, always! [...] The beautiful thing is that in Palermo you also meet people from abroad, from Germany, Switzerland, France, America [...]*"[44]

In contrast to Adama, Saro is content with his job as an intercultural mediator, but he observes the precarity of it, with this precarity being the only reason why he would leave the city in which, otherwise, he would like to stay, putting Palermo and his hometown Tunis on the same plan.

> "*I love this job, I'd love to stay in Palermo, if there is work for sure - but there will always be work to do, this issue will never end. I cannot know what will happen in the future. I know today because I am alive, tomorrow? I don't know. I'm always in love with Palermo, even if I go. Even if I go somewhere else to live, it is always Palermo, my heart, Sicily, everything. So I hope to keep on living here. I would love to live my whole life in Palermo, if I find a honest job, always in my field of immigration. For instance, I worked for a cooperative for five months, without being paid. I got up at 6:30 in the morning, went to work until 2:30 p.m. and at the end of the month I had no money. The second month, same. (I need) money to pay the rent, to pay for food, and many things, so if I find a honest job, that gives me a stipend of 1500-1200 euros, in Palermo si può campare (you can live) [...] I can save money, but if there is no job I must find a place where there is work to do to grow [...] Palermo is and will always be my favourite city, even if one day I will go and live abroad, in another city. My holidays will be in Palermo, in Tunis. I'm not going anywhere else*"[45]

When I met Saro to interview him we sat down at a bar, in front of a proper beer for me and a non-alcoholic one for him. He was upset: he had had an argument with his mother. Pointing at his phone he told me that he was going to block every person from his hometown on Facebook, as someone had probably told his mother that he had been drinking alcohol, which, by the way, was not true. He ranted about how he was there to help anyone who needed it, but no one helped him, pointing to, though in a different way than

[44] From recorded interview, 15th December 2022
[45] From recorded interview, 15th December 2022

Adama, the burden of helping back home and the struggle between independence and family ties.

The issue of family and community expectations back in the hometown was a recurring theme, raised not only by Saro and Adama, but also during informal conversations: Madi, for instance, had explained how when they sent money back home, they do not mean the close (or nuclear) family, but the extended one, explaining how recently he had denied a large sum to an uncle back home because he did not want to make him dependant on him, deciding on a smaller sum, and he did not want for other people to ask him for money. Madi would also tell how back home the media do not show Ballarò in Palermo: they show Paris, Rome, London when Europe is represented and pictured in Africa and this is the image that people back there hold about Western places, creating higher expectations for those who eventually get to Europe: "the gleaming ideal of 'Europe' as an obscure object of desire" (De Genova 2016:76). Laughing, Madi told me that he once told his mother that people were rough sleeping in Italy and she would not believe that people exist that were too poor to have a roof over their head.

Among the people I met in Palermo, Awa was the only one who had been for a prolonged time outside of Italy: after he had been sent to a camp in the North, close to Vercelli, he had fled to Munich, in Germany, where he stayed for almost two years. He explained how in Germany they provided him with a permit for six months while the judge decided on his case; they gave him clear rules - "*they write everything on paper*"[46] - explaining where the school was, that he could work with that temporary permit (a main difficulty among many asylum seekers in Italy as the lawyer has to ask for a specific permit, otherwise the applicant cannot work throughout the wait for the judge's decision), €700 of pocket money - "*you know how much they gave us [in Italy]? €15 a week*", a house after the first two months in a camp. "They make you a good welcome" he said, although "*Maybe they are racist*"[47]. Awa had not been able to remain in Germany, because he was denied a permit of residency: his "system" as he called it, was open in Italy and he had to go back there. If he got a permit of residency there, then he would have been able to go back to Germany. He came back to Italy in 2017, when he started the procedures together with a lawyer in CLEDU to get his permit

[46] From recorded interview, 21st December 2022
[47] From recorded interview, 21st December 2022

to stay, six months to six months until he finally got five years leave to remain, just a week before our interview:

> "*All of these years, my dear, I'm always having permesso di soggiorno sei mesi, sei mesi (permit to stay six months, six months), ok? [...] before I was fucking crazy. If I tell you what I'm doing, what I do…so fucking crazy*"[48]

Awa's struggle for getting a permit had affected his everyday life, his mental health, his romantic relationship; he had starting partying and drinking and would look at me intently saying that he had "fucked around" and "made many mistakes". What he was describing resonated with a conversation I had had one day with Seka and Madi, who would tell about the bad habits that friends of them had fallen into, especially alcohol and drug consumption they were not used to, also as a way to get more integrated with the non-black young population in Palermo. At the same time, Awa had been able to get out of that situation, thanks to the friends he had made, most of them navigating around the solidarity network, with whom he had developed friendship. The network, intended as proximity of places and people, had been Awa's entry point to the city:

> "*I go there [to Moltivolti], take a coffee: I'm always sitting down and meeting someone 'Awa, do you want to join us?*"[49].

Awa had stayed in Palermo apparently for bureaucratic reasons only: "*Now I'm free*" he said, speaking about his new document. When I asked him what he was going to do, he started listing all the friends and options he had in several Italian and non-Italian cities, still he said that "*In Palermo, I think, if I have a good job here, I want to stay a little bit, I don't have problems.*" . On the other hand, Bai, when talking about his future in the city, expressed a quite straightforward opinion:

> "*No, I don't feel that I belong to this city, because what they make me understand is that, even I feel like I am part of it, in the end I am no part of it*"[50]

Bai's words expressed all his disappointment for feeling left out, betrayed to a certain extent, after all the effort he felt he had put into the several projects he had been part of, because

[48] From recorded interview, 21st December 2022
[49] From recorded interview, 21st December 2022
[50] From recorded interview, 30th December 2022

of possibly diverging opinions with the advisors' plans. Bai had come across the sea because he wanted to study in the UK, but now he does not think about that anymore, he says that he does not know anymore whether he wants to stay in Palermo or not, maybe he will go back to Gambia at a point "*to try and change things*" : his frustration with what he has encountered in Palermo is mirrored by the way he talks about Africa and African people, with good Africans being killed and "*stupid*" ones acknowledged by Europeans in charge.

Awa's and Bai's experiences of Palermo show a more complicated involvement and relationship than the one of Adama and Saro, possibly because of their increased difficulties, the former for bureaucratic struggle, the latter for political struggle. Still, these different stories point to the complex ways in which newly arrived migrants relate to different places, making choices out of restricted options.

5.3 Conclusions

Within this chapter I have looked into some ways in which migrants who have become part of the network of solidarity in Palermo navigate the city, looking at experiences of activism, experiences of working within the reception system and perceptions of belonging to the city.

The main aim is to push forward a more layered understanding of the experiences of first generation migrants, beyond the moment of arrival and border geographies, and by foregrounding migrants' own perspective (Tazzioli and De Genova 2023). In particular, by focusing attention on relatively well settled migrants navigating better opportunities than the majority of recently arrived (but also long standing ones) non-white migrants inhabiting Palermo, the aim is that of making easy binaries (e.g. victims/criminals) and categorizations (poverty, marginalisation, etc.) – imposed by both repressive states and humanitarian discourses (Dadusc 2017; Tazzioli 2018) uncomfortable. In this sense, this chapter seeks to provoke thought on the manifold subtle ways, beside openly violent operations, in which racialised borders creep through migrants' lives, dictating and limiting options. But it especially focuses on how migrants' subjectivities constantly navigate these borders, practically and emotionally, from strategic manoeuvres to open frustration (De Genova and Roy 2020; Genova 2021; Tazzioli 2020a). In this sense, the very choice of staying in Palermo, despite the multiple layers of restrictions this choice stems from, is part of an autonomous and subjective ranking of European geography (Tazzioli and De Genova 2022).

Each of these strands should be developed further, for instance, incorporating a gendered approach to these issues. Women's experiences are almost non-present within this work, not only because of their comparatively limited numbers, as it is often expressed by their male counterparts, but also due to difficulty in accessing this population. This difficulty comes from women's engagement in different spaces/places, different access to the city, different sets of added struggles, but also increased difficulties with finding a place for their own political voice. Still, their experience would add multiple layers of depth.

Despite participating in the network and their apparently better positioning within Palermo, these young migrants are still differentially included within its society (Danewid 2024; S M Hall 2021; Mezzadra and Neilson 2013), and often occupy the places which are made available for them. This is the case of those working as cultural mediators - ending up in the same complex and articulated system of places and economies making the infrastructure of reception - or such is the example of the Kirmal enterprise - becoming a flagship project which exploits the exoticism of migration tales and encapsulates them within the driving economies of Palermo.

At the same time, these options are strategically navigated for the migrants' personal trajectories and positions are used to potentially challenge how reception works from the inside. Restricted decisional power comes up strongly when it comes to participation in activism and the local political scene, with a recurring perception not only of the limited means migrant activists can count on, but also of the difficult fight for independence. One example of this is the strained relationship with white advisors, who are perceived to focus on money only, with scarce attention to the actual needs of the migrant community. This comes from a friction between an understanding of the manifold struggles and limits migrants encounter and a context where social provision is more and more delegated to a myriad of subjects which compete for scarce resources. These remain limited and mostly aimed at the success of few exceptional winners and flagship projects, more than at a wider empowerment and better organisation, if not subversion, of the reception system. These issues speak loudly to the widespread outsourcing of migration's management (Tazzioli and De Genova 2016), but also to every actor's embeddedness within a racial capitalist economy, which has to be negotiated daily, and which keeps in place strict hierarchies.

Within these unbalanced relationships, racialised borders embodied by the migrant intersect with other issues, such as a potential patronising attitude of some advisors. This speaks directly to the inevitably unbalanced relationship of solidarity, and to the importance of bringing the conflict and contradictions coming from our very different positioning within the racial capitalist state to the fore (De Genova and Tazzioli 2022). The difficult positioning of migrant associations within the broader activist network in Palermo emerges also in the difficult participation the former face when intervening in matters not immediately related to migration.

It is interesting how these perceived unbalanced relationships within the network were told without any reference to racism, and, in fact, oftentimes it seems more an issue of racialised limited possibilities imposed by multiple scales of politics/government, intersected with paternalistic approaches of subjects with more means, skills and racialised recognised entitlement (white entitlement). Even when racialised prejudices are reported, such is the example of housing in the previous chapter, racism is hardly mentioned. When Awa speaks about his German experience, he mentions that the country might be racist, but it is organised, in a way proposing that the place he is living in now might be not racist, but has a problem with organisation. Bai mentions racism, speaking about strained relationships between black communities and locals in Ballarò, but then when I asked him whether he felt that racism was present in Palermo, he flatly objected that racism was present in Gambia too.

Looking at the way these young migrants relate from an emotional and affective point of view to Palermo, their in-betweenness manifests further. On the one side this manifests through an intersection of feelings of attachment and belonging, developed through the ties they have built throughout the years in Palermo with other people participating in the network, both local and not, and with the other people on the move, transiting through Palermo and inhabiting the same spatial contexts. This particular coming together of several different people will be looked at more closely in the next chapter, where everyday mundane encounters and (non-)shared places will be taken into account. For these migrants who, in some cases, have transitioned to adulthood in Palermo, this city is the place where they have built their own community, created in some way their own independence and, in general, a different set of life than what they have left home. The hometown is often a place

where tight and sometimes demanding ties are lived at a distance with difficulty, sometimes also adopting a paternalistic gaze on relatives back home, which in part reminded me of the experiences of 'becoming white' told by Cesaire (2001) and Fanon (2021), though this gaze does not reject the hometown culture. Hometown is a place where some of these young people are investing money for different sets of projects and a place that some of them look at with renewed political understanding, especially after the 'European experience'. This understanding of the hometown, where some of them want to go back to at a point, coexist with the new home, which has given struggles, but also a new experience and new societal ties.

Finally, looking at the solidarity network from the urban ground and from the perspective of migrants participating in it, prompts a question on the practical discrepancy between affirmations of solidarity and everyday practices of it, especially when solidarity is co-opted within economic practices. This last point does not want to be a mere critique of the current system, but a reflection on the practical difficulties in challenging the current working of the reception system when radically autonomous practices are not put forward, with an open question on what this might mean.

CHAPTER 6 - WHO IS (NOT) A MIGRANT? EVERYDAY BORDERS THROUGH MUNDANE ENCOUNTERS, FLEETING CHATS AND NIGHTLIFE IN PALERMO

6.1 Introduction

The following chapter shifts the focus from the network of places and people, which I have referred to as the 'solidarity network' up until now, to the broader social, spatial, cultural context where this network exists. In particular, the context of Palermo's historical centre, increasingly transited by a multiplicity of people on the move, defined by growing touristification and a fast spreading nightlife and cheap leisure economy. In doing so the chapter focuses on the everyday life I conducted in Palermo as a 'student from abroad', outside of working hours, constantly chatting with a multitude of people from elsewhere and occasionally from Palermo, reflecting on how these encounters tell a lot in terms of the contemporary normalisation of a racialized and classed understanding of migration, mobility and the 'other' (Kunz 2020; Cranston 2017; Kunz 2017) .

Within an urban setting that potentially pulls together in the same space multiple places of different belongings, where fleeting contact with the stranger can be a norm or something to get used to, reflections are made here on: who has the power to choose when and where to engage or disengage with this encounter; the way access, which is already racialized and classed, can be made and unmade in the same place; and the ways the racialised migrant is limited to certain spaces and stories, compared to a vast array of migrants not categorised as such, whose access to the city and freedom of movement is given for granted. Through a collection of personal encounters, mundane chats, fleeting perceptions, the chapter wonders whether "are only the bodies of those who 'don't belong' formed and de-formed by the border, or the bodies of the ones 'who belong' too?" (Lafazani 2021:1147). It does so

from the specific contemporary context of Palermo, looking into the "being in the right urban place at the right time though this time might soon enough come to an end" (Kosnick 2018:9), put in motion by a conflation of processes within the historical city-centre that pulls together, though most of the times in a fleeting way, very different people that might not encounter each other elsewhere.

This chapter does not approach the urban as naturally producing politically relevant encounters through coexistence, but looks at everyday encounters as an interesting perspective on the contingent "[...] microbe-like, clandestine, and insignificant acts of everyday life, in which borders are renegotiated between the ones who belong and the ones who do not, when belonging is not conceived as a sense but as a socially constructed position that manufactures bodies, acts, and feelings" (Lafazani 2021:1144; Wilson 2017). In this sense, to talk about the 'racialised encounter' instead of 'encounter with difference' is fundamental in terms of bringing to the fore the relevance of racialised difference in the way it is rooted within a racialized and classed bordering society. It means contesting exposure to difference as naturally entailing politically progressive or challenging understandings, as this exposure happens within a still differential access to the city as rooted on the 'a priori' inequality that is constantly, historically, purposefully inscribed on the black body from an outsider's perspective. Finally, the encounters recalled within this chapter are not an exhaustive once and for all paradigm: many people are excluded from these stories, many more intimacies and particular relationships. For instance, the understanding of those more disadvantaged Palermitan inhabitants whose space within the city-centre is increasingly shrinking under the current economic/social/spatial transformations, or non-white women's practices of being in public spaces (for the reasons already explained throughout the thesis). In general, this chapter focuses on the personal encounters made within the international, mostly white, micro-community of people that moves within a part of the city-centre.

As in the previous chapters, this one is opened by a last fragment, describing a walking route through the city. If Hope's journey allowed us to follow her in her multiple commutes from the small village on the coast, where the community she was hosted in was located, to the central train station of Palermo, and then to some of the places which are part of the 'solidarity network', this chapter's fragment describes a lazy Sunday walk around the city centre on my own, accompanied by a friend, through places where discourses over home

and movement were constantly coming to the fore. Possibly more than in the previous chapters, the introducing fragment is meant to provide a sense of a particular atmosphere, that I came to think of as a sort of veneer, with the subsequent 'derive' framed as dissonances: 1) the informal, casual chats with people on the move explaining their experience of Palermo 2) social gatherings constructed around the racialised encounter 3) the stories that do not come to the surface or, when they do, make any overarching idea about entire cities and society uncomfortable.

6.2 Fragment 1 \ Lazy Sunday in Palermo

At the Monkey music has already started, like every Sunday morning. We stay for a while, watching people gathering and chilling, then head towards a place where we can have a cheap lunch: on our way, the guy appears again: he has different clothes, he seems less present with himself - I could really call him one of the ghosts of Palermo - he smells. He didn't smell a few months ago, and I guess it is because he has been sleeping rough for too long now, or he just doesn't care anymore. I slow my pace down. After the last time I don't want him to stop me, I don't want to interact with him.

We go back to Monkey, then stroll towards Ojda for a pineapple orange juice. I think Ojda is a Swedish word, I have no idea what it means: it opened a few months ago and is run by a couple in their late thirties. He is from Palermo, she is from somewhere in Sweden: they met in Berlin, where he was working as an architect and she as a designer, then moved back to Palermo and opened this place. Ojda's counter is covered in white tiles, the whole design is stylish, it makes me think of what North Europe looks like, or at what I think North Europe looks like. A group of foreign and fashionable young women are chilling in the sun at the small tables outdoors: a black girl with long dreads laughs and says: "*I want to tattoo 'I love Palermo' here!*"[51], pointing at her belly. Ojda is the hipster place par excellence, they mix products at kilometres 0, a boutique of crazy expensive - even from my relatively privileged, Italian middle-class perspective - capsule collections; waiters look like they have come out of a catwalk. We are in Piazza degli Aragonesi, at night this becomes one of the main areas of the Palermitan nightlife, but during the day it is the core of a myriad of small shops, showing an orange miniature of Palermo's city centre's plan: the symbol of ALAB, Associazione Libero

[51] Sentence from field notes, not recorded, 7th May 2023

Artigianato Balarm (Associations of Free Artisans Balarm), an association picking the Arab name of the city, gathering designers and artisans, who have colonised entire streets in the city centre from 2013 onwards, often creating work for many unemployed local professionals, especially architects. On their website they describe themselves as a micro economy "*Regenerating the Historical Town Center Of Palermo*" where "*Both residents of Palermo and travellers can enjoy this itinerary, discovering what is quintessentially authentic*"[52].

While I'm sipping on my juice Mario, a young journalist and photo reporter from Rome, approaches us. He says that the exhibition we wanted to go to is about to open for the last day - if we want to see it, we better move. The exhibition is in Palazzo Merlo, one of many, partly run down, former aristocratic palaces dominating the centre of Palermo. The exhibition is on the first floor, which is inhabited (owned or rented, I did not understand) by a French artist who has in that place her home and studio. The place is decadent and beautiful: scraped walls, floors and ceilings let out fragments of beautiful old decorations. Walls are covered with works of the participating artists, massive statues with Afro features stand out in the middle of the two main rooms; I ask Mario why the subjects are all African, he tells me the French artist's companion is Nigerian, and that the artist's work is hugely inspired by that culture. There is a grey statue laying down on the floor: Mario explains that it was part of a performance held during the vernissage, in which the sculpture was suspended from the ceiling within a net "*per mostrare che le rete cattura corpi, non soltanto pesci*"[53] (to show that the net captures bodies, not fish only). When we leave the exhibition the light is calmer, we stroll past Altrove (Elsewhere) - aperitivo time is starting and a Dj is playing soft reggae music - we turn in Via degli Schioppettieri, towards the Mojo CoHouse. Mojo is a lot of things, but to sum it up the website says: "*A meeting place for artists, digital nomads, travellers and families, located in the heart of the historical centre in Palermo*"[54]. They often host cultural events and this evening I got a ticket for a concert that is starting in one hour.

[52] https://www.alabpalermo.it/alab/?lang=en
[53] Sentence from field notes, not recorded, 7th May 2023
[54] https://mojocohouse.com/?lang=it

Close to Mojo, Maldusa, the new cultural association supporting free mobility that opened after I left Palermo in January, is open. I enter the small place covered in posters, books and colourful graffiti to say hi and chat with two of its members, two researchers and members of Alarm Phone, one coming from Central Italy, the other from the UK. Next to Maldusa, Mojo CoHouse has opened a new spot: 'la portineria di quartiere' (the neighbourhood reception desk) for tourists and inhabitants who need information about what is going on in the city. Indoor, an exposition of painted skateboards has been opened to raise funds for a new school of skateboarding in the city-centre, created by a Spanish skater and teacher who has been living in Palermo for the past few years. The office is closed, but the Bengalese handyman working for Mojo is there, he knows my friend and let us in.

It is almost 6:30 in the afternoon and almost time for the concert, in the upstairs rooms of Mojo. A young German woman invites us in, we go upstairs in one of Mojo's terraces and chat a bit, drinking a glass of wine: "*I should have stayed six months and now it is almost a year*"[55], she says at a point and I tell her that this is quite a recurring sentence here in Palermo. After a while the concert is about to start, my friend leaves and I take my seat. This evening La Famiglia del Sud (the Southern family) is playing, they're sister and brother: she sings, he accompanies her with the guitar. A friend of theirs, from Greece, is also present and plays the Lyra. Margherita's voice is something incredible and almost ancient. It makes me think of faraway hot shores. Francesco mixes Italian, French, English, Sicilian and his rhythm is highly influenced by reggae. The last song talks about travellers across the sea, the last part is Dyula: their Ivorian step brother wrote that bit for them. At the end of the concert, a Sicilian man, friend of Mojo's owner, is invited to play a song with his Ukulele. He comes from Palermo but has been mostly away for the last fifteen years: he plays a song on the saudade, the feeling of longing for home.

That night I slept at a friend's place, in the city-centre, as I was too tired to walk my forty minute walk home to my cousin's place where I was hosted during my stay. The next morning it was raining, so I enter a Tabacchi on Via Roma to buy a bus ticket. A black woman enters too: "*Mi scusi, un'informazione*"[56], she asks politely in Italian, and repeatedly, as both clerks seem to not notice her. I tell myself it is because of the thick piece of glass

[55] Sentence from field notes, not recorded, 7th May 2023
[56] Sentence from field notes, not recorded, 8th May 2023

separating the tobacconists from the customers. The woman then waits for her turn, she asks again "*Un'informazione, dov'è la questura?*"[57] (An information please, where is the main police station?), the tobacconist almost doesn't look at her and dismissively points with his head, 'di là' (over there) he replies flatly and he couldn't have been more generic: I know where the Questura is and an 'over there' wouldn't help anyone who doesn't know. She asks again, looking for further details, but doesn't get a different reply. There is a black man within the shop, waiting for the results of his 'gratta e vinci' (scratch card), he intervenes, giving the woman proper and clear directions. She thanks him and leaves.

6.2.1 Deriva1 \ "My apartment in Berlin was a hole with a view on the wall": Palermo city-centre as an intersection of people on the move

The fragment above is an excerpt of everyday life outside of the infrastructure of migration-related services and solidarity, which has been considered up until this point. Yet stories of migration subtend the whole of it, in many different ways, merging personal experiences and imaginations about the 'other', with the consistent absence of the same racialized body. This section follows some of the people I have encountered during my stay in Palermo, considering their reasons for staying in Palermo, their perceptions of the city. As seen in chapter 2 authors are increasingly looking at those categories of Western migrants, whose free - or at least simplified - mobility remains unquestioned within migration studies, observing how understanding these categories is fundamental to focus on the racialisation of mobility and to displace a constantly racialised and classed notion of 'migrant' (Kunz 2020; Cranston 2017; Kunz 2017). In this sense, I think it is interesting to shift, though briefly, the gaze from 'The migrant' in Palermo - as a predominantly non white disadvantaged person -, to all those other migrants - as a predominantly white person - , who have been attracted to Palermo by its comparatively cheap costs and calmer life. Together with the international community gravitating around the reception and solidarity network, they form that international network that the racialised migrants in chapter 5 were describing as an appreciated asset of the city.

Throughout my stay in Palermo, I have been surrounded by people who had stayed in Palermo for longer than expected: an Australian writer with Sicilian background, an

[57] Sentence from field notes, not recorded, 8th May 2023

American writer on a Fullbright scholarship researching about feminist Sicilian writers, a French student I met during the Ramadan in Piazza Santa Chiara who then fell in love with Ballarò and bought a ruined house there, an artist from Milan seeking new inspiration. When my US friend's visa was about to expire and she had to find a job if she wanted to renew it, she made a joke about how a friend had reminded her that, if her visa was to expire before she found a job, it was hardly possible that the police was going to check her on the street, the tacit hint being that she was white.

Conversations about movement and identity happened regularly. In May 2023, when I had just got back to Palermo from Sheffield, my French friend, Adeline - whom I had met the previous year during one of the Iftar in Piazza Santa Chiara - invited me to have lunch at Calessino, a 'trattoria'[58] which, in the months I had not been there, had become a fashionable spot to be for tourists and white migrants, also thanks to the weekly concerts and dancing nights that were bringing new customers to a previously mostly uncharted - if not for transit -popular area close to Ballarò. I joined Adeline and her group of friends, all French with the exception of an Italian young man. The French young woman sitting in front of me was a graphic designer who had been in Palermo for one month, but, as she could work remotely, was planning on staying for a while; the Italian PhD student, who was from Catania, had stayed in France for some time and then been living in Palermo for almost six years. When I mentioned that I had never had lunch at Calessino, although I knew the place and the area, the Italian student told us that it was the second time for him, that he had always been quite diffident in going around "*those more problematic areas*"[59] , but now that he knew people he felt more comfortable. As we started talking about how the city was changing, another French woman popped into the conversation, interested: she worked for a journal of geopolitics and wanted to write a piece about the connection in Palermo of multiple categories of migrants.

Leonie is a Swiss young woman in her mid-twenties who got to Palermo during a gap year and was volunteering in the refugee centre during my last months there. She had been working for a pharmaceutical company, a job that she despised because of personal ethical reasons. She had always wanted to visit Italy and had gathered money enough to leave for

[58] A more informal Italian restaurant
[59] Sentence from field notes, not recorded, 11th May 2023

some time: she told me she wanted to study the language - Italian - in the North, where she had stayed for a few months - but wanted to see the culture in the South, which is why she had come to Palermo. Leonie's perception was that sociality in Palermo was different: thinking back to her hometown in Sweden where migrant communities were mainly from Italy and Portugal, she said that every community stayed in their own bubble, with little communication between them. Her perception was that in Italy social engagement was easier, she pointed out that perhaps it was also a cultural matter: days back in Switzerland were far more organised and when work day ended everyone stayed in their own close network. The Italian context had helped her in this sense, she said, as she was quite a shy person. When I asked her if she thought that her background as someone from a 'good European country' had helped the process of networking, she recognised that she had felt at times, especially when first meeting her African friends, that they put her in a higher place within a sort of invisible ranking.

Giorgia was one of the first people I encountered in Palermo: she had come from the North of Italy, she defined herself as an artist and an independent researcher. When I met her she was working as a bartender but was looking for a small place to open her own studio. She referred to her hometown, a small city in the province of Turin, as a "*dead place*"[60]. She did not like Turin either and - she specified - even if she liked it she could not afford it, whereas in Palermo life was still affordable, although she described her life there as also precarious, especially for the increasing costs of housing. She would reflect on how the housing market was becoming ever more problematic for whoever was not a student or a professional.

Affordability, a desire to explore and dissatisfaction in a former hometown, research or work reasons, just the possibility of choice, explorations of migratory past, curiosity, fascination. The desirable migrants on the move that filled my days in Palermo were mostly young people between their mid-twenties and mid-thirties, and, without overgeneralization, belonged to a more or less precariously middle-class Western young generation, with most of them being single, independent people without families counting on them, inserted within an increasingly precarious and 'flexible labour market'. Their affordability in the city allowed them to enjoy the leisure and housing despite the increased costs; they moved freely, adapting themselves in the posh bar as well as in the street market, enjoying the

[60] Sentence from field notes, not recorded, 19th March 2023

ongoing transformations making even more space available for them, but also the contrasts of the city. Interestingly, thinking back to the openly racialised reasons provided by non-white migrants as the biggest hindrance in the access to housing, these people's preoccupation was mainly economic, with a constant underlying theme of lifestyle preferences, with both these reasons being epitomised in a sentence from a young editor born in Central Italy, who had moved from Germany to Palermo: gazing over the city's harbour from his apartment's terrace he had simply said: "*My apartment in Berlin was a hole with a view on the wall*"[61]. This population would cross the same streets as the non-white young men I have written about in chapter 5, they would cross paths, create friendships, share stories.

Across my first, long stay in Palermo I started meeting with a group of friends - at first they were mainly other researchers coming from elsewhere - the US, France, the UK, North or Central Italy, native Sicilians who had left for their studies and come back. As the meetings were focused on sharing ideas and discussing the latent conflict that we observed in the city, other people started to join, invited by different members. One night we gathered in Piazza Magione, Adeline and I had invited Seka, Moudou, Modue and Abou to join: as a group we were thinking about circulating a zine in the city, to talk - among the rest - about the commodification of hospitality, the touristification of the 'margin', and the increasingly anti-environmentalist choices of the current administration (the latter referred to the opening of a new docking place facing the city centre for cruise ships). During the meeting, Seka started sharing his history of precarious jobs in catering in Palermo, telling us of a particular occasion where a former employer had faked his signature without telling him to renew his contract without asking. Alessandra, an illustrator from Rome, immediately joined the conversation explaining how the same had happened to her. In that moment, Alessandra and Seka were meeting over an issue shared by many young people in Italy resorting to precarious, low paying jobs, as a main option, as it was the case for Seka, or as a parallel option to sustain something else, as in the case of Alessandra, who worked as a waitress to maintain herself and her dream of becoming an illustrator. Although, of course, Seka's and Alessandra's backgrounds were inevitably different, that moment was a significant meeting point on a shared issue.

[61] Sentence from fieldnotes, 2nd July 2023

Last time I was in Palermo, in July 2024, I was talking with Ginevra, a young woman in her late twenties from Palermo. She was talking about someone we both knew, a young man from Tunisia. “He worked for three months and then went back to sell weed!”. She told me how he did not want to work as a dishwasher or delivery boy - the only options he felt were available to him - as it was too tiring. “*What do you think I got when I finished high school and did not go to university?*”[62]. She reflected on how the city-centre, where she was living in, was becoming an impossible place to live in: “*On the one side you have a city that you fear entering, on the other hand a city that grows for tourists, who takes the heat? Us.*”. Within her discourse Ginevra was expressing many things, she was judging her friend’s choice as the easiest way, commenting how locals did not have many more opportunities, at the same time she was totally unacknowledging of how she was able to maintain herself thanks to the investment her parents had made for an Airbnb and her possibility to count on her family in case things were dire. Regarding the city she was expressing her astonishment for the increasing, or at least increased appearance of violence of those months: the increased petty crimes, beatings with clear racialized contours, the fast-paced spread of crack and its visible ghosts in the street (in this case, it is important to note that the topic is not new per se, but as seen in the previous chapters, campaigns have started to make people aware and now it is a heavily discussed topic also at national level). The young Palermitani I met throughout my stay had very different perceptions of this changing city: among those politically involved in some way in the city, some of them had left Palermo during their university years, they had gone to the North and come back with good experiences as well as many experiences of being stigmatised for their accents: they would be very uncomfortable with the increasing foreign presence that is eating the city - with this foreign presence being not related to non-white migrants, but to Western privileged migrants who were changing their places and the prices of the city (Fig. 23). Others were working in activities that heavily rely, if not directly cater exclusively to tourists, therefore their opinion was different. A friend in his forties explained to me at one point that he had grown up with a city-centre that was inaccessible and with Palermo constantly stigmatised on media, therefore he appreciated the fact that so many foreigners from across Europe were choosing to come and stay.

[62] Sentence from fieldnotes, 5th July 2024

The contrast between intersecting stories of different migrants from more or less privileged countries and locals, within a city that seems to have something to offer for who comes from a privileged elsewhere only, could shed further light on the racialisation of mobility, at many levels, taking into account not only the different experiences of white and non-white, racialised migrants, but also bringing into question Palermo's native inhabitants.

Figure 23 Where am I? What is left of the city in which we grew up? Where did all the others end up? And why did I choose to come back?

6.2.2 Deriva 2 \ Social gatherings tailored around the racialized encounter: Maldusa's aperitivo, Arte Migrante and Ciwara

Palermo is filled with recurring events that map into its 'multicultural and safe harbour image': events such as Mediterraneo Antirazzista (Antiracist Mediterranean), Arte Migrante (Migrant Art), organised by activists and/or volunteers, or events hosted in places like Maldusa, usually centred on spreading African culture, for instance through music and food, as a way to finance the association, or those launched by some migrant associations to celebrate specific moments - the end of the Ramadan in Piazza Santa Chiara, the anniversary of the Gambian Association, usually hosted at Itastra - the Italian centre for foreigners part of the University of Palermo. A separate discourse concerns Ciwara, the African restaurant located within the highly touristified neighbourhood of Vucciria, at the core of the city-centre, and a regular reference point for its jam sessions of African music and dancing nights.

These different moments/places gather young people from the African communities, but also Palermitani, tourists and the new inhabitants from elsewhere. Within this section I would like to reflect on these spaces of leisure as somewhat temporary, precarious and always inserted within that time that "might soon enough come to an end" (Kosnick 2018:9), which is given by the racialised and classed access to a city, whose transformations might make space increasingly unavailable and unaffordable. In particular, I am going to focus on the always changing arrangements within Maldusa, when it comes to organising events, due to its proximity to another leisure venue constantly expanding and reclaiming space; to the 'event' of Arte Migrante; and to a questionable choice made by Ciwara during a cultural event, which, for three days, suspended the participation of the black migrants who use that place as a gathering point in the city. Aside from Arte Migrante, which counts on the space offered for free by the Priest in Santa Chiara, within the neighbourhood of Ballarò, all the other places/events are located elsewhere, overlapping with the places and situations described in the fragment opening the chapter.

6.2.2.1 - Stepping out of Ballarò: the case of Maldusa

Already mentioned in chapter 4, Maldusa was born in October 2023 in Palermo, as a second branch operating together with an already existing station in Lampedusa. The place, opened by activists operating on no-border activities both at sea and at land, has started several services, such as a co-working area, a feminist and antiracist library, a radio station on "transfeminist, anti-prison, freedom of movement struggles"[63]. In addition to this, it hosts the weekly meetings of the Bayefall group, with food and music, plus an array of events, including book readings, film projections and roundtables.

Maldusa took a ground floor space with two rooms, next to the 'neighbourhood reception desk' opened by Mojo, mentioned within the opening fragment, whose owner owns the entire ground floor, included Maldusa's space. During the beginning of their respective activities, Mojo held weekly jam sessions on Tuesday, a small thing among friends, whereas Maldusa started hosting a weekly 'aperitivo' on Thursday, which remained at first mostly unattended if not for the white and black activists operating in the association. It became more popular as the day was shifted to Tuesdays, so that people would be attracted also by

[63] https://www.maldusa.org/palermo-station/

the jam session next door. For a few Tuesdays the streets were filled with young people, many belonging to the 'solidarity network', but also their friends and people in transit, together with young people from the black communities. Maldusa would sell beers and cocktails to collect some money for the association, and the people attending the Mojo's jam session did not have to look further for a drink as they could have cheap beers there. This situation lasted until Mojo realised the economic opportunity of opening the yet another leisure venue in the city-centre: before the summer 2024 they started selling beers on their own, and during the summer they renovated the entire space, taking back one of Maldusa's rooms, halving the association' space. I wanted to include this bit of something very recent to reflect on the temporal dimension of it. Maldusa made the specific choice of stepping out of Ballarò, as that neighbourhood was already overcrowded, and counted on the good relationship with the owner to open its space, which quickly became a gathering place outside of Ballarò for members of the black community. Still, in the arc of less than one year its space has already shrunk under the pressure of an expanding economy trying to increase its revenue.

6.2.2.2 - Arte Migrante: the event of meeting different cultures

The first time I met Leonie, the young woman from Switzerland, it was during an event of Arte Migrante (Migrant Art): Saro had invited her to come. Arte Migrante is an initiative born in Bologna in 2012, that then spread to other Italian cities and also abroad. It "organises weekly meetings that are open to everybody, aiming at promoting inclusion through art. It welcomes students, migrants, homeless people, workers, unemployed, young people and elders"[64]. In Palermo Arte Migrante had existed since 2016, then stopped during the pandemic: when I joined the organising team - made of activists and third sector workers operating in one or more of the realities described in chapter 5 - in November 2022 it was the first time they were coming back after Covid-19. In the end we were able to organise four evenings, with all four sessions taking place within the space of Santa Chiara, a monumental complex of buildings in the heart of Ballarò, whose spaces have historically been used for social activities by different communities. In the case of Arte Migrante, the setting is simple: colourful rugs, several instruments - guitars, bongos - speakers: people get together in a circle, one at a time the performer - whoever wants to share a piece of music,

[64] https://www.artemigrante.eu/en/indexen

dance, poetry, etc. - either goes into the circle or stays within it and shares what they want. Each evening, people are invited to bring something to eat and/or drink, with all these things being laid out on a series of tables in order to share a moment of refreshment and chatting during the afternoon/evening. Each of the four evenings of Arte Migrante were different: each time people would be different and the atmosphere changed accordingly.

The second evening, on the 24th of November, took place within an indoor room, so that spatially speaking the whole session was a little bit more constrained than the first meeting, which had taken place within the broad inner courtyard. A lawyer from CLEDU brought a group of newly arrived teens hosted in a community for non accompanied foreign minors outside of Palermo. They came by bus, they were all male and quite chaotic and unruly like any other group of teenagers. They spoke Arabic only, and a volunteer from North Africa spent the whole night translating everything said by us and them. Although the common rule was to circulate a board during refreshment for people to sign their name on and what they wanted to share, the evening soon became much less organised and more messy, with these young men taking the scene, taking turns at the phone connected to the speakers only to choose a piece of music and start dancing all together with the rest of the people watching them, some amused, some slightly annoyed. As an organiser I can tell that for sure that evening was quite demanding: we had to constantly remind them not to use their phone or speak by themselves when someone else was talking, and we constantly paid attention that the fun did not escalate too much. At the end of the evening, as usual, people left and the organisers stayed to clean everything up, exchanging a few ideas about the outcome: although the majority of the organisers were happy, albeit tired - and also quite moved by one of the kids, who had thanked everyone in the room for the evening - one of the team was not, as the evening had been too chaotic: "*If I'm looking for this kind of experience I go to Vucciria*"[65], referring to the neighbourhood within the city centre famous for the highly noisy, messy and unruly nightlife.

Although my experience of it was brief, Arte Migrante manifested as a moment of encounter which could change every time, depending on who was there. It was not necessarily a moment of inclusion where everyone could have a space, because things were more complicated - attendants would attune differently to different things, performances, people

[65] Sentence from field notes, not recorded, 24th November 2022

- and yet, it was a moment where space could be claimed, as shown by the young North African men taking the floor for a whole evening, almost indifferent to the rest of the audience. This also pointed to the potential absence of such a space for these newly arrived teenagers who could hardly connect, if not among themselves, as they did not speak Italian yet and did not even have a place, nor freedom to engage with it outside of their community's premises. In this sense the volunteer's preference for a quieter setting and her professed option of choosing where to go depending on what she was looking for was evidently not an option for those young men. At the same time Arte Migrante, which configured itself as a free and welcoming space for everyone in the city, was also a temporally limited moment, made alive by willing volunteers. As Leonie, brought by Saro, other curious people would come to enjoy 'something different', still for us it was just one option among many others.

6.2.2.3 - Ciwara, a gathering place for young black migrants

Ciwara is a Senegalese restaurant famous for its jam sessions and dancing nights. It opened in 2019 in the heart of Vucciria.d. As previously mentioned, Vucciria is one of the areas in the city-centre distinguished for its vibrant, messy and chaotic nightlife: formerly one of the old markets in the city, it manifests the ongoing urban transformations as well as the complex socio-cultural, resisting setting were these transformations are taking place. With the market stalls progressively substituted by restaurants and souvenir shops, Piazza Caracciolo, the square where Ciwara is located, bustles with life: throughout the day the square is invaded by small tables of the many makeshift and more stable catering places, the smoke of grilled fish going up to the main street of Via Roma. On the dilapidated housing the mural of Emanuele Burgio, killed in 2021 because of a feud between mafia families, tops the square: '*Manu you will always be in our heart, the boys of Vucciria*' written around his portrait. Strings with black and pink small flags, the symbol of Palermo soccer team, cover the whole square.

When I asked Adama what he thought about Ciwara, as we were doing his interview not far from that place , he replied:

> "*It is a good thing. If there were many places like that it would be good. It's good thing not only because for us foreigners it is a bit of a gathering place (landmark) [...]*

but also because it's a foreign place where many people go, Italians [...] so it means that it's seen differently, I mean, there are foreign restaurants where not even Italians go or they are defined as dirty, or, they are somewhat crossed-eyed at. On the contrary everyone goes here, so it means that it is seen in a positive way [...]"[66]

During the day and the evening Ciwara serves as a restaurant, providing a gazebo that shelters a series of tables from the hot sun; the decor - the lamps inside, the fabric of the table runners - replicates African patterns and colours. Dishes are mainly Senegalese; drinks and cocktails, with a wide choice of non-alcoholic ones, are sweet and have the exotic taste of ginger or hibiscus.

Most times, I would go there on Sunday evening, for the music and jam sessions organised by the band of DouDou, the Senegalese owner. Jam sessions would start while people having dinner, the rhythm of the drums and Doudou's voice filling the square, small crowds starting to gather around the tables, watching and keeping the rhythm almost unconsciously. All of this would go on until eleven o'clock, when, precisely and mercilessly every Sunday, disco music would start loud from two or three different make-shift cocktail counters situated in all corners of the square. The music would grow, overwhelming: that moment - as dictated by a silent law or arrangement of the square's rules - would signal for DouDou to stop playing, waiters would start pulling tables and chairs inside, Ciwara would start playing dance music too from the indoor space, people would start dancing inside and outside of the restaurant. Sometimes young black men would start freestyling, with people crowding around to cheer them on. On a particular Sunday night it had been raining the whole day, so that the square was relatively empty and aside from Ciwara the other places were shut down. The concert started as usual, Doudou introduced a song telling about his country, his family and history. While he was singing, the small bunch of people surrounding the place started growing. Tourists, young Palermitani, young black men. In front of the band people of all ages started dancing in pairs or on their own. Then eleven o'clock came, signalled by the small chioschetti[67] scattered around the square, which promptly started their music, insanely loud, overcoming Doudou's band. This time though the crowd was there only for Doudou's band, they wanted their music, they wanted to dance. A 'booo' started and

[66] Excerpt from recorded interview, 30th December 2022
[67] Chioschetti are mobile, make-shift counters

increasingly raised, a white woman playing in the band mimicking an orchestra director, inciting a louder 'booo' until the music from the chioschietti stopped and the band went on to give a proper conclusion to the concert.

The relationships built around Ciwara are difficult to grasp, it is a gathering place for many young people (especially men) of the migrant community, who, also because they know the owners and employees, can hang around the place without necessarily purchasing drink or food. It is a place which builds on the precise intent of sharing African culture, inevitably commodifying it as an exotic novelty and quite unique case within the whole city. The restaurant, jam sessions, and dancing nights are shaped in a way that attracts fleeting engagement within a moment of leisure, which is also what is praised by Adama in the sense that the Ciwara is indeed able to disrupt assumptions about 'foreign restaurants', in the way it has been shaped to cater to Western people. Still, people seemed to organise around the Ciwara in precise ways: customers enjoying dinner would sit at the tables in front of the facade, Doudou's band would be on the door. Attendants without drinks would gather around the tables to listen to the music, but most black people would stay on the side, lining along the corridor that leads to the restaurant from the street, almost as if they were just casually hanging out there. Some of them would actually get closer once dinner was over, tables were removed and dancing started.

In December 2022 Ciwara organised and hosted the four-day festival 'La mia Africa' (My Africa), "The festival, promoted by Africa Djengu aps and Ciwara [...] with the support of the Council of Cultures of the Municipality of Palermo, is a project that wants people to discover and retrieve African culture, as African people know it, with their words, their music, their thoughts"[68].

The opening panel took place within an unusual scenario: the whole outdoor pertinence of the restaurant had been enclosed by metal grid panels so that entering the space could be controlled. In fact, if the opening panel was free, the other events of the festival entailed a fare for participating in the lunch or dinner concerts and in the workshops. The festival should have been opened by the new right-wing Major Roberto La Galla, but both him and the Deputy Major had forfeited. The panel hosted a Palermitan researcher in History and

[68] https://www.comune.palermo.it/accade-a-palermo-dettaglio.php?id=824

Institutions of Africa from the University of Palermo, Doudou - the manager of Ciwara - a black lawyer, the President of the Assembly of Cultures and a black third-year student from Political Science and International Relationship of the University of Palermo. The discussion was around the politics in Africa, colonisation and possible scenarios of political and economic enfranchisement, also making parallels between Africa and Sicily on the basis of a shared history of emigration and exploitation. Chairs were almost empty, with very few attendees, part of them being the young employees of the restaurant. Although a few black people were sitting within 'the enclosure', young black men were watching the event from outside, sitting on the fountain in the middle of the square.

When the panel and session of Q&A ended, I approached the moderator, and we exchanged a few words. I asked her how come there were so few people: she replied sarcastically that that was because when things are organised by African people they are not important, they only know how to have fun, pointing to what she thought was the general perception within the city. Still, in the days later, speaking with both white and black friends, I discovered that most people did not know about the event, and especially my black friends had not joined because of the cost.

As a place that was able to cater to both the African communities and everyone else, Ciwara was quite a unique case. Still, as one of very few public gathering places for the young black community, the ease with which it momentarily ceased to exist as such, albeit momentarily, creating a physical and economic barrier, made the belonging of the black young migrants questionable and not granted.

6.2.3 Deriva 3 \ Piercing the bubble: hidden stories, missed encounters, defiant bodies

Within this last section I want to briefly reflect on some 'things' that blatantly made the suspended 'bubble' atmosphere portrayed in the opening fragment feel even more off. This section focuses on 1) the hidden stories of those young migrants who have been protagonists of the previous chapters and who navigate daily the social, cultural, spatial context described within this chapter, 2) the missed encounters as moments where engagement does not challenge the reproduction of racialised assumptions and 3) the defiant bodies that occupy space, forcing, even if for a moment only, discomfort.

My point here is to reflect on the one side on the impossibility, frailty and problematics of shaping overarching, acritical images about places and people (e.g. in this case, the city of Palermo, Sicilian culture, Southern hospitality). On the other hand, once again, it is about looking into the manifold ways in which racialized hierarchies can be kept in place in our everyday lives, for instance looking into which stories are able to come to the fore and which are taken for granted; into how repeated proximity does not immediately entail a renewed understanding of the other (Lafazani 2021); and into how rage and the enraged body manifest the dissonance above whatever politics of repression and/or claim of solidarity.

6.2.3.1 - Hidden stories

> "*My dream was to go to Europe and discover a new culture, new people, learn a new language. This has always been my dream. Then, when the Arab Spring came, in a day I thought of leaving*"[69]

Saro had dreamt of Europe since he was a kid and to discover this new country and new people he left in 2011, when he was 17, on a boat from Tunis. He got to Lampedusa after almost 24 hours of travelling by sea. Sicily had not been his dream, France was, where he had family, but since he was a minor he had to remain in Italy.

Bai wanted to study in the UK, "*a country where they talked my language, English, where I could have integrated immediately, this is what brought me here*"[70]. Together with friends he reached Libya and then they were "*lucky to cross the sea*": in Gambia it was not possible to ask for a student visa, he said:

> "*many friends of mine did that [they tried to get a student visa in Gambia] and nothing happened and they have only lost money. But a friend of mine who is now in Bologna, the same thing happened to him. He too convinced me to come through this journey*"[71]

To go and study in the UK, in fact, he had been asked to state how much money he had in his bank account, on which Bai commented:

[69] From recorded interview, 15th December 2022
[70] From recorded interview, 30th December 2022
[71] From recorded interview, 30th December 2022

> "*One who wants to go and study, a young person, a student, if you ask them how much money they have in the bank, it means that you do not want for them to come, because a student doesn't have anything, they have never worked!*"[72]

On the other hand Awa, Adama, Abou had not planned on leaving Africa. In fact they had been living their life, Abou worked in transport in Gambia, Adama and Awa had reached Libya to work thanks to friends who had told them about the job possibilities and good money offered by that country. Adama had left the Ivory Coast after the civil war started, he would tell me the details about the conflict between the North and the South of the country, the ambivalent workings of the West within the country's politics.

Awa had been travelling through several countries, he said he had always had a curious mind and wanted to travel like his father - a man with no formal education who knew thirteen languages - did. Adama, Abou and Awa were forced to leave Libya once the civil war started, after the death of Muammar Gaddafi, as crossing the border to go back to their country was not possible anymore, and the route across the sea was perceived as safer.

Saro, Adama, Bai, Awa and Abou all have different stories; stories which are far more complicated than the usual framing of "forced migration". Many of these stories of migration are indeed forced, as these young men's choices had been constantly shaped and constrained by the geopolitical games between the West and the Rest, which all of them ultimately challenged through the act of travelling across the Mediterranean. The subtle workings of global racialized hierarchies had been a fundamental part of their lives long before they got to Italy: they had moved and made choices among and through these racialized borders that started way before their arrival.

And yet these stories, whatever lies behind these young men in Palermo, get lost through the flattening attribution of the migrant status, which already comes with a predefined story, that doesn't allow neither for the mundane life choice preference, nor for the contextual and critical understanding of circumstances and histories within African countries. In this sense, talking back to the opening fragment, the specificities of their individual stories is translated by the white public's understanding into a generic piety shaping the death in the sea, as portrayed in the imaginative work of the French artist or the songs of the band

[72] From recorded interview, 30th December 2022

Famiglia del Sud. The migrant's existence, flattened by the white outsider observer, becomes a fascination, an imaginary, the "patronising fantasy of the white man's burden" (Danewid, 2017:1675). The nuances of these young men's choices do not even surface within the workings of the multiple associations working in solidarity, as their fights - as expressed in chapter 4 - are still still stuck on the sea, on the right to survival, and on land, on the right to exist as equals.

And yet, what would mean for these stories to come to the fore? When I went back to Palermo in May 2024, as a teaching assistant to a group of students from the US for a course titled 'The Geopolitics of Borders: From Security to Solidarity in Sicily', the whole month was organised around meetings with activists, journalists, lawyers and so forth, all involved with some kind of migration-related activity. The white interlocutors centred, from their various perspectives, their discourse on death and human rights, on the systemic violence of borders and Europe. When the students met Modue, who came to speak for the Gambian Association, and, one day later, Amat, speaking for the Right2Be movement, together with two other members, the perspective was immediately shifted. "*I did not flee from war, I wanted to pursue higher education*"[73], this is how Modue, who today balances a life as a university student, assistant cook and activist, introduced himself to the students. Before getting in a story similar to those collected in chapter 5 - of being moved from one CAS to the other, working in the countryside to get some money and being lucky enough to find someone, who took him at heart and fought for him to go to school - he recalled the long trip from Gambia, across Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso with their multiple checkpoints, he recalled the lost money, the months for getting enough to move on to the next step; the trip - deadly for many - across the desert in Niger, and the camps in Libya. In a weirdly ironic tone he simply said at a point "*You're young, you want to go places and Europe for me was like paradise*"[74].

In the same way, Amat and other members of Right2Be hosted the students in Giocherenda, a shop of African fabrics and association promoting African culture through games, that was born in 2017 out of a series of workshops organised by international artists. "*What did you have to do in order to come to Italy?*"[75] asked Amat to the students, who looked puzzled,

[73] Sentence from field notes, not recorded, 9th May 2024
[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid.

proceeding to explain what someone in Gambia has to do if they want to go and study in Italy: the trips to the Italian embassy, the limited number of available visas, the money lost for each time this procedure is attempted. Both Modue and Amat produced a shift in discourse at that moment, in a sense providing their audience with something paradoxically more absurd than violence, that is the fact that they were not poor helpless victims.

6.2.3.2 - Missed encounters

When I started volunteering at breakfast at the refugee centre, the climate was often tense: Covid 19 restrictions were still in place, we would serve breakfast in the courtyard of the building, a beautiful old structure which on the other hand was not designed for many people to stay and consume food and drinks. In fact the courtyard lacked tables, and only a couple of benches were present. Us, volunteers, would stay within a room, which opened on the courtyard, with more than half of the opening blocked by a table where food was displayed. A plastic panel would prevent people from touching food. Each morning, users would wait for the main door to the courtyard to open, then stop at a table where a volunteer would take their name (even if breakfast is one of the few services that do not require being registered at the centre, numbers and names of users were still collected to produce data about the use and necessity of the service), finally they would wait in line for their turn, at which point they would try to point to the food they would like to eat (a manoeuvre rendered at times difficult by the plastic panel), proceeding to have breakfast while standing or taking a place on one of the benches.

At times, things would become tense: some older volunteers would have harsher or rude and patronising manners while giving food and users would become upset. Then practical inconveniences might occur, an example being hot milk poured in plastic cups that became too hot to handle (paper cups had been in use for a while but were too expensive and had not been bought again) and made the whole process difficult in the absence of anywhere to put the cup. Volunteers at breakfast would usually be middle-aged and older people, always present, plus a couple of younger people, usually those volunteers on the move, that were not meant to stay for a long time or that talked little Italian.

Towards the end of April 2023, when Ramadan started, while we waited for someone to come and open the door for us, an old volunteer had explained to me that few people would

have come for breakfast from that moment onwards, as many of the users were Muslims. If they come, she said, it is probably to get milk for the night. It was not entirely true, as people continued to come, even though they usually asked for something they could eat later. Some other volunteers had started to bring dates, which were much appreciated. The old volunteer had talked about Ramadan as something nonsense, as the whole religion, a religion based on fear.She would go on telling me that after all that deprivation, people observing Ramadan would get drunk in the evening as there was no other day. "*And can you imagine that I met people who have actually collected money an entire life just to go once to La Mecca?*"[76] she asked, shocked, before moving on about how Jehovah's Witnesses refuse blood transfusion.

The old volunteer was a retired person living outside of the city centre, she would come in every morning by car and in the same way she left. Her community was not there, she had probably no clue about the experience of Iftar as it was simultaneously happening during those days in Piazza Santa Chiara, just five minutes walking from there.

The old volunteers' comments were often infused with paternalism and embodied preconceptions about the 'other'. A man coming each morning to deliver food for breakfast - leftovers from bakeries nearby - was standing next to me on a day I was not behind the plastic wall. We were looking at people getting past the 'sign-in desk', the man was talking about how young men coming from the East have a sort of genetic violence within. A black man came through and walked towards the breakfast spot "*The blacks from down under, not those from up, they're different*"[77]. He pointed at the black man walking "*the other time he went past the reception, he was not listening and when I touched him (to stop him) he went like 'don't touch me!', now we say hi to each other*"[78].

The older volunteers' comments interestingly pointed to the Italian foreclosure of race, which becomes embodied - with racism disguised as mere matter of 'cultural difference' (Hawthorne 2021; Lombardi-Diop and Romeo 2012) -, intersecting a humanitarian approach to the suffering victim.

[76] Excerpt from field notes, 3rd April 2022
[77] Excerpt from field notes, 22nd March 2022
[78] Ibid.

Most frequent comments regarded how users were often 'picky', about the food, but especially about the clothes. In fact, within the same courtyard, the 'bazaar' took place every morning: users could access it twice per month to get clothing and housewares. Again, because of Covid-related restrictions, users were not able anymore to enter the building and choose clothes by themselves: they had to tell volunteers what they wanted. Volunteers would then enter, get potential items and display them on the outdoor tables where the users would check what they did or did not want. Users, especially at the bazaar, would often try to circumvent strict rules, for instance they would avoid the strict old volunteer and try to wait for one of the younger and more malleable ones. Those who got caught would be reprimanded as children. At the same time, everytime a user would thank volunteers for their service, older volunteers would praise them. Although Centro Astalli describes itself as a laic structure inspired only by the ideas of Jesuits and denies 'assistenzialismo' (welfarism), being theoretically aimed at the users' empowerment, services are built and managed around the gesture of provision which requires gratitude, although dynamics change drastically when young people of the civil service or young foreign volunteers are involved, pointing also to a generational issue at play.

The centre for refugees was a place of multiple sets of different relationships and this excerpt does not intend to be exhaustive. Also, within this section I am not interested in the centre per se, but on those people that the centre put me in contact with, whom I would have not encountered otherwise. With these people, who joined the centre from somewhere else in Palermo, those embodied racialised assumptions and behaviours engrained within our constantly 'othering' society came in, showing a slice of population that was almost completely disengaged with the rhetoric produced by the city and a part of its inhabitants. These old volunteers were middle-class retired or unemployed Palermitani whose engagement with the other was based solely on an act of benevolence rooted on religious or bourgeois patronising. In the same way, I would guess this common (non)understanding whenever I left that part of the city to go back to my cousin's place within another area of the city, 40 minutes walking from the city centre, where the major encounter with the racialized other was that between middle-class people shopping for groceries and the black men helping with carrying heavy shopping bags for 50 cents to one euro.

6.2.3.3 - Defiant bodies

Ultimately, the bubble portrayed within the opening fragment exploded, such is the case of the ‘ghost’ of Palermo: this young black man I met for the first time in September 2022, when summer was about to finish. Almost every evening he would walk through Via Discesa dei Giudici towards Piazza Sant’Anna - where I was hanging out with friends most of my evenings - asking for money. With his very tall and slim figure, he would linger, waiting and staring, even after people told him they had nothing to give. Once he entered Ojda in the early evening, while customers were having aperitivo, asking for something to eat. He wanted chips. People behind the counter remained frozen, customers gave him fleeting glances; Agnes, the Swedish baker, came out of the kitchen holding a dish with a few bits of focaccia, which he refused. As the situation seemed stuck, I told him that I could show him where he could have some chips, but when I started giving directions, he looked at me and bluntly asked me whether I was paid to tell people where they could eat.

Nightlife in the city-centre was filled with roaming figures asking for money or street vendors, the latter usually coming from South Asia, selling lighters, rolling papers and filters, moving from one pub to the other. After months in Palermo they had become recurring encounters, we would say hi to each other and recognise each other's face, but the tall man did not even attempt to engage with the repertoire of ‘good manners’ that many people asking for money would use: his presence momentarily bothered the atmosphere and, although the uncomfortable moment was a fleeting one, it was a sort of glimpse of something off, just like a ghost, before things could back to normality. I never knew anything more about him, his silent rage and progressively less stable behaviour touching me and keeping me at a distance, still his presence was a constant reminder of something going on that no one talked about.

Now that I am writing this chapter rage in Palermo is taking another, more organised form, apparently. On the night of the 4th March of 2023 a young Gambian man was stabbed in the street and died after more than two weeks in the hospital, with no official news about the fact until his death. This is far from being the first violent act involving non-white individuals in Palermo and yet the response was different than other times, as all the migrant associations came together to protest in the streets, their demands not being only to shed

light on what had happened and to have justice for a member of their community, but to shout against the constant criminalization and racialization of the migrant community in Palermo. As in the case of the protest 'Palermo, Capital of denied rights', this protest is telling a different story about the city. I was not there, but followed the events through the stories of my friends. Chatting with some of them, there is a recurring feeling on how Palermo is changing, dissatisfaction is being manifested more broadly, openly and more harshly. That protest brought whispered and privately shared reflections, at least a part of them, in the street, with bodies and voices materially challenging whatever attempted narrative about the city. Media coverage, which in March focused on the protests, is now shifting the discourse, following local politicians but also Palermitani working and living in the city centre, on the need for increased securitization of the historical centre. Still, the march organised for Kitim's death was probably the first one where all the black migrant associations have taken such a public stance with respect to their own city.

6.3 Conclusions

If the previous chapters have been preoccupied with the manifold ways multivarious racialised borders shape everyday life in Palermo; how they are simultaneously reproduced and navigated by the racialized migrant within the interplay of repression/solidarity, this last chapter's aim was that of shifting the gaze to the broader context of the safe harbour city of Palermo. In this sense, each section of this chapter contributes further to a reading of the city which makes the overarching notion of safe-harbour or solidarity city (Fischer and Bak Jørgensen 2021; Mayer 2018) limited, contesting the idea of an immediate prevalence of "solidarity bonds and coexistence" (Agustín and Jørgensen 2019:199).

Interestingly, but perhaps not surprisingly, the lives and trajectories of the white migrants and natives depicted in the first section of the chapter and the lives of the racialised, non-white migrants portrayed throughout the three empirical chapters are both tightly connected to broader processes of social, cultural, economic restructuring, and yet the latter are those which remain 'in place'. Their specific and restricted ways, due to racialized and classed reasons, of engaging with public spaces remain unacknowledged and unquestioned. As recursively repeated throughout the chapter, understandings of the racialised, disproportionately black migrant subject remain stuck on the sea, shaped in the spectator's

piety or imagination (Danewid 2017). Their forced presence in Palermo - which might become a choice at a point - is never put into comparison to the multiple subjects on the move (Kunz 2020; Cranston 2017; Kunz 2016). Within this chapter, the international network and abundance of space and moments for encounters and networking which was praised by young migrants such as Adama and Saro, is not diminished but looked at in the ways these spaces for encounter are never to be given for granted, and in the ways these are shaped exactly as moments where to meet the 'racialized other', one of many options for many white attendants, a set of quite restricted options for non-white ones.

The liberatory dance of the young teenagers was allowed by the re-activation of Arte Migrante; Ciwara, navigating between a gathering place for the black community and commercial activity for the leisure of the 'paying others', where fame comes from the brandization of an exotic product and atmosphere which is unique in the city, suspended attendance of most of its regular customers for four days, disproportionately affecting young black migrants. These events, together with the other portrayed in the chapter, also speak to that commodification of diversity in cities (van Eck et al 2020; Hackworth and Rekers 2005; Hatziprokopiou et al 2016; Shaw et al 2004), which in Palermo clearly feeds into the safe-harbour narrative.

At the same time, the weird positioning of Ciwara, although difficult to capture, manifested on the one hand through its consolidated role outside of the traditional black community space in the city, Ballarò, on the other hand through the way that role was fixed within its leisure scope, as was shown by the almost total lack of participation to the event. Interestingly, the lack of participation was also on the side of the black community, probably pointing to the difficulty in creating significant discourse if not participating in the network. Both Ciwara and Arte Migrante, also, were freely navigated by white consumers, the potential suspension of these spaces being non relevant to them.

Reflecting on the words and opinions expressed by the older volunteers at the refuge centre was interesting: even though we were spatially within the part of the city on which all the images around multiculturalism and hospitality are grounded and generated, within one of the main centres of the solidarity network, those people were completely disengaged from the broader micro culture and community within which the network is embedded. This is

relevant within a more complex understanding of who engages with particular images, atmospheres and scenarios of the city - in this sense I want to stress that the city centre too does not work as an homogeneous bubble, as what has been described here is just a micro-community existing within a broader social context. Furthermore, the different perspectives shared by different white individuals within the chapter speak to the way racialised assumptions are embodied and performed within mundane moments (Lafazani 2021; Wilson 2017). Interestingly, although the older volunteers (section 7.2.3.2) and the artists portrayed in the opening fragment speak from a 'different culture', they both are examples of how the patronising white gaze is reproduced (Danewid 2017).

This diversified understanding also provides a clue about how fleeting imaginaries without politics, radical or not, have limited reach. The fleetingness of images, for as much as they can perform - and they do perform, as seen throughout the chapters with the proliferation of events, places and projects whose economy builds on hospitality - is signalled also by the current changing tone and words of the migrant associations and the perceived feeling of how things are changing. These changes accompany the physical changes of the city, the never resolved, nor addressed structural inequalities, which today are treated again through a securitarian lens only. The conflation of the safe harbour city with the touristic city is indeed providing an intersection among different people, who all make a living within increasingly precarious conditions but still comparatively better than the places they have left, still this intersection does not immediately entail a progressive politics of the 'other', as racialised borders are indeed imposed not only on the black body but also shape the white, unacknowledging gaze.

CHAPTER 7 - DISCUSSION : FOREGROUNDING ORDINARY CONFLICT AS 'ANTIPOLITICAL' STRUGGLE WITHIN RACIAL CAPITALISM

7.1 Introduction

Drawing on the conceptual framework laid out in chapter 2 and the empirical material on which this project builds, the current chapter engages with the research questions that have guided the project: each question explores the multifarious ways racialised borders extend beyond the extra-ordinary geography of the borders, into the urban realm, and how racialised migrants navigate them. In this sense, this project has sought to expand critical border scholarship by adopting an urban perspective and by centering the focus on migrants' direct experience, responding to a call for "seeing from the critical standpoint of migration" (Tazzioli and De Genova 2023:5)". The project also contributes to a growing scholarship that centres racialised borders within approaches to migration and cities (Georgiou et al 2022; S M Hall 2021; Lafazani 2021; Arapoglou 2012).

In answering the research questions, a main theme has emerged, which subtends the three empirical chapters, that is the need for an approach that refuses the different binaries produced by the current European and Italian management of migration, but also by part of the academic knowledge production on the subject. This chapter suggests an approach that is attentive to the nuances, to the grey areas, to the variously concealed conflictual practices. An approach that is also attentive to the ways these conflictual practices are navigated by racialised migrants along ubiquitous borders.

Starting from here – and focusing especially on the relationship between racialised migrants and solidarity actors - the chapter reflects on Ida Danewid's concept of 'antipolitics' (2024), to imagine 'foregrounding conflict' as an 'ordinary' antipolitical manoeuvre from within a racial capitalist system. A fundamental aim of this is to reflect on how foregrounding conflict might open up for creating a ground for common struggles among equals. This imagination starts from the ground of Palermo as a European inner South with its own history of racialised struggles. In this sense, this project has tried to expand critical literature on contemporary migration, focusing on a relatively under-represented geography, which is becoming increasingly important for its position as an external border.

Finally, the chapter considers what it might practically mean, in this moment and from the ground of Palermo, to openly and actively engage with conflict.

7.2 Answering the research questions

The research questions guiding the project changed consistently during and after the fieldwork. The final questions explore how the mechanisms described by critical border scholars at the European geographical borders are enacted from an unexceptional urban perspective, beyond arrival. This shows how multiple levels of border governance intersect with local politics and multifarious solidarities, while also considering how this interplay - and migrants lives accordingly - get embedded within a multiplicity of other ongoing urban processes, looking at what these intersections can tell.

This is looked at from the perspective of a city that has built its entire image on the concept of 'hospitality', being recognised widely by public discourses but also academic research, despite the more critical voices that are starting to emerge. A central aim has been, within this critical, situated postcolonial approach to European migration management, to bring migrants' experiences to the fore, not only in the way they negotiate daily racialised borders and restricted options, but also in the way they actively produce political voice and space, and also simply in their affective relationship with a city and its contradictory context.

In the following, led by the research questions guiding the project, I will pull together the main points raised within the empirical material, linking them to the research gaps and conceptual debates discussed within chapter 2.

7.2.1 *How does the European racialised border regime embed itself within everyday life in Palermo? And how is it navigated by racialised migrants?*

This question's aim has been mainly that of expanding the work produced by critical border scholars from an urban perspective, following the example of authors who are increasingly adopting a 'border perspective' in their approach to migration and cities (Georgiou et al 2022; Hall 2021; Lafazani 2021). Critical border scholars describe migrants' experiences of European borders as one of containment intended as continuous disruption - through forced immobility, hypermobility, confinement - aimed at constantly hampering and wearing migrants out (Tazzioli 2020a; Tazzioli and Garelli 2020). This is especially read in geographical

and statutory terms. But how are these processes 'urbanised' and how do they intersect with other forms of dispossession? (Georgiou et al 2022; Hall 2021).

In chapter 4, the stories of arrival of Bai, Awa and Saro have been clearly mapped within the process of containment operated by the Italian reception system. The suspension of their lives verbally expressed in their recounts, while they waited, confined and dispersed in the Sicilian countryside. Awa and Saro's experiences were also marked by the disorganisation and corruption of different types of reception, reflecting a national widespread issue connected to the privatisation and absence of controls within the Italian reception system (Colucci 2018; Accardo 2018; Avallone 2018). Awa was most probably hosted in a CAS, Saro in a centre of reception for unaccompanied minors - hosted together with local minors with different backgrounds, from those escaping troubled families, to those being detained for minor crimes. This also points to the lack of adequate structures for vulnerable populations in Italy.

On the other hand, Hope's history in the same chapter exposed a different way in which these measures operated. She was not held in the first reception system, but in a shelter for mothers and children, outside of the city. She did not risk losing her permit, as that was linked to the kids who were born in Italy, and yet her life story was one of repeatedly appearing and disappearing from the solidarity network. She had started seeking jobs again once brought to the shelter after escaping from an abusive relationship, and she was hyper-mobilised, travelling back and forth to Palermo, to seek a job, a house, mere information, then a lawyer. Hope needed a job to get herself and her children out of their precarious situation: she would come to the job desk to look for the only options made available for racialised migrants in Palermo, independently from whatever expertise they retained in their hometown: hard, low-paying, long hours jobs.

Even with contracts, these restricted options speak to the racialised hierarchisation of labour allowed by the differential inclusion produced by the European borders (Danewid 2024; Mezzadra 2013; Tazzioli and De Genova 2023), which do not entirely refuse migrants, but keep them as exploitable subjects with controlled rights. Differential inclusion then intersects with the already precarious opportunities offered by the Italian context (Merrill

2011), and the specific context of Palermo (Giglioli 2021), as one of the Italian cities with the lowest employment rates and widespread submerged economy.

Differential inclusion does not operate on the more fragile categories only: in chapter 5, the experiences of the generation 'in-between' is presented as made of better-off young racialised migrants who have strategically navigated the system, in this case the economies made available to them by the current economy of Palermo: reception and catering. Working within the reception system or exploiting their own exotic experiences as marketable products as best options, but also forced options. Centring luck within chapter 4 has served the purpose of focusing on the violent arbitrariness that operates on migrants' lives within a repressive international and national politics that do not look beyond emergency and repression (Avallone 2018). This arbitrariness can be navigated only through constant resourcefulness, that Hope, Bai, Awa, Saro, Adama have resorted to, to 'get out' of their containment. Crucially, the everyday racialised bordering practices that force migrants to constantly count on white mediators - to find information, job opportunities, housing, which are not then secured - create a framework for access to the city that is not just classed, but eminently racialised.

Class and race are not the only perspectives to be taken into account. Gendered access is at play in Palermo too, though this project could not work in depth on this issue, for reasons explained throughout the thesis. Health conditions are also an issue. In chapter 4 and 5 I have mentioned the fight started by the public assembly SOS Ballarò to ask for institutional attention and the creation of spaces for dealing with addictions. Within the issue of crack consumption, racialized migrants with addictions are faced with further struggles. Other than not having services to resort to, they also lack family ties to fall back on. Though this project could not delve into these complex experiences, I feel it is important to at least flag the multiplicity of ways in which race intersects with multiple other already precarious situations.

The border regime does not enact only through its repressive apparatus, heightened by local shortcomings. The everyday struggles faced by migrants in chapter 4 and 5 are recursively met by an apparatus of reception and solidarity that in Palermo is made up of a vast array of actors with different means, agendas, and statuses, operating within a city that, through the

various manoeuvres described in chapter 3, has built its new outward image on hospitality. In this sense, chapter 5 has argued that what has been described by border scholars as clear cut distinctions between patronising humanitarianism and solidarity 'creating cracks' (Dadusc and Mudu 2020:1207; Mezzadra 2020; Tazzioli 2020b) fade within a greyer area. In the same way, clear cut distinctions between repressive states and exceptional local responses (Bauder 2021; Bauder and Gonzalez 2018; Bauder and Juffs 2020, Fischer and Bak Jørgensen 2021; Mayer 2018) also fade in more complex, power laden relationships. Furthermore, the different counselling services, projects, economies and events promoting inclusions are explored in chapter 5 as existing in relation to the violent border regimes.

The discourses of solidarity promoted by Mayor Orlando and by some local realities also operate on promoting the city's image, thus hospitality and solidarity become instrumental to something else, in this case a long process of enfranchisement, a tool in a restructuring economy, an attempt at repositioning within a broader geography, as it has been described by more recent work (Wyer 2023; Neil 2023). This is not to the deny the usefulness of certain stances and actions adopted by the city or some of its members, but to point to how these act within a play rigged at the roots: a play that can be played by the white saviour on the basis of the black body's mere right to stay alive and exist, without disrupting 'The Migrant' as victim in need.

As the emergency management of migration intersects with a progressive devolution of social care from municipalities to other actors, the proliferation of places and services filling the state's gaps provide an array of opportunities - economic, social, moral - for mainly white subjects and the entire city, that contribute to the multidimensional economy generated by current regimes of migration control (De Genova and Tazzioli 2022; Dadusc 2019; Dadusc and Mudu 2020; Mezzadra 2020; Tazzioli and Genova 2023).

7.2.2 *How do racialised migrants claim space for their own political and affective expression in Palermo?*

Literature on political struggle and organisation developed by migrant newcomers is especially focused at the geographical borders (De Genova and Roy 2020; Genova [ND]; Tazzioli 2018, 2020b; a, 2021; Tazzioli and De Genova 2020). Urban accounts on the matter (aside from the struggles of second generations, such as those described by Camilla

Hawthorne and Heather Merrill in the Italian context) are especially focused on other 'exceptional' spaces, such as radical autonomous realities (Dadusc 2019; Lafazani 2018; Mezzadra 2020; Mudu and Chattopadhyay 2016; Raimondi 2019). Little is said about how the activist and political action of first generation migrants intersects with solidarity movements in the city, beyond arrival and beyond exceptional spaces. Also, little is said about first generation migrants arriving as 'sbarcati' (lit. landed, this term is used in pejorative terms to address migrants landed after crossing the Mediterranean) and working within the reception system and the solidarity network (whereas white solidarity work has been addressed e.g. by several urban and non-urban debates as seen in chapter 2). Finally, as debates rarely extend beyond immediate experiences of the reception system/moment, little attention is given to the mundane experiences and perceptions of belonging to the city and, in general, to the practical and emotional toll of being suspended between places.

In chapter 5 I have attempted to see "from the critical standpoint of migration" (Tazzioli and De Genova 2023:5), by focusing attention on what I call an 'in-between' generation, suspended between first arrival and second generation, and their comparatively better opportunities and lives. I argue that focusing on such a group in Palermo has been fundamental within this project 1) to make easy assumptions and categorizations of newly arrived migrants as either victims or criminals, marginal and disadvantaged, further uncomfortable. This has been done especially by exploring how potentially exploitative 'better' opportunities are yet tactically navigated as part of personal and political strategies/trajectories. 2) To account for a more complex portrait of the newly arrived migrant, which does not take into account struggles only, but how these embed within layers of duties, life choices/preferences, limits and possibilities, frustrations, affective belonging of a young population on the move. Finally, 3) to consider what happens when border solidarity intersects migrant subjectivities 'beyond survival' and 'beyond arrival'.

The example of racialised migrants working as mediators is significant in terms of the ways these young men negotiate Palermo's racialised restricted opportunities. Mediators are fundamental figures within the reception system: the proliferation of services of different kinds requiring mediation in Palermo offered Saro the possibility to continuously find jobs in very different places, from local cooperatives to international organisations. His activities within different volunteering and activist groups, and the particular coming together of

people and places in Palermo, gave him further networking opportunities. Still, despite becoming in a sense a part of the whole mechanism, the words of Khaled and Bai pointed to an ethics of being a mediator that went beyond the provision of cultural and language mediation, as they both used their position and certain amount of power to provide information they felt of fundamental value, for instance strongly encouraging newcomers to enrol in school.

As another example, the Kirmal group had been born out of a project of inclusion which had positioned them within a social enterprise at the intersection of tourism and social service, working on their 'exotic' histories as a commodifiable feature. Though the project positioned these young men again within a specific place within Palermo's current driving economy, all of them made use of the project to sustain themselves while pursuing other opportunities, for instance University studies.

In terms of developing a political voice, though Adama and Bai explicitly addressed white interference within their politics, the political organisation of migrant associations in Palermo is rapidly changing. For example, the MovementRight2Be mentioned in chapter 5 emerged as a way to gather the splintered voices of the different groups and communities, following the example of broader international and national movements creating translocal links. This, in a sense, reflects the potential of creating transnational alliances from the urban ground, as proposed by authors working on solidarity cities (Bauder 2021), still the concept is expanded by centering the attention not only on white solidarity.

Finally, considering this 'in-between' generation's mundane reasons for staying - despite the initially forced localization - and perceptions of the city, beyond the daily struggles and beyond migration-related issues, allowed in chapter 5 to consider these migrants' experiences beyond the migrant status. In this sense, their experiences are brought to the fore as shaped by multiple overlapping feelings: the independence reached in Palermo as compared to the expectations back in the hometown, the difficult relationships with multiple homes, the daily calculations about staying or leaving, mainly due to economic reasons, the projects back in the hometown. This is not to simplify the struggle: all of the people I encountered managed working, studying and political activism, while also providing for family back home, with all of this at times affecting mental health. Still the aim was that

of foregrounding these racialized migrants' perspectives, while also giving a more rounded understanding beyond, though linked to, migration struggles.

7.2.3 *What can urban everyday encounters in Palermo tell us about the conscious and unconscious, relational understanding and racialisation of the 'black other'?*

Drawing on the concept of being in the right place at the right time (Kosnick 2018), this project has used urban encounters as a way to explore the everyday coming together of different individuals in the city centre of Palermo (chapter 6). In this sense the project is not interested in proposing examples of meaningful coexistence in a shared space or inherently political moments within the encounter with the other (Wilson 2017). Rather, it has used the context of Palermo - as increasingly touristified, commodified and traversed by a multiplicity of people on the move - to bring to the fore questions about the people involved in the encounter and about the racialized and classed positioning of different subjects within a shared area of the city.

In this sense, the racialisation of the experiences narrated in chapters 4 and 5 is made even starker when broadening the gaze to the multiplicity of other people on the move inhabiting the city. Authors are increasingly looking into mainly white, privileged mobility, observing how it sheds further light on the racialisation of the 'classic' category of migration (Duplan and Cranston 2023), by observing how racialized hierarchies are co-produced (Kunz 2020). What does it mean to enact this kind of reasoning within a city where several privileged, mainly white communities on the move are freely choosing to step into the multicultural, safe harbour city of Palermo, where most non-white migrants coming across the Mediterranean have been, at least initially, forced to stay? The micro-community of the solidarity network - the students, practitioners, volunteers, activists, researchers, journalists - but also the new inhabitants, young professionals, artists, overstayers that have decided to settle. All of them within a city of shrinking services, increasing prices, low wages. A city that is increasingly shaping for the 'good foreigner', with this impacting both Palermitani and racialised migrants.

Still, if on the one side these dynamics are making the access to the city centre increasingly classed, other than racialised, on the other side it is interesting how the choice of movement for better quality of life and not just for economic opportunities (Duplan and Cranston 2023)

is already a racialized choice, the more complex choices of the racialised migrants being concealed by migration management, but also by the widespread exoticization of the racialised encounter and the continuous flattening of the complex migrants' stories in the European public discourse and culture. Pulling together the example of Moltivolti, or of the Avenir project (chapter 4), together with the fascinations narrated in the fragment opening chapter 6 - the work of the French artist, the song of the Palermitan duo - what emerges is the constant reproduction of a framing of the 'migrant other' from a white perspective rooted on compassion, which focuses eminently on the violent death or potential death in the sea (Danewid 2017), in a sense denying migrants to be more than a suffering crowd.

Missed encounters have also been looked at to get a glimpse into the patronising narratives of those individuals who are disengaged with the rhetoric produced by the city and a part of its inhabitants. During Ramadan, in my mind the harsh comments of the old volunteer in the centre for refugees (chapter 6) resonated even louder as compared to my experience in Piazza Santa Chiara (chapter 5) where the evening's Iftar was a moment of joy, sharing and politics. And then, these encounters spoke to an historical concealed and internalised racism that marks Italian society (Hawthorne 2022; Lombardi-Diop and Romeo 2012), even from an 'internal colony' perspective.

This example was interesting to me in the way it hinted at the narrow reach of imaginaries which are more aimed at whatever happens outside of Palermo, while migrants' experience in Palermo hardly challenges what has been going on in Italy since the first arrivals. The 'ignorant' comments of the older volunteers also pointed to embodied racialized hierarchies that ground a better positioning on the othering of someone else, which might be interesting to look at further, thinking back to Hawthorne's concept of an Italian precarious whiteness (2021), Giglioli's account of Sicilian splintered belonging (2017), but more broadly thinking back to the multiple ways in which race performs through ordering society. In this sense, whiteness is a shifting concept, regularly adopted as an "epistemological standpoint from which to see oneself and others" (Faria and Mollett 2016:88), within potentially infinite 'relational otherings'.

Finally, looking at encounters in Palermo has also been a way of questioning where these encounters could take place and what mechanisms governed them, as many of these

moments/places are especially configured around the encounter with the 'racialised other'. The existence of these specific places/moments in a sense said something about the not normalised widespread presence of non-white migrants in the city. In this sense, the unquestioned racialisation of mobility, the fascinated reproduction of migration stories as constantly linked to the sea, the old volunteer's words and the places of 'racialised encounter', spoke to those multifarious ways in which borders are embodied and performed daily, positioning specific people in specific places (Lafazani 2021).

Interestingly the moments of encounters between black activists and students - such is narrated in chapter 6 - were on the other side moments where the immediate assignment of a background was overturned, with the activists highlighting first the actual reasons for leaving, then the experiences endured to come.

7.3 Foregrounding conflict as antipolitical struggle

Building on the empirical material, this section focuses on the relationship of solidarity, reflecting on the importance of moving beyond clear-cut distinctions between patronising humanitarianism and empowering solidarity, as both are embedded within a racial capitalist system within ordinary spaces. This section argues that starting to consider the contradictory choices and conflictual actions operated by solidarity actors as something to foreground and not conceal might open up for the grounding of radical politics within everyday un-exceptional spaces.

In chapter 4, among the different voices and experiences, I presented the story of Bai, a young Gambian man who got to Palermo in 2016 - thanks to a phone number that a volunteer had given him in Lampedusa, connecting Bai with the association Porco Rosso in Palermo. Once landed in Agrigento, Bai had been left on his own by the police with an expulsion notice and no explanation whatsoever. Bai wanted to study in the UK and had decided to come across the Mediterranean as he thought that was the only option available for him, as getting a student visa in Gambia was almost impossible and also expensive. Like many others, he had followed the suggestion of a friend who had already made it and attempted the Mediterranean crossing.

In Porco Rosso the option he was presented with was that of appealing against the expulsion notice, then start the procedure to ask for asylum - as today this is the only available, legal route to enter Europe. He refused at first, remaining suspended by its illegal status, then realised that trying to reach the UK illegally was too difficult and decided to apply for asylum in Italy - the only available option. As education reasons are not covered by asylum, I can only imagine - also thanks to what I learnt through the seminars with the lawyers from CLEDU (the Legal Clininc hosted within the Law School in Palermo) - how much of the lawyers' effort has been on crafting a bulletproof history of violence, painful enough, in order for Bai to be granted asylum by the Territorial Commission.

As asylum has become the only, increasingly hard, way to access Europe (De Genova 2016b), migrants stories are flattened to become the 'right story', and the only story that can surface, shifting the attention from more complex reasons for leaving, and from the profoundly hierarchisation and racialization of mobility under a contemporary Western border regime that forces migrants' existence to be reduced to that of a 'victim', if not threat. Of course, Bai, Modue and Amat actually endured violence already prior to coming across the Mediterranean. And yet that violence, which presents itself in the form of a long and debilitating, harmful and potentially deadly journey made of checkpoints, kidnappings and tortures is allowed by the contemporary global management of mobilities, and illegalization of movement.

Within such a context, what is it possible to say about the interplay between repression and solidarity and, furthermore, is it really possible to call for clear-cut distinctions between solidarities filling the gaps and those creating cracks (Dadusc and Mudu 2020)? Or should the question shift to how to navigate the inevitable embeddedness of solidarity practices within the racial capitalist state and economy, thus using this grey role and identity to move further?

Going back to Bai's history we can imagine the different actors he encountered as part of the securitarian/humanitarian industrial complex - the policemen, the members of the commission, the economic machine of Italian reception. At the same time, looking at the solidarity side, we have two main actors - the lawyers from the legal clinic and the leftist activists in Porco Rosso. As requesting asylum has become the sole way of getting to stay

and avoid illegalization, incarceration and deportation, these lawyers know that they have to frame the interview with the Commission in a certain way. This action has a double face: on the one hand they are in a sense counteracting the international and national repressive system, by playing along and tailoring the right stories. On the other hand they are working within the system, as practitioners, focusing on allowing as many people as possible in, within the current framework. The same goes for Bai's experience in Porco Rosso, where the only path available within the current framework had been laid out for him - appealing and then requesting asylum - as the only practical, legal way. Though many activists navigating around Porco Rosso might share abolitionist ideas, theoretically speaking, they too worked within the current framework following pragmatism.

Within these two actions and places, the space for contesting who defines legality and illegality (Dadusc 2019:20; Dadusc and Mudu 2020; De Genova and Roy 2020; Isakjee et al 2020; Tazzioli and De Genova 2020) did not come out in practice, but remained as a theoretical subject for debate during meetings and seminars. Within the lawyers and activists' practices, filling gaps, acting in accordance with the state's 'legal system', coexisted simultaneously with creating small cracks, which, from the urban perspective of everyday life beyond exception, never configure itself as something 'radically' different from the state's system. A simultaneous reproduction and contestation. The same goes for the multiple ways in which several solidarity actors fill the state's gaps by providing a safe network of services against racialised structural shortages.

Of course not every element of the solidarity network in Palermo is the same: they all have different means and status. The refugee centre I volunteered at was bigger, more institutional in structure, than the other groups. It built on the profiling of its users as a fundamental manoeuvre for internal organisation (who can do what) but also for grounding further requests for fundings (as shown in chapter 4), whereas CLEDU and Porco Rosso operate on a voluntary and activist basis. At the same time a place like Moltivolti, which eminently builds on the branding of hospitality for its economic activities, contextually offered a fundamental place of gathering for the activities of many associations in Palermo, including racialised migrant groups.

Also, these realities, within the city, do not operate on their own, but fundamentally network to fill each other's gaps, through the 'social partnership' (chapter 4). The people of these very different spaces all come together in specific moments/assemblies, such as the SOS Ballarò assemblies (chapter 5) or the meetings of the Forum Antirazzista. Within such intertwined sets of mutual relationships, bringing conflict to the fore, as "something to inhabit [...] rather than attempt to 'resolve.'" (De Genova and Tazzioli 2022:802), might further the challenging reflection on "how to critically negotiate ongoing forms of coloniality" (2022:802). This applies not just against the easy enemy of the state and its violent apparatus, but also as it manifests daily within the same actions of solidarity, as these pull together individuals whose background in terms of power and privilege is incommensurable. While it is fundamental for radical spaces to exist, as well as for radical political thought to be theoretically explored, I argue that grounding radical politics within everyday un-exceptional spaces requires first the acknowledgement of our own embeddedness within the processes that work towards keeping a racial capitalist world order in place. Operating within the conflict, and from the conflict within, instead of seeking it out only outside of solidarity, might open up for reflections on how embodied power structures are replicated constantly.

Palermo, from this point of view, offered another interesting perspective, on the one side being the place where whole groups of migrants come across the Mediterranean were forced to remain, due to the Dublin regulation, but also being a place that gathers a community of people from elsewhere to work at different levels with migrants, myself and other researchers included (chapter 4). In this sense, current systems of migration management have generated a whole set of opportunities for employment, for apprenticeships, for research, for visibility, even without getting into the more problematic branding of solidarity, that in Palermo presents itself in multiple forms. The free movement of people acting in solidarity and converging in Palermo for its simultaneous nature of border zone and safe refuge; the multiple activities and groups partnering and competing for funding made available for migration-related activities, structured around privately led inclusion activities devolved by multiple scales of governance and private actors to third others, who cooperate and overlap. The jobs, research and training opportunities made available by the need to institutionally counteract a repressive regime. All of this speaks to

the multiple tight interrelations between repression and solidarity. These interrelations come up in the form of contradiction: the CESIE's project was financed through the EU's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (chapter 4). The project that gave birth to Kirmal (chapter 5) was financed by the Fondazione Con il Sud, a private non-profit organisation "*born […] from the alliance between bank foundations and the third sector and volunteering world [...]*"[79] for the infrastructuring of the South, which promoted participants' inclusion by clearly positioning them within what appears to be the only way for Southern economies to thrive (that is tourism) and the only way for migrants' lives to find a purpose within such a system (that is selling their own life experience as a product).

Navigating the conflict in such cases would be acknowledging the contradictory partnerships, the compromises, and simply, the other face of a racial capitalist extractivism that does not stop at the violent exploitation of lives in the fields, or in the carceral system, but that holds extraction in tension with and inherent to our ways of being in solidarity with others. This way of thinking otherwise is fundamental to shift a discourse from self-centred 'bad and good whites' categories (Danewid 2017), to recognise that solidarity can create a safer space (Garelli and Tazzioli 2021; Tazzioli and Walters 2019), but also reproduce those "asymmetrical, hierarchical power relations" (Tazzioli and Walters 2019:181), which are often recognised for humanitarian action only.

Racial capitalist states are rooted in the differential accordance and allocation of power and a profound hierarchisation of the society, aimed at hindering common fights and struggles (Danewid 2023; Virdee 2019). Solidarity actors are placed within the difficult position of mediating and counter-manoeuvring; still they play the fundamental role of a 'benefitting' counter action. This delicate position creates the potential for something to lose within the system, with this something to lose being exactly what should be foregrounded, accepted, shouted out. It is our mutual constraints that need to be denounced: the risk of losing a job, the risk of being stigmatised and scapegoated as entire cities, societies. In this sense, I imagine these conflictual and contradictory interstices, often concealed as something to cover and hide, as potential 'antipolitical struggles' from within the state's violence, from within the ordinary, where antipolitics is understood as something that wants "neither to cure nor mend, but rather to explore damage, to embrace harm and blockage, and to refuse

[79] https://www.esperienzeconilsud.it/vocidelverboviaggiareaccoglienzamediterranea/scheda-del-progetto/

the cure that comes in the form of containment and order" (Danewid 2023, p.150, citing Halberstam).

Thinking from a Southern perspective, and operating within and through the conflict we are all part of, might open up those "intertwined histories" arising out "of the colonial past and the neo-colonial present" (Danewid 2017:1683; Tazzioli 2020a) to be truly foregrounded and centred on mutual fights and struggle. Since I started the PhD, critical and activist meridionalist approaches are apparent in mainstream discourse, denouncing the colonial extractivism operating within the Italian souths at many levels. Intersectional struggles are rising: Claudia Fauzia and Valentina Amenta (2024) have recently published 'Femminismo Terrone'[80], working at the intersection of meridionalism and feminism. Young Italian scholars like Carmine Conelli (2023) are adopting increasingly critical postcolonial stances from a Southern perspective. Palermo offers an interesting intersection of people and struggles which might radically open up for exchange in a non-hierarchised way. For this to happen, the voice of racialised migrants should be truly recognised as equal, also through accepting that this equality at the moment is more imaginative than factual.

7.4 Extending the migrant's 'paradox' in practice

"A migrant is a person required and refuted by Western sovereignty" (S M Hall 2021 p.1). This is the opening sentence of Suzanne Hall's book, which explores how racialised borders creep from the geographical borders, through everyday life in the city. This paradox has been centred by postcolonial authors denouncing the never resolved colonial racism and extractivism defining the relationship between the West and the Rest (Hall 2019). This chapter has tried to expand the paradox to everyone's embeddedness within a racial capitalist system, where each of us takes a specific place within a racialized, classed, gendered hierarchisation of the society. This last section reflects on what it might mean to centre conflict, contradictions, and navigating grey areas, to explore the damage, from a practical and political standpoint, using the case of Palermo. It reflects on how bringing conflictual and contradictory experiences to the fore, openly navigating them, instead of concealing them as potentially mining struggles and fights, might open up for processual

[80] *Femminismo* stands for 'feminism'; *terrone* is a pejorative term used to describe Southern Italian people when they migrate to the North of Italy.

shifts: shifts that may start from something as simple as sharing conversations about it, not just within seminars and classrooms, but in daily practice.

Border studies create a framework of clearcut allies and foes: the geographical borders appear as a place of spectacle - the spectacle of repression, of illegality, but also of white solidarity and the migrants' autonomous forces. I have no direct experience of this, and I can only imagine the wider, more complex ground through which borders articulate, still the border seems to remain mainly an exceptional space where a main fight for survival is fought.

On the other hand, in chapter 2 I argued that the urban approach to migration is still mainly policy-driven, with some authors seemingly operating clear-cut distinctions between policy and politics (such is the case of Vertovec's concept of superdiversity). At the same time, the 2015 'migration crisis' has ulteriorly impacted cities in the way they are related to broader governance scales. Solidarity cities have emerged as capable of creating counter-manoeuvres, in the way they operate at the intersection between "the imperative of social policy and the aims of immigration control" (Ataç et al 2020:116). Conversely, spaces of radical autonomy have been explored as places where transversal alliances have been created over shared struggles. Places not of pacified difference, but where antagonisms, divergences and power relations are navigated on a daily basis (Dadusc 2019; Lafazani 2018; Mezzadra 2020; Mudu and Chattopadhyay 2016; Raimondi 2019). I recognise the political project subtending this work, for example in the way it frames urban squats as radical political laboratories, opening up possibilities beyond citizenship, and beyond the racial capitalist state, which ceases to be framed as the beginning, but also the inevitable end of the problem (Danewid 2024). However, urban squats are still, as much as borders, exceptional spaces, within countries like Italy where daily life and access to rights are still heavily mediated by citizenship, constructed as a racial form of belonging and a concession to new inhabitants (Hawthorne 2021).

This raises the question: how is it possible for a city like Palermo to critically enact this practice? Where Palermo is intended as an internal colony, historically portrayed as an internal 'disadvantaged other', and also the racialised other on which Italy has constructed its own whiteness (Hawthorne 2022; Merrill 2011). Yet Palermo is also a city embedded

within a broader economy that goes beyond Italy and is shaped by attempts at repositioning and establishing an identity that feels detached from systemic practice if looked at from the ground. Also, what does it mean to adopt conflict as practice for all those multiple actors involved with migrants in the city, in a context of a shrinking social care that is progressively devolved to fragmented actors, with different statuses and means, which count on restricted resources? These questions are political as well as policy and practise oriented. Though this project does not give clear cut answers, it has worked on showing the contradictions but also the radical enactments that can be operated while acting within the racial capitalist state: the mayor's stances have been more centred on discourses than praxis, and yet it is true that they have created a sort of culture in Palermo that is shaped around the micro-community that I call 'solidarity network'. The lawyers' and activists' actions detailed here are simultaneously contesting and reproducing racialised rules: they are radical and not radical at the same time. Palermo is also showing a process that is always in motion, constantly changing, as shown by the example of the movement Right2Be: despite the power dynamics described in chapter 5, this movement is gaining relevance and voice, but was not born out of nowhere, as it built on years of political practice within other groups and within the solidarity network, despite the power-laden dynamics.

Lately, Palermo has started an activist public assembly against overtourism. Though I am not in the city at the moment, I am following the events thanks to my friends' updates and social media posts. During a demonstration held on the 27th of September in the very core of the city-centre, two boards caught my attention: "# VITA LENTA BUT THEN YOU COMPLAIN ABOUT SLOW SERVICE" ("vita lenta" means "slow life"), and "ACCOGLI IL MIGRANTE COME IL TURISTA" (host migrants as well as tourists). The first board jokes against tourists looking for slower rhythms in Southern cities like Palermo, but then lamenting the lack of services; the second board speaks against the racialisation of mobility. This is happening in a city centre where it is common to find stencils shouting "Tourism is colonialism", "eat the rich", "tourists go home" (chapter 3). Despite the potential for this struggle to be built across the white and non-white communities inhabiting the city centre of Palermo, the participants of the demonstration were mainly Palermitani and new white inhabitants, and yet the boards are speaking for the potential of a common fight, that does not look only at tourism, but more broadly at for whom the city is built for.

In the same way, in March 2023, the protest of ‘Palermo Capital of Denied Rights’ described in chapter 4 had been able to pull together different segments of the community of Palermo, over a common issue, which for sure affected the racialised population more than Palermitani or new white inhabitants, the latter detaining citizenship and better visas (when they need one), but still created a ground for contextually bring racialised access to the city to the fore. Both these struggles create common spaces over issues which are not only migration-related, but encompass migrants as inhabitants of a place.

I understand that this last section is eminently told from a white perspective, but I feel that it is the only coherent way of action, as I cannot fully speak for the other side. Still, this project has tried to foreground migrants' experiences in the multifarious ways they navigate the restricted options and identities imposed on them by Western culture and society, while strategically using their roles for something else. It has foregrounded how migrants in Palermo continuously defy whatever form of categorisation is imposed on them by the Western society. The example of black activists introducing themselves as students stuck in my mind in the way this is almost never done by white activists talking about migrants, and then something as simple as that produced destabilising feelings in the audience, shifting the discourse to something closer, to something paradoxically more human than the moral representation of lost life in the sea.

7.5 Conclusions

Within this chapter, I have tried to link some of the main issues raised within the conceptual framework of the thesis with the empirical material on which this project is built on. As the project has progressively developed, during fieldwork and throughout the analysis and writing process, around an attempt to navigate a conflictual space in-between, refuting the reproduction of binary thought that characterises understandings of migration from different perspectives, this chapter has:

1) reflected on the research questions which have guided the writing process, each answered to in a way that calls for more relational understanding and ‘contradictory thinking;

2) drawing on the contradictions, the chapter has tried to reflect further on the conflictual spaces and practices observed in Palermo, and on the simultaneous reproduction of borders and resistance to them, imagining the foregrounding of conflict as potential antipolitical struggle 'within the system';

3) reflected on what it might mean, in practice, to be open about conflictual positioning.

This chapter is intended as a final reflection on the project, but also as potential for further thought, seeing this research not as an end to a path, but as the beginning for further research and praxis.

CHAPTER 8 - CONCLUSIONS

8.1 Introduction

Grounded in the aftermath of the 2015 so-called 'refugee crisis' and the increasingly populist responses and intensifying border regimes across Europe, this project has looked into the daily articulations of the contemporary European management of migration from a geographically and historically situated urban perspective. Adopting a postcolonial approach to migration and European history, this project is grounded in the city of Palermo, Sicily - one of the many Souths generated by Eurocentrism and today a prominent European external border to be kept under control. In recent years Palermo has been internationally acknowledged as a solidarity city and a safe harbour for migrants coming across the Mediterranean.

Following authors who are attempting to broaden the understanding of how racialised borders work beyond spaces of exception, extending through everyday life in the city, and adopting a relational approach to the urban, this work builds on a conceptual framework that pulls together different strands of literature.

A focus on critical border studies has given scope to reflect further on the contemporary neocolonial management and exploitative differential inclusion of migrants, as rooted within an unresolved racism that has historically subtended and shaped the relationship between the West and the Rest (Hall 2019). Furthermore, drawing on the complex relationship between states' repression, patronising humanitarianism, multifarious forms of solidarity, and migrants' autonomous action despite the violent struggles, this project has sought to:

1) understand how those complex relationships articulate within the urban space and intersect with other ongoing processes

2) argued for an analytical move beyond the multiple binary readings that surround much work on migration and the apparatus built around it, proposing instead to navigate a greyer, conflictual, contradictory space.

Considering several layers of geographies, understood as multiple 'Souths within' - Palermo, Sicily, Italy, South Europe - has allowed the grounding of the project within "geographically

contingent histories of race" (Faria and Mollett 2016:88). In this sense the crisis produced by contemporary migration has been linked to an internal crisis for racial belonging to the imaginary of modern Europe at different scales. The Southern context within the project has been considered both in practice, as material context of arrival, but also conceptually, observing how different practices of migration management at the Italian scale, but also at the local level in Palermo, could be read by bringing race to the fore in the way it has been concealed within Italian history, then de facto affecting the Italian violent approach to contemporary migration. But also in the way Palermo's stances with regards to migration have been used to reposition the city within the European modernity framework.

Finally, observing how the relationship between migration and cities has been looked at from the urban ground, the project sees the city as a preferential site, if read from a relational perspective, not just for policy production, but for a deeper understanding of the workings of racialised borders and, consequently, of migrants' experience of these, by grounding them within an everyday life that pulls together several ongoing processes and several actors. With attention to the dynamic interplay between repressive states' actions and exceptional solidarity cities, this project has sought to offer a more complex and nuanced understanding of everyday realities in Palermo.

In order for a relational approach to the urban to be enacted, methods have been crafted accordingly. This project has built on a multi-sited ethnography shaped around a collection of places that, while centred in a specific area of Palermo - its historical centre - defy strict and static boundaries. This collection of places was built processually, following clues in a spontaneous way during the fieldwork, in particular following events and members, tightly or loosely attached to what I call the 'solidarity network' in Palermo.

8.2 Main contributions

A main conceptual contribution has been that of synthesising interdisciplinary literature explicitly from an urban perspective. In this sense, this project has built on critical borders studies, critical migration studies, postcolonial approaches, and urban studies. The approach to geographical situatedness in the way it has tried to look together at the European, South European, Italian, and Palermitan dimensions has also given a fundamental background of complexities, grounding an account of contemporary migration management within a

postcolonial critique that does not relate only to a Global North and a Global South, but that cuts across geographies, observing the not so latent role of race in constructing these multiple geographies.

Following authors who are increasingly adopting a 'border perspective' in their approach to migration and cities (Georgiou et al 2022; Hall 2021; Lafazani 2021), this project has expanded the knowledge produced by critical border scholars, observing:

1) how racialised borders enact in the city, intersecting other forms of dispossession (Georgiou et al 2022; Hall 2021), linked, for instance to the ways in which differential inclusion works in Italy and in Palermo, where the migrant status intersects with local shortcomings (Giglioli 2017; Merrill 2011).

2) the arbitrariness that affects migrants' lives in Italy, a country that does not go beyond the emergency in terms of migration policies and the importance of luck and resourcefulness to get out of containment (Colucci 2018; Avallone 2018).

This is observed from the context of Palermo, where the lack of public services is increasingly devolving social care to a fragmented array of actors. In this sense, the composite solidarity network in Palermo is seen on the one side as a fundamental resource for migrants, on the other side as an apparatus of opportunities for a micro-community of volunteers, practitioners, social workers, researchers, students, and existing as tightly related to the border regime.

From an urban perspective, a further contribution has been that of looking into how the clear-cut distinctions between filling the gaps and creating cracks (Dadusc and Mudu 2020) which are often operated at the borders, fade within a greyer area, as all the actors involved, despite different approaches, are compelled to cooperate in the absence of resources and municipal action. Thinking back to the issue of solidarity cities (Bauder 2021; Bauder and Gonzalez 2018; Bauder and Juffs 2020), Palermo is an apt case that shows how, despite the political stances that have been possibly crucial for the creation of a fertile environment (though circumscribed and far from systemic) for the birth of certain initiatives, hospitality has also been hugely instrumental more than central. A tool used for purposes not necessarily related to migration.

This project has foregrounded the experience of what I call an 'in-between' generation of migrants, as they are first arrival migrants, but navigating comparatively better situations than the majority of racialised migrants in Palermo, as they have been connected since their first arrival to the opportunities opened to them by the solidarity network. Their experiences contribute to a fundamental gap in migration studies. In fact, even though there is a clear acknowledgement within critical studies of migrants being classified by Western societies as either criminals or victims, literature on first arrivals' migrants experiences beyond struggle and disadvantage are little developed, if not for the examples of political struggle developed by critical border scholars (De Genova and Roy 2020; Genova [ND]; Tazzioli 2018, 2020b; a, 2021; Tazzioli and De Genova 2020) or authors working on radical autonomy (Dadusc 2019; Lafazani 2018; Mezzadra 2020; Mudu and Chattopadhyay 2016; Raimondi 2019).

This project does not deny the struggle, but has also revealed these young migrants' strategic ways of navigating the restricted options made available for them in Palermo, on the processual development of political voice in the city, despite uneven power relations. Also, it has looked into the mundane affective relationships that these racialised migrants have developed, despite their suspension between places, with respect to the city and its inhabitants, with the intent of foregrounding more complex histories than those 'allowed' by forced migration.

This work has also contributed to the literature on urban encounters, which are not considered as necessarily generative of political outcomes (Wilson 2017), but as intersections of people encountering at the right moment and in the right place (Kosnick 2018). In this sense, encounters have been used to question the actors and places involved, thus making reflections on the racialisation of mobility (Kunz 2020; Cranston 2017; Kunz 2017), increasingly studied, on the embodiment or racialised assumptions (Lafazani 2021), on the racialized and classed access to the city. In this sense, encounters have been used as tools, not necessarily productive of something else, but as interesting, 'insignificant' moments (Lafazani 2021) able to tell us something of the manifold ways borders operate within simple interactions, silently defining and normalising, who belongs and who does not, and where different people are spatially but also conceptually positioned.

Finally, this project has tried to creatively dialogue with Ida Danewid's recent concept of 'antipolitics'. In the discussion chapter I reflected on what it might mean to enact an antipolitical approach, within the state, within the politics, as the project moves within ordinary space. In this sense I have imagined foregrounding conflict, that is all the small simultaneous contestations and reproductions of racialised borders, as a potential antipolitical struggle within. Though this reflection might be of little use for municipalities directly, it might open conversations within politically involved groups, which still have a fundamental job of mediating between governance and inhabitants. Navigating conflict, instead of attempting a hardly reachable solution of it, might open up for a dialogue on shared struggles and on our own existing within a racial capitalist system.

8.3 Areas for further research

This project has tried to show how the urban ground is a preferential site for synthesising different strands of thought, actors, processes, that make sense only in their simultaneous coming together. Cities as the coming together of a multiplicity of stories open up for infinite sets of observations. From the ground of Palermo, several issues have been explored: the enactment of the Western border regime in its multiple forms; the racialization of mobility; embodied racialised understandings; power relations; manoeuvres of enfranchisement and so forth. Though this approach might be messy to a certain extent, the main purpose is that of reflecting through the different intersections that can be observed from an urban ground that is not only confined to the policy realm.

Though this work has built on authors adopting a critical, postcolonial approach to migration and European history, some of the concepts present in this project - such as those related to racial capitalism or abolitionism - are rooted in critical Black, postcolonial studies. As this PhD has also been a process of personal growth, I encountered some concepts later in the process and in the way they have been elaborated by other authors. As stated within the thesis, much urban work on migration is still mainly policy-oriented and would benefit from increasing dialogues with and across critical approaches.

A main recurring theme throughout the chapters is the limited access and understanding of the experiences navigated by racialised migrant women, elders, young people, people with health issues of any kind. The work presented here is centred on male experience, though

with some reflections on how added 'vulnerabilities' might lead to very different experiences. I see this as a recurring issue within research on migration, therefore more work is needed on diverse experiences, not taken into account for their different struggles only, but also for foregrounding divergent experiences of negotiations and organisation. Still further, more work is needed that foregrounds migrants' experiences in a complex and nuanced way that takes into account much more than the struggles for survival.

Regarding Palermo specifically, another category that is mostly absent from this project is that of Palermitani who inhabit the city-centre but, despite being highly affected by current transformations, are not part of the more visible networks and communities investigated within this project. At the same time, as this project has chosen to focus on relatively 'better-off' migrants, it would be interesting and important to understand the daily negotiations outside of the solidarity network, within other areas and micro-relations of the city, but also considering more disadvantaged migrant populations within the city centre.

This work is grounded in Palermo and though it builds on the specific intersections of actors, politics, places, and histories observed within this city, it speaks to broader issues and struggles. It would be productive and politically relevant to understand what 'ordinary radical practices' look like in other urban settings, and from which simultaneities they stem from. At the same time, thinking about Palermo and other similar contexts, more work needs to be done on the potential for shared struggles and histories. In this sense, more critical work is needed that centres the workings of race within the European contest. As this project has explored the potential for peeling the multiple racialized others that exist 'within Europe, more work that links contemporary migration struggles with local struggles for belonging is needed. For instance, focusing more on Palermitani and the way they relate to the changing city and its narratives, to the stigma imposed from the outside, to their own experiences of migration or decisions to stay, might open up discussion of interesting shared parallels, if taken into account critically. I refer to Palermo here, because this is the city I have experience of, but these kinds of parallels could be traced elsewhere, in places where multiple categories of 'othered' people intersect.

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APPENDIX 1 - Information sheet for participants

The University Of Sheffield.

Research Information Sheet

Title of the Project: 'Othered people in othered places: a critical and situated exploration of the challenges of cultural diversity in Palermo'

Researcher: Francesca Guarino

Contact details: fguarino1@sheffield.ac.uk

My name is Francesca Guarino. I am a student from the University of Sheffield (UK) and I am inviting you to take part in a research project based here in Palermo. In the following I will explain what the project is about and why I would like for you to take part in it. Feel free to discuss this with others if you wish to and please remember that, if you need any further information or if you have any questions about what you are going to read, you can contact me and I will be happy to discuss everything with you.

Thank you for taking the time to read this.

What is this project about?

The aim of this project is to understand in a more complex way the relationship between migrants and cities in the European context, in order to discuss and contest contemporary European and Italian politics and views on migration.

This project will explore the experiences of people who have migrated to Italy, and to Palermo in particular, questioning how they inhabit the city, and exploring issues of identity and belonging and how these concepts are negotiated (if they are) within a city that has been narrated in the past years as a 'welcoming city' and that has become a transit for many migrant populations who are not necessarily categorized as such (e.g. expats, digital nomads, south workers, etc.).

The research will explore your experiences of life within the city of Palermo. It will look into the ways you deal/have dealt with your everyday life here, from practical issues (e.g. accommodation, job, permits, social life, etc.) to your perceptions of places and people, and of Palermo's so called 'multiculturalism'. Also, if you are involved as an activist within the city, it will seek to understand your experience of the role, how you got involved and why.

Who is organizing this project?

This project is being conducted by me, Francesca Guarino, as a PhD student within the Department of Urban Studies and Planning at the University of Sheffield (UK), and it is supervised by Professor Michele Lancione and Professor Ryan Powell.

Do I have to take part?

I am inviting you to take part in this research as I believe that you might give important insight on the topic I am investigating, through your opinions and personal experiences, but this is by no means an obligation. You are completely free to choose whether to take part or not and all responses will be kept anonymous and confidential. I will discuss your contribution with my supervisors only, for the purposes of the project, but also in that case I will use a pseudonym in order to protect your identity.

Who else is going to take part in this project?

The people I have chosen to interview within this project are local or people 'from outside Palermo' with whom I engaged during my stay here. Mostly all of them fall within a age range that spans from 25 to 40 years old and are part of some sort of association or activist group. Most of the people I am going to interview were not born here, but come from elsewhere and have migrated here for some reason. This choice of interviewing different categories of migrants, both 'mainstream' ones and those not categorized as such, comes from a will of questioning the very term and how it is usually framed.

What happens next if I agree to take part?

If you agree to take part in this research we will first have a chat about this document. In that occasion you might ask for any further clarification or any issue that you might still feel the need to discuss. I would also like to discuss any anxiety you might have about taking part in this project, so that we can find a solution together.

I will ask you to take part in a conversational interview with me. We will touch upon topics such as your experience and perception of Palermo and its places, issues related to your everyday life, such as housing, job, social life, activism, etc. If you feel comfortable about it, I would like to ask you about the reasons that have brought you to Palermo and the reasons why you have chosen to stay.

For the interview we will choose a moment of the day and a location that is suitable and comfortable for you.

Interviews will be recorded, but will be kept secure and anonymous. This is because for me it would be easier to be fully attentive to the conversation if I do not need to take notes, but if you do not feel confident about this, we can discuss it.

How will the information collected be kept confidential?

Compliance with the Data Protection Act (2018) and GDPR (2018) ensures all information will be kept confidential.

Further information about these regulations can be found here:

Data Protection Act:

https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-data-protection/introduction-to-data-protection/about-the-dpa-2018/

EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR):

https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-data-protection/guide-to-the-general-data-protection-regulation-gdpr/

Your contribution will be anonymized through the use of a pseudonym and kept safely. All data related to the project, in fact, will be stored in a digital archive protected by password and only I will be able to access it. Pseudonyms to secure anonymization will be used also for analysis and in the case of publications based on this project. So your name will never display in any published material, but also within my notes.

Regarding Consent

If you decide to take part in this project I will need your consent to conduct interviews and use the information that will derive from these. Together with this information sheet you will receive a 'Consent form'. If for any reason you feel uncomfortable signing the 'Consent form' with your name, there are alternatives available.

To summarise, consent can be of three types:

- Signed with full name
- Signed with initials only (in this case oral consent too is needed)
- Oral consent only

In the case of oral consent:

- This can be given at the presence of a witness we choose together (in this case the consent form will be signed by me, as the researcher, and the witness)
- Or it can be audio recorded.

Please do not hesitate to ask for further clarification on this. Also, know that, if you decide to sign the 'Consent form' with your name, the form will be kept in a safe location and locked and no-one will access that document but me. The same goes for the eventual recording of the consent. Also, in both situations you will receive a copy of the 'Consent form' for you to keep.

Are there possible risks if I decide to take part in the project?

Please know that I will not share any information regarding you with anyone. Also, I would like for you to tell me if there are other concerns you have about taking part in this interviews. We can talk about them and see if it is possible to overcome these and how. If you decide to take part in the research, please feel free to express any fear or concern that might arise later, at any moment.

What are the financial benefits of taking part in this study?

There is no payment for taking part in this research. I understand that participating in this project might take precious time from you and, although I cannot repay you by economic means, I will do my best to avoid disrupting your everyday activities.

After the study starts, can I change my mind?

Yes. You can withdraw from this research at any moment and you do not need to provide a reason for it. There will be no repercussions of any kind for this. If you decide to leave the project, all your contributions will be removed from the research and destroyed.

If you want to exercise your right to withdraw, please contact me on my email: fguarino1@sheffield.ac.uk or on my phone : 348 6924367.

What if I have a problem?

If you have any concern, doubt or issue you want to discuss about this project, do not hesitate to contact me at the email address I provided above. If you have concerns about the way I, Francesca Guarino, am conducting the research or about other issues you cannot discuss with me, please contact the project's supervisor: Professor Ryan Powell on: r.s.powell@sheffield.ac.uk or Professor Michele Lancione on: michele.lancione@polito.it or m.lancione@sheffield.ac.uk (if your complaint is in Italian, Romanian or French).

What happens when the study finishes?

The results of this research will be published in both academic and non-academic outputs. They may feature in articles or be presented at conferences. They might be used to write a policy report or a piece written for the general public. Your name will never appear in any publication or presentation, as your identity will always be protected by a pseudonym.

Thank you for taking the time to read this document!