Sri Lankan Napoli

Navigating Borders in the Porous City

Doctoral Dissertation

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Abstract

In Napoli, in the early 2020s, a Sri Lankan resident claimed that “Napoli was like Sri Lanka”, and that despite his very recent arrival and his lack of (what is usually understood as) Neapolitan-ness or *napoletanità*, “Napoli was his hometown”. This research stems from the contrast between two constructs, “Sri Lankan Napoli” and “Neapolitan Napoli", and the puzzle that their coexistence poses. Drawing on a cumulative six months of ethnographic fieldwork in Napoli, between March 2019 and November 2021, this research locates itself in the conjunctural space of that puzzle, from which it puts together a trio of theoretically informed research questions.

The first question addresses border-crossing and the mobility practices that accompany it. What were the multiple borders and the boundaries, this dissertation asks, that Sri Lankan migrants needed to negotiate and move across, to achieve residency in Napoli? Where were Napoli and Sri Lanka located in a punctured borderscape through which transnational fields connected, produced and rescaled those localities? *The second question focuses on residing in cities.* What was the relation that Sri Lankan migrants had to mediate, knit and curate between themselves and Napoli, such that they could harness the city to their practical purposes, however partially and fallibly so? How does a material and practical understanding of “residing” as “navigating” help supersede static categories of belonging like “integration” and “community”? *The third question focuses on urban diversity and identity.* How does thinking with a construct like “Sri Lankan Napoli” shed light on that other imagined object, “Neapolitan Napoli”? By considering Napoli “as Sri Lankan”, how may we de-naturalize predefined and limited conceptions that govern the ways in which Napoli is, and must be, “Neapolitan”?

The research findings can be summed up in three arguments. First, this dissertation offers a methodology and a set of theoretical tools to work at turning the initial paradox of the foreign resident on its head — operating as if it were not paradoxical in the first place. In the case at hand, it begins unpacking assumptions as to who and what counts as “Neapolitan”, mapping out leads into other ways of formulating questions of diversity in urban spaces. This methodology, ethnographic in nature, I characterize as “taking Napoli as method” and choosing “people as sites”.

Drawing on my collection of ethnographic material, the second argument posits that residing in a city as dense as Napoli involves bridging and suturing between discrepant, simultaneous *times*. I suggest that narratives that ascribe pre-defined temporalities to their objects are misleading. Instead, my research findings point at altogether different, contradictory times, that coexist in Napoli, and require various forms of labor and mediating practices from its residents.

Further, I observed how long-distance nationalist ties and allegiances provided a moving repertoire of skills and aspirations that could make migrants as savvy as any resident, destabilizing identity constructs like *napoletanità*. This enables me to argue that while migrants are generally portrayed as subaltern actors, they in fact enact convincing and effective claims to the city they reside in, producing and rescaling it as they do so.

Eventually, through the lens of some of its Sri Lankan residents, this dissertation contributes to a "cosmopolitical" archive of Napoli, one that might offer new horizons for planning practices that engages with urban diversity and migration.

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PART I

Setting the stage

Introduction

Opening vignette. “The Sri Lankan city I know best is Napoli”

Dimuth and I were enjoying a late breakfast huddled under the tarpaulin awning of a bar in the Vergini market[1]. It was a stormy day in September 2021, a little over a year from the day we had met, and nearly two years since Dimuth had first set foot in Napoli. Violent gusts were kneading their way through thickish clouds, turning the sky into an uneven patchwork of whites and blues. Napoli was the city we had then settled in, until, perhaps, forceful winds or imperceptible breezes drew us elsewhere. We sipped our coffees and chatted on, happy to catch up, after I had spent a few weeks away, in France with my family.

I updated Dimuth on the situation in France regarding the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and we had a lively exchange about domestic politics in Sri Lanka. From there, the stream of our conversation led him to reflect on the differences of “culture” (as he put it) that he found in Napoli.

Before he came to Italy from Sri Lanka, people had warned Dimuth that life in Napoli was “difficult” and “dangerous”. And in a sense, they were right, he explained: things had not been easy for him, and still weren't. The application for his permit to stay had been lagging for over a year, dragging him down into what he experienced as a deaf and dumb bureaucracy; the private "agencies" he obtained counselling from were manned by, in his words, "cunning" Sri Lankan advisors and translators, more interested in "tricking" him for cash, than actually providing any reliable information; he still did not always understand why Neapolitans got so "angry" so suddenly, and his knowledge of Italian and Neapolitan languages was only stammering.

But overall, Dimuth pointed out on that day, taking a sip from his coffee, things were not that bad. Working on and off as a *badante*, cleaner, or kitchenhand, he usually managed to make enough money to sustain himself and send some home. he had a cheap place to sleep in; he had made friends (among whom he

[1] See figures 2 and 3 for locations of the places mentioned.

counted me) and strung useful “contacts”. When he walked around an area he named “Cavour”, but which actually extended into the Sanità and Stella neighborhoods, there was always someone he knew and would stop to greet. After more than year and a half here, he could find his way around places, and he was proud to say he knew his way with people — Sri Lankan and otherwise. Dimuth summed it up matter-of-factly:

— “Now, Napoli is my hometown”.

Then, his face lit up and he made a joke: “You know what we say here: Italian people, if you tie their hands... they can't speak anymore!”, he giggled.

I smiled along and tapped into the joyful, second-degree mood that had fallen upon us to tell him a joke of my own, eager to hear his reaction: “When I come to visit you and your family, in Sri Lanka... and when they hear what I know about Sri Lankan culture, maybe they will be surprised... and they will ask me*, ‘Where have you been, to know so much?*’ And I will answer: *‘Well... the Sri Lankan city I know best...is Napoli*’”

Dimuth burst out laughing and held out his hand in glee so I could clap my palm in his.

— “Yes Cap, maybe it is true... *Napoli is like Sri Lanka*.”

(fieldnotes, October 2021)

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In 2021, my friend Dimuth was a fellow resident of Naples/Napoli[2]. At the time when our conversation took place, he had been staying and working in the city for over a year

[2] The city of Naples/Napoli is called differently in different languages —*Naples* in French (/napl/) or in English (/'neɪ.pəlz/), *Nápoles* in Spanish, *Neapel* in Deutsch, *Napoli* in Italian, *Nápule* in Neapolitan, etc. Rather than different names, however, those writings and their pronunciations may be better thought of as regional variations around the same name, which was given to the city by its Greek founders in the 5th century BC: *Nèa pólis*, the "new city". During my fieldwork, I found the Neapolitan *Nápule* and the Sinhala නෘපෝලි (*Naapooli)* to be significantly closer to the Italian *Napoli* then to the English *Naples*, which is why, in most of this dissertation, I render the city's name as *Napoli,* reflecting the pronunciation I most often heard. I use *Naples* only when quoting an English-spoken text or conversation in which the English spelling or pronunciation was used.

and a half. But before that, Dimuth had spent nearly all his life in Sri Lanka, the island where he was born, seven thousand kilometers off Italy's coasts. Along with being a resident of Napoli, he was also a Sri Lankan citizen rather than an Italian one (as confirmed by his passport), and he had needed to display proof of his citizenship and mobility status (through a range of paperwork including visas, work permits and, during the coronavirus pandemic, biological screenings such as PCR-swabs) when crossing a number of national borders to enter Napoli. In addition, he did not quite fit into common or easy ideas (including his own) of how Neapolitans behaved, or what they looked like. For one, he did not speak Italian or Neapolitan, and had little familiarity with the gestures and bodily performances that many residents of the city used to punctuate their conversations[3]. His skin was also a darker brown than the shade obtained by even the most assiduous among Napoli's suntanning experts, and he was a Buddhist (although not a frequent temple-goer) rather than a Catholic. On top of that, he had no way to tell with certainty where he would be in the next few years: would he stay in Napoli, return to Sri Lanka, or would he attempt (or be compelled) to go somewhere else altogether? While effectively a "resident" of the city, Dimuth was also something else: he was a "migrant" settled, for the time being, in Napoli. Such a label was enough to set him apart from mainstream understandings of who could identify as Neapolitan, and of who might claim belonging to the city.

Simultaneously, however, it is hard to ignore the laughter caused by the joke I told Dimuth — "Napoli is a Sri Lankan city" — and the paradox it signaled: an association too grotesque to be fully realistic, but an association that, however, drew inspiration from lived, contemporary practices. Napoli and Sri Lanka were separated by numerous national borders and yet, since I had met him, Dimuth had explained to me many times — pursing his lips in disbelief or chuckling in amusement as he had on that stormy day — how other fellow Sri Lankan residents of the city believed Napoli to be just "like Sri Lanka". I suggest that in this "like", in this mimetic effect, lies not only laughter, but also the opening of a ludic possibility (Anjaria and Anjaria 2020): perhaps, Napoli was meaningful and effective for Sri Lanka and for Sri Lankans, *similarly to* some of the ways in which it

[3] See Jason Pine (2012) for a subtle account of the importance of the performativity of communication and expression in Neapolitan contexts. See Antonia Dawes (2020) for a timely study of multi-lingual practices involving migrants and Italians in Napoli.

functioned for Italy or Europe, or for "native" Neapolitans, as my friend Sasanka called them — whatever all of those word meant; and blurring out their meanings in the same token. And perhaps this effectiveness of the city, rather than his past origins or his future destination(s), was simply enough for Dimuth to call Napoli his "hometown".

In other words, the brief recollection of the ethnographic encounter opening this dissertation faces the reader with an empirical "puzzle" (Timmermans and Tavori 2014, Astuti 2017, Björkman 2020), that is rather ordinary but no less contradictory in its terms: How can a person not quite identify (in their own terms or in others') as Neapolitan, yet hold the ability to call Napoli their hometown? How does Napoli function meaningfully for people, but without this efficacy entailing strict identification or belonging? How are commitments to different places, not only compatible, but also instrumental to each other?

Chapter outline

In the introduction to this dissertation, I hold on to this puzzling double association — a resident *meaningfully* Neapolitan *and* Sri Lankan; Napoli functioning *like* Sri Lanka — generated through a vivid empirical and ethnographic encounter.

First, and rather than attempting to theorize an explanation that would overlook this puzzling ethnographic moment as too singular to hold any theoretical potential, I start by unpacking the presuppositions that render it paradoxical in the first place. I suggest that attempts (scholarly and otherwise) to measure the "integration" of settled migrants into a supposed wholesome and static host society lead to the dissolution of this surprising mimetic effect, and to the representation and treatment of migrants as (more or less threatening) outsiders, rather than as residents of the city. Second, I present a lexicon of theoretical terms which, instead of solving (or dissolving) the puzzling "like-ness" generated by my meeting with Dimuth, help me formulate its terms more clearly: in particular, I characterize and situate the "migrant" not as an alien figure, but as a border-crossing, mobile navigator. I also sketch out the troubled, messy uses of categories like "Italian", "Sri Lankan", "Neapolitan", "native", "foreigner" or "migrant", and I explain my own take on naming "groups" or "communities" of people throughout this dissertation. This leads me, in a third part to spell out a number of theoretically informed research

questions. Finally, the resulting research findings are summed-up, followed by a summary for the rest of this dissertation.

1. What is Sri Lankan Napoli?

1.1. Statistical and phenomenological approaches[4]: the migrant community

In 2019, the official count for the Sri Lankan resident population in the *provincia* of Napoli exceeded 16 000, over 90% of whom were known to live in the *comune* [administrative city] of Napoli, making them the largest group of non-EU foreigners in the city (ISTAT 2019). At the time of my research, suspicions had it that accounting for presences more temporary (without *residenza* declared in Napoli) or irregular (without a valid permit to stay) would make this number rise almost two-fold. Gender-wise, Sri Lankan residents were only slightly off-balance, with 47% of female residents in 2019 (*Ibid*.).

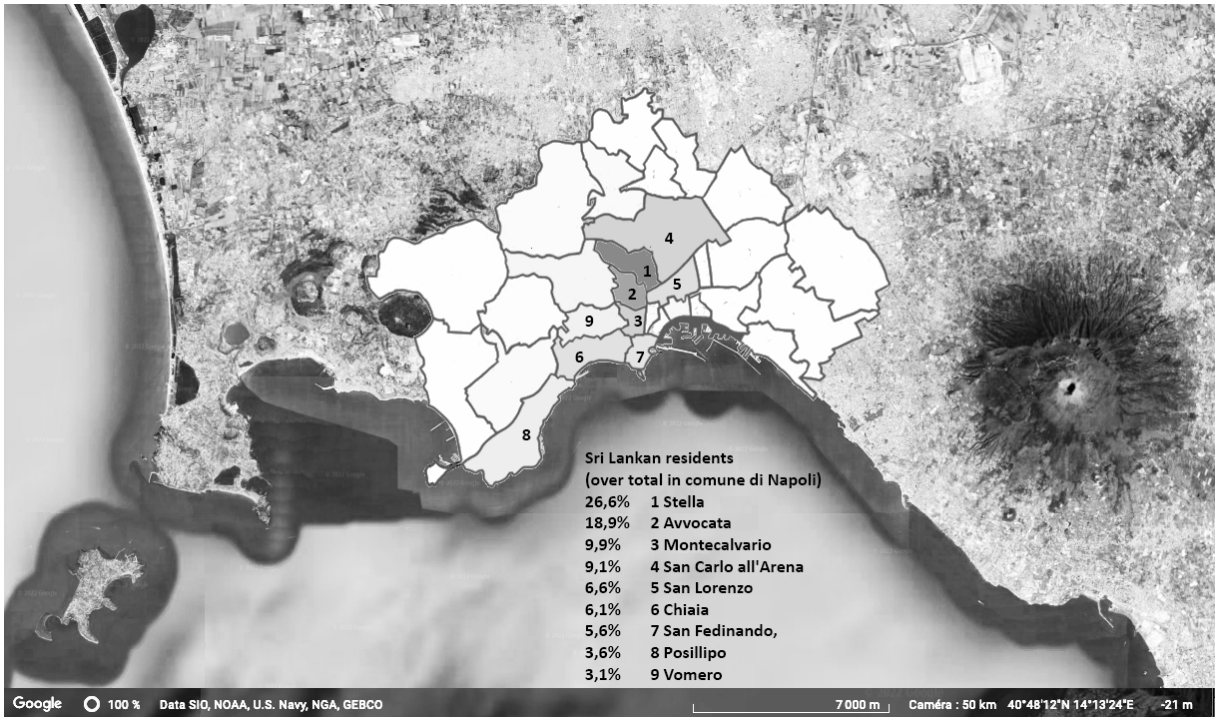

Figure 1. Localisation of Sri Lankan residence in Napoli, 2016 (elaboration by author from Google Earth with data from Comune di Napoli 'Servizio Satistica')

[4] The Interludes present a collection of photos illustrating a phenomenological approach to the migrant community.

A 2016 survey led by the city's demographics services (Comune di Napoli 2016) reported that the vast majority of Sri Lankan residents in Napoli had signed up for *residenza* in the *anagrafe* [residency registers] in *quartieri* [districts] straddling the outer fringe of what went by as the city's *"centro storico"* (Dines 2012). Following the 2016 statistical report, the popular districts of Stella, Avvocata, Montecalvario, San Carlo all'Arena and San Lorenzo totalized over 70% of declared Sri Lankan residency, while the registers of the more affluent districts of Chiaia, San Ferdinando, Posillipo and Vomero accounted for close to 20% of Sri Lankan residency in the city (fig 2.). The majority of Sri Lankans in Napoli had then declared their residence in central districts which overlapped with a series of *quartieri*, localities and neighborhoods, that more commonly went by the names of Santa Lucia, Quartieri Spagnoli, Montesanto, Sanità and the "*centro antico*" (fig. 2 and 3).

Quartiere di residenza	Sri Lankan residents	% over total number of Sri Lankan residents in the *comune di Napoli*
Stella	3948	26,6%
Avvocata	2804	18,9%
Montecalvario	1462	9,9%
San Carlo all'Arena	1344	9,1%
San Lorenzo	984	6,6%
Chiaia	912	6,1%
San Ferdinando	837	5,6%
Posillipo	536	3,6%
Vomero	458	3,1%
Total of 9 most populous quartieri	*13285*	*89,6%*
Napoli (comune) total	**14831**	

Table 1. Naples resident Sri Lankan population, Decembre 2016 (source: Comune di Napoli, Servizio Statistica, compilation by author)

To those numbers and to the statistical evaluations that they enable, we might then want to add some of the ordinary perceptions of Sri Lankan presence in Napoli: phenomenologies that come to constitute a landscape. Zooming in, the numerical aggregates of people forming the so-called "*comunità Sri Lankese"* (e.g. de Filippo and Strozza 2015,59) in Napoli were usually understood at the time of my research (both by scholars and by residents of the city), as residing within a collection of smaller areas — from a single street, to a series of building lots, to the premises of a square — which did not necessarily coincide with any administrative or existing historical neighborhoods (fig.

3). Those were the areas within which Sri Lankans were perceived by different onlookers to operate on a frequent basis.

Residential concentration of the "*comunità"* was notoriously found in via Francesco Correia (nicknamed *il Cavone* for the numerous caves carved out of it, both laterally and vertically), an emblematic street of central Napoli that widens from a furrow dug through *tuffo* cliffs by millenia of water running down from the hill down to what is now *piazza* Dante. The *Cavone* was recently portrayed as "*la casbah dove Napoli parla solo Indiano* [sic]" (the casbah where Napoli speaks only Indian) by an online journal, that, apart from its dubious geographic and linguistic accuracy (Ottopagine 2019), made the point that the area presented a perceptibly high concentration of Sri Lankan residence. Scaling up the Cavone, the sidewalks were punctuated with grocery stores selling a range of South Asian wares and foods, small take-away restaurants offering for an average of three euros a portion of "rice and curry" (at times doubling up into downstairs spaces to rent-out for karaoke parties or wedding celebrations), a pocket-size library with a selection of English, Sinhala and Tamil books, a collection of front-doors advertising for homemade goods (from jaggery-packed sweets, to spicy cutlets, to handsewn facemasks), potted chilis and eggplants growing lavishly by the front doors of *bassi* (ground-floor dwellings). Walls and doors steadily displayed all manners of *manifestini* (little posters), providing dates or costs for ranges of events: from bus trips to see the Virgin Mary of Lourdes, to theatre plays, to Italy-spanning cricket tournaments, to political elections in Sri Lankan or in Italy.

Figure 2. Central Napoli neighborhoods (elaboration by author from Google Earth)

At the foot of the *Cavone*, *piazza* Dante itself (a large open space with a few benches encircling the vast mouth of a metro entrance, along with a handful of bus stops), was a good place to look, as the city's residents would tell me without being prompted, if I wished to see Sri Lankan families with strollers and children — and, as those people would have had added to me, in pre-pandemic times, around the start of February or the start of May, I shouldn't miss the concerts taking place on a stage set up in the piazza's center. At the top of the *Cavone*, a Sinhala- and English-taught private schools (one of another half-dozen similar institutions) had taken up several floor spaces into one of Napoli's countless former monasteries.

Similarly, the Sanità neighborhood — where I happened to live at the time of the windy day portrayed in the opening vignette — had been dubbed “Little Colombo” in an early paper on the topic, with the smaller sections of the Cristallini and Stella areas figuring as further points of concentration (Amato 1999; see also Sepe 2004). Piazza Cavour and the mercato delle Vergini were bustling squares, respectively a transport hub (two metro lines and ten times as many bus lines had stops in Cavour) and a daily open-air market that was economic enough (although cheaper options existed if one pushed it further toward the Garibaldi train station) to attract the surrounding' low-wage earning residents, migrants and otherwise. Sri Lankan presence continued deep inside the Sanità, as signaled by punctual encounters with "ethnic" businesses, along with people's effective

residences. Sinhala could be heard on the street and read on the walls all the way down to the Orto Botanico to the west, along a few of the streets that scaled up the Capodimonte hill north-ward (including the Cristallini zone), and to the east up the *via* delle Fontanelle. In the school-free summer months, little boys and girls wielded cricket bats in narrow, shaded streets turned into make-shift pitches.

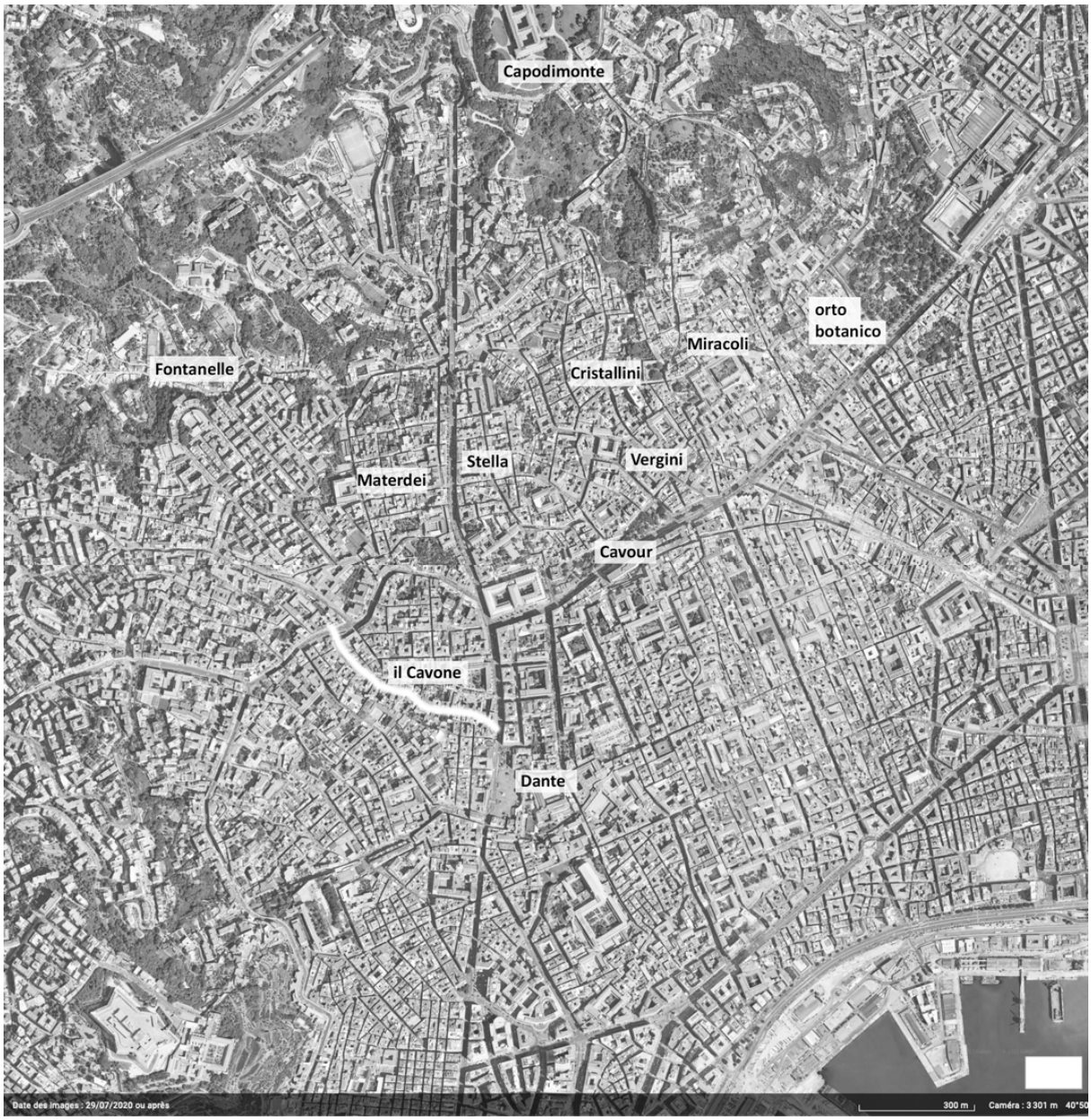

Figure 3. Central Napoli neighborhoods, zooming in on Sanità, Montesanto and the centro antico

The phenomenological and statistical landscape of Sri Lankan presence in Napoli would not be complete without a Hindu temple (in Montesanto), two Buddhist temples (a small one in the Fontanelle; and a large one past the northern end of the Capodimonte parc and twelve metro stops off piazza Dante), and a range of Catholic churches offering

mass given by Sri Lankan Sinhala- or Tamil-speaking priests, the most well-known of which was the Chiesa del Gesu Nuovo, in the heart of the *centro antico*.

1.2. The migrant's paradox: 'so novel as to be astounding'

But what does this tentative phenomenology of a Sri Lankan landscape, and what do those statistical indicators and the maps they yield (fig 2.) tell us about Dimuth's laughter? If the concentration of Sri Lankan presence in Napoli is so easily ascribable to a "world" of its own (Laino 2007), separate and visibly clear-cut into select spatial areas and select social phenomena, contained into the space of a map that would reflect a bounded neighborhood, then what should we do with the mimetic melting together of Napoli and Sri Lanka suggested by my encounter with Dimuth? To push this question further, let us take a brief detour: through another Italian city and another migrant "*comunità"*, and into literary (rather than solely ethnographic) storytelling:

> "We walked to the far end of the lane, where it joined the Rio Terà San Leonardo, a busy street, thronged with tourists and vendors."
>
> *'Look there — and there — and there,'* she said, pointing first to a waiter in a café, and then to a man who was selling chestnuts and another who was wheeling an ice-cream cart. *'You see'*, she said, with a note of pride in her voice, *'they are all Bengalis (...)'*
>
> I began to listen carefully now and soon I was hearing echoes of familiar words and sounds all around me. I wandered down the street, starting conversations in Bangla almost at random: the idea that it might be possible to do this in Venice was, for me, something so novel to be astounding."
>
> (Ghosh 2019,177-178)

When ingenuous traveler Deen Datta, the Kolkata-born narrator of Amitav Ghosh's novel *Gun Island* (2019), met fellow Bengalis (most of them Bangladeshi citizens) in the Venezia of the late 2010s, the landscape generated through those encounters was something he perceived as "so novel as to be astounding". Deen's surprise stemmed in part from the marginality (or the downright absence) of migrants in the narratives and representations that were usually circulated on Venezia. The "Venetian" landscape opening to Deen, in this excerpt, echoes with the snapshot of a "Neapolitan" landscape previously outlined: it appears as a set of spaces and practices involving a group of migrants settled in a foreign city; and, *as such*, it is a cause for surprise and curiosity. The contemporary conjuncture is one in which the "migrant" generally figures as a "paradox"

caught between the liberal claims of governments to openness and multicultural inclusivity, and the commitments of sovereign power to heightened border control (S.M. Hall 2021:9; see also Mouffe 2000). While in both examples alluded to previously, Napoli and Venezia, migrants worked and lived in positions that were socio-economically central (in domestic work; in the flourishing tourism industry; etc.), and while they occupied geographically central positions in the city, they were nevertheless constricted to marginal positions in the city's representations — such that an attentive tourist would be amazed at encountering their presence in a public square or a busy street. Migrant presence, when not surprisingly uncovered by keen eyes, is usually pictured as transient, subaltern, and, cast aside in a complex regime of visibility and invisibility that puts into question migrant membership in the city, and in its social and political spheres (Rancière 2000).

Urban scholars have grappled over the years with this question of the paradoxical relation of migrants to urban spaces and practices; and the ways in which this relation can be studied, discussed, —and influenced or acted upon. Yet the paradox itself often remains unquestioned, taken for its word: it remains assumed that foreigners and migrants are not ordinary residents, such that their presence continues to be surprising, paradoxical. Under this acceptance, Sri Lankan residents of Napoli cannot really be seen as "Neapolitan", in the same way that it would sound a stretch to call Bangladeshi residents of Venezia "Venetians". Under those assumptions, migrants tend to be considered as internally cohesive groups or "communities", more or less "integrated" within similarly cohesive cities. Assessing the degree of "integration" of the foreign part into the native whole then becomes the concern of commentators, whether they stand more on the descriptive or on the normative side (Briata 2019,37), and whether they declare themselves pro- or anti-migrant. Are migration and migrants themselves a threat (as conservative stances would have it), to be perpetually pushed away and contained, at a remove from society-proper? Or is migrancy (as some progressive opinions might put it), on the other hand, a condition to be celebrated as an indicator and a factor of urban multicultural life — but ultimately overcome through incremental settlement and inclusion of migrants in the city? Those questions sum up the terms to which the debate is reduced: the problem of the "integration" of foreign "communities" inside the city. The following paragraph demonstrates the pervasiveness of the concern with migrant "integration" from the media, to residents, to law makers (see also 'Associazione Carta di

Roma' 2019, 48-51,57-58) — before showing how it falls short of explaining Dimuth's laughter at the possibility of Napoli being both his home *and* like Sri Lanka.

1.3. Measuring integration

Consider the following quote, which, in a few lines, provides an insightful snapshot into how the relation of Sri Lankan migrants to Napoli is casually approached by the media through measurements of the "community's integration":

> "Se per i ragazzi napoletani qualsiasi piazza è buona per posizionare quattro zaini e farne due porte per giocare a pallone, *fielder, pitch, wicket*, sono i *must* dei ragazzi dello Sri Lanka che portano Napoli verso l'élite del cricket internazionale e ora sperano di entratre nelle semifinali del campionato italiano. . . [con] una squadra, il Kent Lanka, orgoglio di una comunità che conta solo nel Napoletano diecimila (*sic*) persone perfettamente integrate nel tessuto sociale e produttivo partenopeo. . . .
>
> . . . 'Purtroppo' —sottolinea [uno dei fondatori della squadra]— 'non abbiamo un campo dove allenarci. . . Facciamo un appello in questo senso a chi ci può aiutare. Il sogno? I nostri ragazzi sono tutti napoletani. Nati in questa città e perfettamente integrati. Siamo tifosi del Napoli e spesso andiamo allo stadio per vedere Insigne e compagni . . .
>
> . . . L'integrazione è nel dna dello Sri Lanka. Sin dai colori della bandiera. Un *melting pot* culturale che ne fa la loro forza." (Agata 2020)

In 2020, according to *Il Mattino*, "*ragazzi dello Sri Lanka*" were not the same as "*ragazzi Napoletani*" in Napoli: this was made evident by their alleged clear-cut cultural preferences for sport. And yet, the journalist insisted, every effort was made to integrate on the part of the Sri Lankans: true, the teenagers played cricket and not *pallone*, but they did so at levels that promoted Napoli and Italy at national levels, making them (as the journalist implies) deserving enough to be included among the city's residents, and to access a range of resources and services: in that case, the easier and cheaper use of a cricket pitch for school children. In addition, and regardless of their cricketers' prowess, the "*comunità"* also made sure to manifest its civic allegiance by showing fervent support for Napoli's football team. The journalist adds that their integration was indexed not only on their social and cultural efforts (like going to the stadium to see the *partita*), but also on their participation in the city (and the nation's) economic and productive growth. The story concludes with a remark that awkwardly matches the integration capacity of a few deserving individuals and groups, to a national community's alleged genetical propensity for integration—a remark that recycles the tired assimilationist trope of the "melting pot",

not to mention being ironically at odds with the past and current ethnic, religious and economic tensions fracturing Sri Lanka[5].

Preoccupation with integration is not limited to media outlets. Consider the words of Enrico, an Italian volunteer at a Catholic charity offering material support to single mothers and poor families residing the Miracoli neighborhood, when I questioned him in 2019 about the migrant residents the charity engaged with. Briefly outlining the national make-up of the people who came to the center, Enrico went on making a sweeping claim: "Sri Lankans are easy... they are well *integrated*... it helps that they are Catholic... and they are generally good humored... Not like Africans... Take Nigerians, so hot-tempered, *they* will always cause problems" (fieldnotes, June 2019). "Integration", in *il Mattino's* account, or in Enrico address to me, was then indexed on group and individual compliance with the host society's economic demands and sociocultural customs. It also offered a variable that applied to an entire "community" of foreign nationals, providing the possibility of comparisons and opposition with other national communities (for instance, Sri Lankans were considered well integrated in Napoli when Nigerians weren't).

But among those directly concerned with the question of the integration of Sri Lankans in Napoli, not everyone considered it the same light. Take Dilip, an artist and Napoli resident, in his mid-twenties, and the son of a couple who had migrated from Colombo nearly thirty years ago, now domestic workers in Napoli. When I met him for a coffee and a chat, he told me that his father was a withdrawn man when in Napoli, even though, to Dilip's tender amusement, every *partita* [football game] saw him slip into discreet yet sincere support of Napoli's football team. But Dilip knew how his father's quiet demeanor would shift as soon as he visited Sri Lanka. Only there would he truly come alive, Dilip could see it: "*Si vede nel suo sguardo*" [It shone in his eyes]. His mother was different, more "Neapolitan", according to Dilip, and he described how she casually eased into speaking Italian and Neapolitan when they were together in their *Montesanto* flat. But he could also tell that she failed to be fully comfortable here: "She won't ever sit at the post office, even if a bench is free, she waits standing, as if ready to leave. I think..., that she doesn't really feel at home here... *non si sente verramente a casa qui*". His parents never went out in the evening for food or drinks, and he had trouble explaining to them

[5] See Chapter 2 for more on the historical and geographical context of Sri Lanka.

his participation in what is glossed (among local press and policy makers) as "*la movida",* crowds of young people who gather on the street at night for take-away drinks and food. Dilip cringed, adding that they hoped he would eventually marry a "Sri Lankan girl", before making a hurried caveat: I must realize, he said, that what he had just described was not everyone's case. The parents of some of his "*italo-srilankese*" friends led completely different lives, eating out, enjoying their life in Napoli in many ways[6]. Yet he couldn't shake off the idea that there was a kind of separation, a "*ghettoizzation*" of Sri Lankans in Naples, as he put it, and that this resulted in a problem: "*C'è integratione spaziale, ma non c'è integrazione umana.* There is spatial integration, but no human integration" (fieldnotes, March 2021). Dilip's statement was significantly more nuanced than many sweeping claims about the *comunità*, such as those featured in the previous couple of snippets. But it remained concerned with measuring a degree integration, and considering as its object pre-defined, *a priori* mutually exclusive groups: the "Sri Lankan community" and "Neapolitans".

Along with their pervasiveness in everyday narratives on migrants in cities, preoccupations with integration weigh heavily on the lives of migrants and their families, as they have become increasingly formalized into Italian legislative texts[7]. This has notably been the case through the 2007 *Carta dei valori della cittadinanza e dell'integrazione,* the 2009 *Accordo di integrazione* introduced in the so-called *Pacchetto*

[6] The question of Italy's "second generation" — residents of Italy born of foreign parents— is a heated topic. See a recent text from Italian and Sri Lankan writer Nadeesha Uyangoda for an insightful and detailed autobiographical account. Notably, access to Italian citizenship for applicants who can't demonstrate "blood" ties to Italian citizens is conditionned by a strenuous process, governed by an outdated Citizenship law that dates back to 1992. See also films *Per Un figlio* by Suranga D. Katugampala (2016); and *La Voliera* by Bagya D. Lankapura (2019) for sensitive renderings of the relation between young residents of Italy and their Sri Lankan parents. *Italo-srilankese* is but one name people may claim for themselves, in some situations, and gives no certain information on place of birth or citizenship; I use it here quoting from Dilip, who equally easily called himself "Neapolitan", and, when younger, had made a point to call himself "Italian" only.

[7] Similar steps have been taken at the EU level, for example with the Common Basic Principles for Immigrant Integration Policy in the European Union (2004, EU Council on Justics and Internal Affairs); the Common agendas for Integration: Framework for the Integration of Third World Country citizens in the EU (European commission 2005, 2011 and 2016) the European agenda on migration (2015, COM, Brussels).

sicurezza and the 2010 *Piano per l'integrazione nella sicurezza Identità e Incontro*. Sociologists Vincenzo Carbone, Enrico Gargiulo and Maurizia Russo Spena (2020) point out that legal formulations of integration might *appear at first glance* to indicate a bi-directional negotiation between host society and migrants, such that a migrant's compliance with the "values" and "rules" of Italian society should respond to his or her access to resources and services that guarantee his or her life and livelihood (2020,378). But as Gargiulo writes elsewhere (2016) it is in fact a starkly asymmetrical relationship that is promoted through Italian legislation given that the "rules of the game and the limits" are all dictated by the Italian side. While Carbone et al. point out (2020) that there is a difference between the practical effects of openly discriminatory policies (and discourses) such as those promoted by ex-Interior Minister Matteo Salvini[8], and stances that come out as promoting foreign presence and integration — they also insist that those approaches in fact share a common premise, according to which "Italy is represented as a compact and unitary cultural community", the values and rules of which must be embraced by newcomers. Integration-focused accounts, in their concern with the encounter between the "inside" of a host society, and migrant "outsiders", are normative as well descriptive. Whether they claim to be pro- or anti-migrants misses the point: whatever their declared agenda, those narratives tend to relegate migrants in a ready-made state of spatial-temporal, socio-economic, and cultural marginality —while black-boxing the mechanisms that made them figure as marginal in the first place.

•

Ghosh's character Deen's ease at speaking Bangla in Venice, Dimuth's ability to joke about Napoli being his home and "like Sri Lanka", and even the fleeting "Neapolitan-ness" of Dilip's mother all suggest a different kind of relationship between migrants and the city from the integration narrative — a relation that was cannot simply be indexed on the degree of integration of a foreign part into a native whole. At the same time Dilip's quandary at being in between "Sri Lankan-ness" and *napoletanità* was painfully real, and the borders he negotiated daily pressed into his life. This relationship between Napoli and its Sri Lankan residents, as the following will make clearer, was unevenly mobile; it

[8] To cite but one example, Matteo Salvini was recently trialed over migrant kidnapping charges (Tondo 2020).

involved modalities of residing layered in mediation practices, and it was fractured in borders and boundaries that excluded, but also included, in often unpredictable ways.

The *empirical puzzle* that triggered this research into being is, I recall: how can an urban context like a city, function and be meaningful as "Sri Lankan" and as "Neapolitan"? And what difference does it make to ask this puzzling question, to follow up the consequences of the mimetic effect, as a planner? Departing from strict integration- or community-based narratives, evaluations and interventions, the following paragraph presents the "words, models, metaphors, and syntax" (Mol 2021) which helped me address this puzzle.

2. Who is a 'Sri Lankan migrant' in Naples?

2.1. "Europe's migrant crisis": problematic "immigrants"

Over the past decade, Europe's borders have been likened to chokepoints (Giordano 2018; Carse, et al. 2020) and graveyards (e.g. Andersson 2012; IOM 2014, 2019). Although flows of people moving between Europe and Asia, or Europe and North Africa are certainly nothing new and can be traced back to generations of exchanges across the region (Braudel 1972, Ben-Yehoyada 2017), those flows have condensed into what is considered a recent problem of immigration from the early 1990s (Colucci 2018). By the early 2010s, the Mediterranean had congealed into one such violent border, as dramatic images of orange dinghies and lifejackets flooded the media, igniting imaginations on all sides of the political spectrum. Death tolls rose, riveting commentators worldwide, with reports focusing on frail ships left stranded at sea for weeks by European nation-states' coastguards. In 2011, 64 261 people reportedly arrived in Italy by boat from across the Mediterranean — a figure that had leaped up from the 4 406 registered in 2010 (Colucci 2019). It was estimated that in 2019, 450 people died at sea by attempting to reach Italy by boat (IOM 2019). Simultaneously, the enforcement of other borders within around and Europe have fueled imaginaries of a "migrant crisis": in particular, the Balkan route became another deadly chokepoint, after a 2015 deal between Turkey and the EU drastically reduced possibilities of legal passage across the border (RiVolti ai Balcani 2020). Culminating in 2015, media depictions of those borders and border-crossings triggered the politicization of what was becoming known as "Europe's migrant crisis" (e.g., Giordano 2018, 2020), and one of the most debated political topics of the

contemporary conjuncture. In consequence, progressist, pro-immigration and anti-racist stances surged across the continent over the past two decades, and activists, migrant, and non-migrant alike, have taken up the struggle to prevent deaths and open borders.

At the same time, "a shallow politics of fear" (S.M. Hall 2021, 9), took hold of imaginaries. Hard stances on the pernicious effects of immigration for host societies were reignited and intensified, in the conjuncture following the 2008 financial collapse, which triggered cascading rises in unemployment and economic precarity across Europe (e.g., Dawes 2020, 3). As systematic reports on Italia media coverage of immigration-related issues show, the media "picked up on the criminalization of solidarity and often uses the same language as the politicians to discuss it, reinforcing a strong anti-immigration and anti-NGOs prejudice in readers/viewers" (Mastantuono and Shah Povia 2019; see also Associazione Carta di Roma 2019). In Italy, sociologists Asher Colombo & Giuseppe Sciortino (2004) have traced discourse on immigration in the media back to the beginning of the 1970s, in coincidence with the first substantive human flows directed to Italy. As the term "*immigrato"* (immigrant) progressively replaced the term *straniero* (foreigner, stranger) in mainstream discourse, it became increasingly used in a negative way, to depict a certain category of non-Italian presence in Italy: essentially low-skilled workers from Eastern Europe, and, increasingly, countries of the Global South. Differentiating them from foreign residents coming from the European Community, those foreigners are additionally branded as "*extracomunitari*", a qualifier that has much to do with racializing tropes as it tends to differentiate white Western migrants from the rest. At that time, "[f]ar from adopting a position of exaltation of immigration and facile anti-racism, the press saw these workers as victims of a process that disclosed the profound ills of Italian society" (Colombo & Sciortino 2004). Thus, for several decades, "immigrants" to and in Italy have become identified in the media and wider public sphere as racialized low-skilled workers, poor, marginal and threatening, tied to acts of crime and deviance. Immigration and "immigrants" — whether or not part of the flows that directly feed into the most compelling images of the "migrant's crisis", and whether or not they had crossed on foot through Balkan forests or taken one of the Mediterranean maritime routes — are increasingly seen as a threat for the integrity of Europe and of its singular nation-states (De Genova 2017).

No longer the limited field of the far-right, such discourses have seeped into the normality of the stances taken by so-called social-democrat political leaders or media pundits across Europe. Italy is no exception, with far-right politician and former Interior Minister Matteo Salvini emblematic of the circulation of blatantly racist and xenophobic declarations against "immigrants" (e.g., O'Grady 2019; Associazione Carta di Roma 2019). The following quote from the *New York Times* illustrates the atmosphere in France at the eve of 2022's presidential elections, a situation paralleled in other European countries, where increasingly "tough stances" on immigration (Onishi 2021) have become a casual means to generate votes:

> "As president, the candidate said, she would "eradicate zones of non-France" (...)
>
> It was not Marine Le Pen, the far-right leader, who was speaking, but Valérie Pécresse, the center-right candidate in April's presidential election. (...)
>
> Like others on the right and far right — who have railed against a supposed invasion of France by immigrants, even as arrivals have grown less in France than in the rest of Europe or in other rich nations worldwide in the past decade — Ms. Pécresse has taken a tough stance on immigration. Describing it as "out of control," she said there was a link between immigration and the rise of Islamism, terrorism and crime." (Onishi 2021)

Thus, mentions of *immigrazione* and *immigranti* in the media increasingly promoted a vision that was "far less centered on the labour market and enticing economic factors that activated or impeded mobility, and much more preoccupied with the impact of immigration on the social and cultural life of Italy" (Colombo & Sciortino 2014; Associazione Carta di Roma 2019). Despite the recent publications of important work debunking the myths and incoherencies about human transnational mobility, and at outlining the subtleties of the issue (e.g. Ambrosini 2020), immigration is still framed as an anomaly, and the three decades leading to the turn of the century have set the stage for the figure of the "immigrant": a "phantasm" (Colombo & Sciortino 2004) hovering in the margins of society, a threat to the integrity of the nation-state (at risk of interrupting it with zones of non-"nation"), stripped of any historical or economic materiality.

2.2. Problematic group identities: "immigrati srilankesi" and "napoletanità"

The term "immigrant" problematically designates some residents as suspect "foreign" elements in the "native" whole of the city, regardless of their specific migratory story. For many commentators of Italian cities like Napoli, migrant residents are also characterized

by their membership in a “national community” (or by their ethnicity, as in the case of the “Roma community" or of the “Tamil community”). This national labelling in part reflects people's citizenship (the passport they hold), identifies a nation-state territory of which they might have been residents at a given point in their lives (and might still be or plan to be) and are assumed to hold various forms of social and political allegiance to, and it gives indications as to what language(s) they are likely to speak. This distinction is telling in cases where migrant workers continue to move between destinations of employment and nation-state of citizenship, alternating residence in both places over more or less extended cycles. In those cases, the national label alerts to the possibility that some ties to the country of departure might remain potent and effective. This is clear in the case of many migrants from South Asian and South-East Asian countries like Sri Lanka or Indonesia who are involved in what continues to be characterized and promoted by sending governments as the “circular migration” of low-skilled workers. Unstable subjects and key elements in the economies of their origin countries through the sending back of remittances, those migrants often remain bound to return “home” after their stint of work abroad (Brown 2014; Lindquist 2009; see Chapter 2 for an overview of the Sri Lankan case).

However, when professed from the limited perspective of the administrative confines of a city, in many cases and as in Enrico's comment above, ethno-national labels act as sweeping claims that flatten residents' ties with their country of citizenship, or place of former residence, or cultural and linguistic uses. Rather than alluding to the shifting transnational patterns of circulations that might connect this person's residence in Naples to other places, characterizing a person as a member of Napoli's “Sri Lankan community”, tend to superficially ascribe an identity and a set of behaviors to the group thus labelled: *Sri Lankans are easier than Nigerians; integration is in their DNA* etc. Similarly, calling something or someone “Neapolitan” tends to declare this object of attention as “naturally” or “originally” of Naples, regardless of the variety of meanings that this “being of” the city can take in practice. A brief ethnographic recollection illustrates this notion.

In the fall on 2020, as I moved back to Napoli after having spent the first COVID-19 lockdown in Scotland, a year and a half down the line from the start of my research[9], I met

[9] See Annex for a research calendar.

with the landlady to my new flat. Adelina was a theatre actress and had resided and worked for most of her life in Napoli, readily calling herself a "Neapolitan". She lived in a circle of artists and performers that extended into a larger middle-class network of family and relations. On the Airbnb page on which she rented out a property she owned in a scenic spot in the South of Campania, Adelina described herself as *an "amante del mare*", a lover of the sea. When we first met, she had initially mistaken me for a traveler on a long vacation in the city, as we had not yet discussed how long I would be staying in the flat. After I explained I lived and worked in Napoli, Adelina nevertheless offered an unexpected explanation as to how things worked "here", in the form of a warning. In Napoli, she asserted, the famously hectic traffic had recently changed: now, "Neapolitan" drivers, exasperated with the increasing presence of tourists, easily lost patience when they spotted foreigners attempting to emulate the "local" practice of chaotic crossing. "*Devi stare attenta"* [You need to be careful], she insisted — there was no doubt, in her eye, that I would be identified by those hurried drivers as an irritating trespassing foreigner. But soon after, Adelina offered a reassuringly contrasting claim, in a tone of emphatic generosity: *"Napoli è una città molto accogliente*", a place where people felt welcome, a port city that had long been a herald for "diversity". I smiled at her tirade and thought that there was something amusing and homely in that sweeping praise of the city, one that I heard many times before (Dawes 2020:18). Whatever the city was, I told her, it kept my curiosity alive, for there was much that I did not understand. But Adelina took my answer for a complaint, and warmly told me not to worry: "*il Napoletano è così*", this is what the Neapolitan is like — but I would get it soon, she assured me.

In readily describing "*the* Neapolitan" as a type, Adelina located her commentary about the city into a steady tradition of stereotyping (Herzfeld 2015). According to those accounts, Napoli and its residents were tied to a well-defined repertoire of characteristics generally termed "*napoletanità*": chaotic and beautiful, passionate and resigned to its imminent death, unchanging and vibrant, ridden with crime but resilient, a sunny port and a "paradise inhabited by devils" (a quote often attributed to German poet Goethe), etc. This repertoire of stereotypes classically lent itself to binaries (Pardo 1996; Benigno, et al. 2009; Ferulano), leading to cycles of celebrations and lamentations on the "aporetic" nature of the city (d'Acierno and Pugliese 2018). As activist and Napoli resident Emma Ferulano explains in an interview with geographers Michele Lancione and Colin McFarlane, calling upon a shared *napoletanità* flattens out understandings of class

conflict, along the lines of a popular expression in Neapolitan language: "*simm e napule paisà*" [we are all from Naples, patriot!](2021). Ferulano goes on locating problematic references to *napoletanità* in narratives circulated by members of the middle-class, echoing with my own recollection of Adelina:

> "[In Napoli] the middle classes (including intellectuals and academics) are more generally trapped within a positive self-narration of *"napoletanità"*, far removed from the city's objective day- to-day issues and with strong prejudices against the poor and vulnerable components of the population. Attitudes that both condemn the poor for their poverty,at times with aggressive overtones, but can also be described as "do-gooder" paternalism, which sees the populace as an expression of the Neapolitan character." (Ferulano 2021)

When applied unreflexively to residents of Napoli, "Sri Lankan" and "Neapolitan" are then markers that both run the risk of essentializing behaviors into people, naturalizing their belonging to supposedly cohesive — and exclusive — groups and "communities". Sociologist Roger Brubaker (2002) warned against the analytical shortcomings of such an approach[10], suggesting that we refrain from uncritically using ethno-national or cultural group categories, and instead consider "the ways in which—and conditions under which—this practice of reification, this powerful crystallization of group feeling, can work" (2002,167). As anthropologist Lisa Malkki puts it, we simply need to remain aware that "people categorize back" (Malkki 1995) hence the constant need to situate and unpack the uses and changes of ethno-national labelling. For example, my friend Sanath, a Sri Lankan citizen and a legal resident of Napoli for over ten years, arguably well-versed in much of the city's workings (see Chapter 1) nevertheless vehemently refused the qualifier "Neapolitan" for himself, rejecting with it the negative side of the binary of stereotypes that cling to the city.

The difficulty in categorically naming my interlocutors: "Sri Lankan", "native", "immigrant", "foreigner", "Neapolitan" — is a tension that animates the entirety of this thesis and that I explore in the following pages. Still, a few initial settings are worth noting already. Against the term "immigrant", voices in and out of the academia insist on using the term *migrant*, to allude to "the movement, intrinsic incompletion, and consequent irresolution of social processes of migration" (De Genova 2017,3). Here, I retain such an approach and avoid the use of "immigrant" unless I am quoting another source. Instead,

[10] Brubaker (2002) terms this bias "goupism".

term migrant is more helpful to simply designate those people "who have crossed international borders" while keeping in focus the multiple forms of mobility and "modes of emplacement" that constitute any migration experience (Çaglar and Glick Schiller 2018,5). I keep the qualifiers Sri Lankan and Italian in designating people through their citizenship, and write in scare quotes as "Sri Lankan", "Italian" (or "Italo-Sri Lankan") when citing interlocutors or other sources. In addition, I refrain from using "Neapolitan" if not when quoting another source. Instead, my aim is to try and be more specific in characterizing residents of Napoli, for example in alluding to how long they have resided in the city for, or to what economic practices their livelihood in the city is based on, or to what attachment to the city they claim for themselves.

3. From empirical puzzle to theoretical inquiry

3.1. Migrants as mobile border-crossers

> "At some point he crossed the frontier. This may or may not have coincided with the geographical frontier of his country. It isn't the geographical frontier that counts: the frontier is simply where he is liable to be stopped and his intention to leave thwarted. On the far side of the frontier, when he has crossed it, he becomes a migrant worker. He might have crossed it in a dozen ways." (Berger and Mohr 2010 [1974], 47)
>
> "There is something quite peculiar about the pervasive assumption that what is most meaningful or interesting about the dynamics of migratory movements, and the experiences of people who move, is the cessation of their movement—their presumed settlement and assimilation as 'immigrants'." (De Genova 2005,56)
>
> "Like the variable light of dawn and dusk, the living city is not easily captured and perpetuated in writing. And like the vast sky above the small ship, this city embraces and overwhelms the ethnographer. There can be no vantage point from which to oversee the city and no position from which it appears still. How indeed to capture what is always changeable, never occurring in the same terms?" (Gandhi and Hoek 2012)

The attention to *borders* and their histories, moreover, helps me discuss the representation of migrant residency in Napoli into flat landscapes of phenomenologically perceived "Sri Lankan" instances (like temples, so-called "ethnic businesses", areas of residences, or cricket pitches), and the color-coded maps that statistical surveys lead to (see figure 1). Focusing on borders urges us to account for the multiple ways in which Sri Lankan residents of Napoli are compelled to engage with far fractured and fleeting spatial

and temporal configurations, to achieve (for the time being or for a lifetime) residency in the city.

At the same time, thinking with borders leads to considering migrancy as involving a range of mobility practices that are not limited to a crossing a line between a nation-state of origin and one of destination. Here, I draw from the work of mobility-attuned scholars to think of the ways in which "mobility includes not only geographical movement in time but also social and existential mobility" for people on the move through mobile worlds, with cross-border migration only one among many of the ways in which mobility is practiced and lived (Riccio 2018). At the turn of the 21st century, social science scholars have called for a renewed attention to mobility (Urry and Sheller 2006; Massey 1991); a concept that ties together movement, representations and practices. Their insistance is that "mobility is not just a function of time and space, but an agent in their production" (Cresswell 2006, 3-4), which results in a updating dynamically of the attention Lefebvre famously gave to the "production of space" (Lefebvre 1991). As geographer Doreen Massey pointed out three decades ago in a seminal piece, the question of mobility is not simply one

> "of unequal distribution, that some people move more than others, and that some have more control than others. It is that the mobility and control of some groups can actively weaken other people. Differential mobility can weaken the leverage of the already weak." (Massey 1991)

Characterizing migrant residents of cities as border-crossers foregrounds the unevenly (im)mobile texture of their lives. As De Genova suggests, “community”- and “integration”-centered approaches (by presuming aliens and natives; cohesive insides and alien outsides) don't fully account for the simple fact that migrants move through cities, but also settle and stay in cities, and often do both in alternance — as Dimuth and many of Naples' Sri Lankan residents did or planned to do. Here, it is worth noting how often Georg Simmel's initial insights on the importance of considering strangers in cities both as residents, and as "potential wanderers" has been turned into a blind spot and cast away from much of urban studies' sits of interest (Sopranzetti 2019).

In addition, a focus on integration fails to account for the ways in which cities themselves change and move, “never occurring in the same terms” (Gandhi and Hoek

2012) as urban residents take up the challenge of living in them[11]. In other words, integration-aiming work (whether it is more on the descriptive or the normative side) doesn't provide all the keys to unpack the presumptions leading to astonishment at the ubiquity of Bengali residence and presence in Venice, or to the half-believing laughter at the ludicrous yet credible suggestion of a likeness between Napoli and Sri Lanka. Those accounts do away with the mimetic effect of *Sri Lankan Napoli*, they dispel the threat of the mobile alien into the graduality of asymmetric integration or the unidirectional line of assimilation.

3.2. Mediation and material practices that matter: migrants as navigators

This section clarifies what I mean when I ask: in what ways was Napoli a *meaningful* context that *functioned* for Dimuth? For Amitav Ghosh's character Deen, surprise did not come merely his sight (or his broader phenomenological experience) of fellow Bengalis working and living in Venice: more importantly, he was astounded by the *possibility* it granted him, in Venice, "to [wander] down the street, starting conversations in Bangla almost at random" (Ghosh 2019). All *functioned* as if, quite simply, Bangla were a "Venetian" language; and Deen was struck by the new ways in which Venice could be meaningful for him, by how it suddenly afforded him with points of access and sets of possible practices, and by how this led him to new ways of representing the city (to himself and to others) in a global borderscape punctured with human flows.

Deen's shock resonates with Dimuth's laughter in the vignette opening this chapter. To my joking provocation —"Napoli is a Sri Lankan city"— Dimuth responded that, perhaps, Naples indeed *functioned* and was *meaningful* for him, and for countless others, just *like* Sri Lanka. This converged with his previous remark: as he saw it, Napoli was his "hometown"; and he was, in Napoli, for purposes that *mattered* to him, analog to a Neapolitan. I want to take Dimuth and Deen's prompt seriously, and to consider urban spaces as (potentially and fallibly) delivering shifting functions and providing unsettled meanings that can be unevenly, and sometimes effectively, harnessed by their residents.

[11] The political ecology litterature on urban metabolism offers a compelling demonstration of the mobility of cities themselves (Swyngedouw 2006, Gandy 2004). For a recent take on metabolism that considers mobile processes that seep through both through bodies and city, making urban political ecology speak to medical anthroplogy see Solomon (2016, 2021).

My understanding of urban "space" and of its socio-material production (Lefebvre 1991) is tied to a set of practical questions: how is materiality made to matter in Napoli, and for whom? How do Sri Lankan residents make urban spaces work for their purposes? What spaces emerge from the work residents put in residing in the city?

In addressing those questions, I am drawn to the "material" practices, discursive or otherwise[12], by means of which people mediate their lives in cities. Such practices may involve Dimuth's struggles to obtain legal documents, as much as his sweeping claims about what Napoli is and isn't. Recent strands of urban scholarship working with ethnography have asked similar questions (e.g. Björkman 2021; McFarlane and Silver 2017) drawing insights from long-standing debates around "practice theory"[13] animated by the work of Bourdieu (1977), Lefebvre (1991), Foucault (1975) or Latour (1993). Those debates tease at the idiom of "practice" to offer attempts at theorizing "how everyday life [is] formed, performed and disrupted through wider cultural, economic and political dispositions. . . how people come to know and use the world around them in particular but changing ways . . . [and to put] emphasis on the making of worlds." (McFarlane and Silver 2017,6).

This has notably led to intensify the focus on "materiality" as that which is affected by practice and, in turn, affects it. For a working definition of materiality, illuminating how this concept may help tease out the practices that "matter" for residing in Napoli, I draw on anthropologist and media scholar Arjun Appadurai's critique and expansion of philosopher Bruno Latour and sociologist Michel Callon's ANT (Actor Network Theory; see Latour 2004, 2005). In Appadurai's words:

> "materiality and mediation are best treated as mutual conditions of possibility and as effects of each other. Seen this way, mediation is more than simple association, relation, or juxtaposition. It becomes . . . a mode of materialization . . . because it is through mediation,

[12] The experience of doing ethnography has influenced my belief and conviction that there is "there is no useful distinction to be drawn between (so-called) *discursive* and *nondiscursive* forms of practice" (Börkman 2021,36, emphasis in the original), or in other words, that is simply practically impossible to draw strict lines between the discourses and words interlocutors may speak, write or otherwise circulate, and the other activities they may engage in.

[13] For an elaborate review on "practice theory", see Rouse (2006); for a condensation of those points which are most relevant to urban ethnography, see Björkman (2021, 36-37). It is relevant to note that

> whether in the mode of seeing, touching, feeling, hearing, or tasting (or through more complex infrastructures), that matter becomes active, vital, energetic, agentive, and effective in the world around us." (Appadurai 2015, 233)

In linking materiality with "mediation", Appadurai sharpens the analytical edge on the relation between people and the world they act in and with. For example, the relations between migrants and cities — such as that between Sri Lankan residents and Napoli — can then be thought of as an embodied process of mediation through which "matter becomes effective" and the city lends itself to residency. Residing, in that sense, can be thought of as "navigating" (Vigh 2009; Anjaria and McFarlane 2011; Solomon 2021): a mobile endeavor that is not merely about binary juxtapositions — such as that between Sri Lanka and Italy; or between "migrants" and "natives"; or between residents and the city — but becomes "a mode of materialization" of both the city, and of its residents' subjectivities. I draw on the idea that practices such as those Dimuth engaged with are entangled in the contexts they unfold in, such that and "the bodily skills through which they are realized are intimately responsive to the affordances and resistances of their surroundings" (Rouse 2006,536; cited in Björkman 2021,37), while those surroundings inevitably react to the push that those practices effectuate in them.

3.3. From empirical puzzle to research questions

A chat and a coffee with Dimuth were all it took to raise a troubling set of puzzles, while complicating any simple or definite answers. In Napoli, in the early 2020s, what did Dimuth, a Sri Lankan *migrant*, mean and imply, for the city and for himself, when he said: "Napoli is my hometown", and when he claimed that "Napoli is like Sri Lanka"? What would be the consequences of taking Dimuth seriously? The contrast between those two constructs, "Sri Lankan Napoli" and "Neapolitan Napoli" materializes as a real/imagined and empirical/theoretical site of ethnographic inquiry.[14] And it leads me to spell out the theoretically informed research questions which animate this dissertation.

[14] Here, I draw my inspiration from Nicholas de Genova's own examination of the "transnational conjunctural space" he calls "Mexican Chicago" and defines as: "a Chicago that is practically and materially implicated in Mexico and thus, a Chicago that can be understood to belong meaningfully to Latin America.

The first question addresses border-crossing and the mobility practices that accompany it. What were the multiple *borders* and the boundaries, this dissertation asks, that migrant residents like Dimuth needed to negotiate and move across, in order to achieve residency in Napoli? And where were Napoli and Sri Lanka located in a punctured *borderscape* wherein transnational fields connected, produced and rescaled those localities?

The second question focuses on residing in cities. What was the relation, this dissertation asks, that Sri Lankan migrants had to knit and curate between themselves and Napoli, such that they could achieve effective membership in the city ("*Napoli is my hometown"*), harnessing it for their practical purposes, however partially and fallibly so ("*Napoli is like' Sri Lanka"*)? What kind of mediating, suturing, translating, and navigating practices and modes of materialization did this relation involve? For a migrant resident, how does an understanding of "residing" as "navigating" help make sense of what the relation between a city — Napoli — and its residents, in a way that supersedes static categories of belonging like "integration" and "community"?

The third question focuses on urban diversity and identity. How does thinking with a construct like "Sri Lankan Napoli" shed light on that other imagined object, "Neapolitan Napoli"? How does the "Sri Lankan" lens help reformulate understandings of the work that a concept like *napoletanità* does when it's casually circulated, along the host of stereotyping practices that characterize it? By considering Napoli "as Sri Lankan", how may we de-naturalize predefined and limited conceptions that govern the ways in which Napoli is, and must be, "Neapolitan"?

3.4. Research findings

> "Allargare sempre lo sguardo. Forse anche questa è una responsabilità politica e intellettuale di chi si occupa di formazione e di politiche pubbliche in contesti di diversità." (Briata, Bricocoli and Bovo 2018)

Not merely an ''ethnic enclave'' or an ''immigrant'' ghetto, then, Mexican Chicago is a conjuncture of social relations. . . [and] the conjuncture of an urban ethnographic site (comprised of a multiplicity of particular places across the metropolitan region) and a set of specific questions" (De Genova 2005,7)". In my case, in addition, "Sri Lankan Napoli" does the work of putting into perspective the pervasive stereotyping practices attached to what I call "Neapolitan Napoli".

The research findings can be summed up in three arguments. Dimuth, a Sri Lankan citizen, a migrant worker and a resident of Napoli suggested that the city was (meaningfully, and efficaciously) his "hometown", and he recognized that it could be characterized as "*like* Sri Lanka". Drawing on various strands of theoretical work on urban epistemologies, the first argument is that such puzzling claims can be taken as a heuristic to expand our outlook on the city (Briata, Bricocoli and Bovo 2018). In other words, I propose a methodology and a set of theoretical tools to work at turning the initial paradox of "Sri Lankan Napoli" on its head — operating as if it were not paradoxical in the first place — unpacking assumptions as to who and what counts as "Neapolitan" and following the leads into other ways of formulating questions of diversity in urban spaces. This methodology, ethnographic in nature, I characterize as "taking Napoli as method" and choosing "people as sites".

Drawing on my own collection of ethnographic material, the second argument I make is that residing in Napoli involved bridging and suturing between discrepant, simultaneous *times*. I suggest that crisis narratives enlisting migrants as ideal suspects are misleading — as are any narratives that ascribe pre-defined temporalities to their objects, such as those that brand Napoli as stuck inside a limbo out of time. Instead, my research findings point at altogether different, contradictory times, that coexist in Napoli, and require various forms of labor and mediating practices from its residents. This, in turn, enables me to specify one aspect of navigating cities as mediating within and between discrepant, simultaneous times.

Further, I observed how long-distance nationalist ties and allegiances provided a moving repertoire of skills and aspirations that could make migrants as savvy as any resident, destabilizing identity constructs like *napoletanità*. This enables me to argue that while migrants are generally portrayed as subaltern actors, they in fact enact convincing and effective claims to the city they reside in, producing and rescaling it as they do so.

Eventually, through the lens of some of its Sri Lankan residents, this dissertation contributes to a "cosmopolitical" archive of Napoli, one that might offer new horizons for planning practices that engages with urban diversity and migration.

3.5. Thesis outline

Part I, opening with this introduction, sets the stage. *Chapter One* exposes the methodology put to work through fieldwork, as my objects of inquiry and my methods, together with my object of observation and my sites shifted through ethnography (understood both as an embodied research and 'data' collection practice, and as an operation of knowledge production through writing). *Chapter Two* uses material from historians, geographers, anthropologists and jurists to speak of two interlinked sides of my conjecture: Napoli and Sri Lanka— Sri Lankan Naples and Neapolitan Sri Lankans— enabling me to theorize Sri Lankan Napoli as a borderscape. The next three chapters (regrouped in *Part II*) lay out my ethnographic findings by focusing in turn, on two key concepts: time (*chap. 3*) and knowledge (*chap. 4*). *Chapter 3* centers on my friend Dimuth, whom we've met already in this introduction. *Chapter 4* is about embodied, localized knowledge and transnationality, and it foregrounds the character of Sasanka, my Sinhala professor. The Conclusion casts a new light on the findings through the lens of food and of the *proposition cosmpopolitique* (Stengers 2007).

Interlude. Thresholds and closed doors

This brief selection of pictures is a collection of thresholds, that give a sense of what can be perceived as the "limits" of the "*comunità"*. Standing on the outside of those threshold participates in generating quests for "gatekeepers", together with naturalizing the idea of a bounded community. All but empty of human figures, those pictures also illustrate my own reticence at the voyeurism of snapping pictures of (alleged) *comunità* members. As suggested in the Introduction to this dissertation, those images participate in an urban phenomenology that only brushes the surface of what Dimuth's laughter indicated, when he said "Napoli is my hometown", together with "Napoli is like Sri Lanka".

Figure 4. via Francesco Correia, nicknamed "il Cavone

Figure 5. View on the Cavone's stratification

Figure 6. Hairdresser in Sanità

Figure 7. An agency in Sanità, registered as a CAF (Centro di assistenza fiscale) and offering a number of services, including help with administrative proceedings regarding residence permits.

Figure 8. A restaurant in Stella.

Figure 9. An agency, doubling up in money transfer office, in Montesanto, advertizing for "everything you want - front of your home".

Figure 10. A grocery store in Quartieri Spagnoli, with a selection of South Asian vegetables displayed on the street.

Figure 11. Hindu kovil [temple] in Montesanto

Figure 12. Entrance to a* palazzo *in Sanità

Figure 13. Entrance to a house in Sanità

Figure 14. Entrance to a house in the Cavone. Pots of eggplant and green chilis.

Figure 15. Intercom in Sanità. Some Sinhala or Portuguese names give away clues as to the nationalities of the residents.

Figure 16. A sign written in English and Tamil, advertizing for halal meat. Reads "kindness and availability at your service".

Chapter 1. Napoli as method

Opening vignette. A chance encounter

— “Now, if I understand correctly, you are curious about migrants, in Naples”, Prof. L asked, somewhat rhetorically.

Her eyes were twinkling as I sat across her desk, on a chilly afternoon in February 2019, twitching nervously my hands. My doctoral program had kicked-off a couple of months ago, and it was about time I got the outline of my research project settled: object of study, research questions, methodology. Grounding my interest in “Naples” into “something concrete” was the purpose of that day's supervision meeting.

Reaching for her phone as she spoke, Prof. L casually explained that I should speak to a colleague of hers, a geographer and expert in international migrations in Italy and Naples. She started scrolling down her contact list.

— “Yes, I am interested in migrants, and in the city”, I answered, “it's just that... I don't know...”, I attempted, in a compulsion to spill out my hesitation — but Prof. L. was already pressing the phone against her ear, waiting for the call to come through.

Looking up at me, she mouthed: *Africa or Asia?* A couple of weeks before, I had mentioned in passing my curiosity for the central areas of Naples, and for residents of South or East Asian background. Prof L's eyes did not leave me until I croaked out a half-muted “Asia...”, to which she nodded and whispered again*: Sri Lankan or Chinese?* The ringtones from her phone sent my thoughts and doubts spinning. My mind's eye might have caught a colorful flash from the novel I was then reading, set close to the southernmost tip of the Indian subcontinent — or perhaps I was just surrendering to the extent of my own ignorance, in naming a country I could only barely place on a map:

— “Sri Lanka...?”, I stammered, just as Prof. L. began speaking on the phone. Within minutes, she was explaining to her colleague from Geography that a doctoral student of hers was studying the “Sri Lankan community in Napoli”:

"Could she drop you a line, and maybe come by and have a coffee with you one of those days? Sure. Great, thank you so much...."

After she hung up and I sat frozen — the whole scene would not have lasted more than a few minutes —, Prof. L. broke into a kind smile, and stared me in the eye.

— "As you do ethnography, you will need to knock at every door you find", she said wisely, "Some doors will slam shut in your face or simply remain closed; but others will open and let you in."

(fieldnotes, February 2019)

The nudging from my supervisor was, I knew, a test-proofed mentoring tactic, and I welcomed the encouragement it offered. Yet this brief chat was also highly consequential in unforeseen ways, taking me to unexpected places, both empirical and theoretical. After this meeting, I set out to design (and, later, reflexively re-design) not only my methodology and research questions — but also the object of my study itself. This chapter is about this design process. Through staging this 2019 meeting into an ethnographic prompt, I tackle the idea of the methodological approach to an *object of study*. As the vignette suggests, there was an element of chance in my choice of an object for myself. It could have been otherwise, elsewhere, different people or things. Through sequenced "contingencies of encounter" (Tsing 2015,142), the geographies of what and who was potentially close, distant or intimate to me in Naples had begun to shift: an object of study had become tied to me and me to it — "the Sri Lankan community in Napoli". This chapter unfolds the process through which I realize that I could only address that object — in a way I felt compelled to — by questioning its very existence. This led me to let it dovetail into an "object of observation" on the one hand, and an "object of inquiry" on the other hand (Fernando 2014).

As my own geographies blurred in and out of focus in contact with those of my interlocutors', my initial object of study — a bounded social entity, congruent with a bounded geographical space — was losing salience as an "object of observation", and leading me to question what my inquiry really was about. Moving around the practices and people that made up Napoli, I encountered a puzzling mismatch between assumptions (mine and others' as well) that supposedly bounded entities (such as people, things or practices) were homogeneous to bounded spaces — and *who* and *what* I met

with in the field. My problem had become two-fold, both epistemological and methodological: the question "*what am I studying?" (or "what is my object of inquiry?")* could no longer have the same answer as the question *"where and how am I studying it" (or "what is my object of observation?").*

Chapter outline

This chapter is organized in four parts. The first part briefly considers previous urban scholarship that has focused on locating national and ethnic communities in cities. I continue with outlining critiques to approaches that consider clear-cut correspondences between people and the spaces they inhabit (in the wake of the Chicago School of sociology's seminal work). I follow with presenting alternative ways to study difference in cities: in particular, some of those offered by inspiring strands of urban ethnography. In the second part I stress the methodological and epistemological implications of letting inquiries on the urban unfold through ethnographic engagement — what I call taking "Napoli as method" (Corsin Jiménez 2017; Lieto 2018; Björkman 2015). I explain how taking "Napoli as method" meant letting my "object of inquiry" abductively emerge from recursively rubbing against each other empirical insights and theories. The third part delves into the methods put to work doing ethnography in Napoli. I explain where and how I placed my body in the city, outlining my choice and encounter with "objects of observation" which illuminated my inquiry on the urban, without blurring together with it. I show how what I initially saw as the failure of my attempts at mapping the "Sri Lankan community in Naples" was highly productive, as it forced me to reconsider how this preliminary object of study had dovetailed into an object of inquiry, *and* an object of observation. Eventually, I was led to reconsider my object of observation itself by conceiving of "people as my sites". Fourthly and finally, I include a section in which I engage with the ethical questions that my methodological process met on the way. I address the issues of how the "situated" character of knowledge and of its production (Haraway 1988) involves the ethnographer, touching upon the notions of "reflexivity" and "positionality", which incorporate but also exceed the intersections of usual social science categories (Narayan 1993; Weston 1996; Pachirat 2009).

1. Problems with ethnographies of difference in the city

1.1. After the Chicago School: sedentarism, metonymy, and the migrant problem

There is a large body of social science scholarship that seeks to map out the presence (geographic, demographic) of migrants in cities, and Naples and its region are no exception (e.g. Coppola 1999; Amato 1999, 2006, 2009; de Filippo and Pugliese 2000; Cattedra 2003; Sarnelli 2003; Schmoll 2004; de Filippo, Caputo and Strozza 2005; Russo Krauss 2005; Näre 2010, 2012; Laino 2013). This literature, mostly linked to Italian sociology and geography, builds on available[15] statistical and demographic reports on migration and migrants (both local/regional and national), in a bid to locate migrant populations present on the Italian territory. While the precision, accuracy and methodology of the available quantitative reports have long been subject to much discussion[16] (Amato 2009; King 2002; Colucci 2019), both the categories of analysis and

[15] The Italian National Institute of Statistics (Istat) is a public institute that provides official statistics relating to migration, in collaboration with a range of public institutions such as the Minister of Interior. Other public bodies also offer their own data collection, for example at the municipal level. The catholic organization Caritas Italiana, in collaboration with the foundation Migrantes, publish yearly *dossiers* collecting and compiling data on migrant populations arriving in Italy, providing a more user-friendly, complementary database to that of the Istat Additional data is also produced by Caritas/Migrantes, through estimates and numberings they carry out from their local offices, for example the Centri di ascolto Caritas (Caritas/Migrantes 2020, 114). Between 1991 and 2012, the Caritas/Migrantes reports were soberly entitled "Immigrazione Dossier statistico" and remained focused on numerical and quantitative data. From 2013 onward, the dossiers were renamed "Rapporto Immigrazione" and became more thematized and qualitative, incorporating commentary from social scientists or policy makers, seeking to divulgate information on migration/immigrants to a wider audience, pursuing Caritas' "critical but optimistic stance towards the role of immigrants in Italian society" and its advocation for "peaceful coexistence" (King 2002). A number of other private organizations, religious or not, provide additional data (eg. Camera di commercio).

[16] Correctives and caveats are available from within the reporting institutes and organisms themselves; while 2019 marked the turn toward centralized, continuous online census has been implemented in Italy.

the information they provide remain widely used, serving as tracers for mapping out the landscape of migrant presence in Italy[17].

Those numbers and their elaborations into maps figure as the "authorised techniques for making migration and diversity officially visible in the city" (SM Hall 2015), illustrating the Italian government's obsession with account numerically for foreign residents (Vereni 2014, Cacciotti 2021). But as much as they make visible, they also obscure. The scholarly attention given to those techniques and modes of making migrants visible stands in the lineage of the fascination that drew a young team of sociologists in the Chicago of the 1920s and 1930s, to the social and spatial upheavals undergoing in the US around that time (Semi 2006). Chicago was then a rising social and spatial hub, attracting massive financial investments, along with waves of migrant laborers from the south of the US, as well as from Europe (Wirth 1938; Sopranzetti 2019, 115; Semi 2006). With urban resources and infrastructures — such as housing, work or health care — made accessible in drastically uneven ways, tensions grew between differently situated groups (both socially and spatially), while racial divides pitted white residents against their black neighbors, erupting into violent riots (Sopranzetti 2019). It was in such a turbulent context that the Chicago School social scientists gathered around the example of sociologist Robert E. Park, systematically putting to work ethnographic methods to study the city, *in* the city. Theoretically, they strived to refine and follow the implication of Park's conception of the city as an "ecology" (Park 1936; Wirth 1938).

[17] In the quantitative reports used by scholars who seek to map out ethno-national diversity in Italian cities, *nationality* is a central category from which the limits of the populations under study are initially carved out. *Gender* (male or female), age and marital situation make up the next sections of information readily available through official censuses, serving more detailed descriptions of the population at hand. These reports also provide estimates of the distribution of *legal statuses* of migrants. They generally do so by triangulating national and municipal surveys with data from other sources, such as interviews within samples of the population under study (e.g., de Filippo and Strozza 2015; Coppola et al 2009). *Ethnicity* and *religion*, on the other hand, are only evaluated through secondary estimates and interviews ran by the social scientists themselves. In some instances, information can be obtained on the forms of entrepreneurship that members of migrant communities engage in, and the financial capital they can rely on to do so (e.g. Amato 2017).

Reviewing the lasting influence of the ecological approach to cities, anthropologist Claudio Sopranzetti makes the point that, in a tradition carved out by the Chicago School, mobility — human and otherwise — remains a persistent "blind spot" (Sopranzetti 2019). In those classical approaches, migrancy is disregarded as a condition at remove from urbanity proper, while migrants themselves failed to generate scholarly focus as they seemed bound to ultimately disappear with the "cessation of their movement" (De Genova 2005,56). All goes as if sociologist Georg Simmel's initial insights on the importance of considering strangers in cities both as residents, and as "potential wanderers" were erased (Simmel 1950, 402; Urry and Sheller 2006). Simultaneously cities and urban spaces remain overall considered as stable social and spatial units, offering higher or lower degrees of porosity for incoming migrant bodies. The ways in which this bias and its variations have ingrained themselves throughout further scholarly work pertains to an analytical tendency that has been termed "sedentarism" (Malkki 1992; Cresswell 2006).

One consequence of sedentarism bias is that, in contrast, any given state of normalcy becomes one in which social groups can be fixedly matched to bounded spaces. What has been termed the "metonymical bias" (Sopranzetti 2019) of the ecological approach to cities — according to which the city's inhabitants are organized in discrete enclaves and the culture of a given group is assumed to be "isomorphic" to the space it occupies (Gupta and Ferguson 1992)— is a persistence feature in social science scholarship, lingering even in some of the more recent segregation studies[18]. In particular, the data in quantitative demographic reports is often associated with physical spaces in the sociology and geography literature that builds on them: whether through representation on maps, or in tables and graphs that locate people and their practices in the city. Not limited to the urban scale, the scholarly bias toward the naturalization of socio-spatial boundaries and the isomorphism of groups to spaces has also led to taking national categories as starting points for analysis— a tendency which has been efficaciously flagged as "methodological nationalism" (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2003).

A further consequence of sedentarism stems from the hidden moral and normative premises (e.g. Morris 2015; Pachirat 2018; Sopranzetti 2019) underlying the approach to

[18] See Arbaci (2019) for a fine-grain approach to segregation in South European cities.

urban space put to work by scholars like Robert E. Park and his followers[19]. One such premises is a latent supposition that there is something abnormal and threatening in the unchecked circulation in the city of "humans, commodities, and lifestyles" (Sopranzetti 2019,116). "Deviant" was the term introduced by the early Chicago School and taken up by subsequent scholarship to refer to a range of mobile urban residents, including the (often overlapping) categories of criminal, ethnic minorities, and migrants. Migrants have long been the ideal suspect of sedentarist and metonymical social science approaches to urban spaces, conceived as mobile elements pitted against static non-migrants; gathered in unsettled groups, problematically enclaved apart from the city proper. Migration scholarship across social science disciplines (including those which operate in cities, and use ethnographic methodologies) then holds a persistent heritage of sedentarism, operating through a metonymical bias which constitutes migrants as problems (Anderson 2019).

1.2. Transnational and mobile innovations in urban ethnography

Strands of scholarship have emerged in reaction to the biases that render migration and migrants problematic in the first place. On a political theory level, postcolonial and feminist studies have considerably expanded the lexicon with which difference and exclusion can be conceptualized (e.g. Hall 1993; Gilroy 1987; hooks 1992). Inspired by this work, several Napoli-based cultural and political theorists have recently provided alternative theoretical accounts of race and difference in the Italian context (Chambers 2008, Conelli 2015, Curcio & Mellino 2010). Notably through a focus on the geographical, historical and cultural category of the "Mediterranean", this literature has worked at dismantling approaches that reify the difference between migrants and natives, offering readjustments to think of the relation between migrants and cities (Chambers 2008). But despite the theoretical reframing they offer, many of those critical accounts fall short of fully engaging with the practical, material sites of migrants' relationships to urban spaces in cities like Napoli. In other words, they tend to operate in the spheres of theoretical

[19] On the formative years of prominent Chicago School founder Robert E. Park and how they shaped some of his conservative views, see Morris's *The scholar denied: W.E. B. Du Bois and the Birth of Modern Sociology* (2015).

formulations and debates, lacking a focus on the messiness of lived urban spaces, and on how those can be practically and empirically lived and studied.

Opening an empirical space of inquiry, scholarship across disciplines (anthropology, sociology, geography, urban studies) has put ethnography to work, grappling with the complexity of transient and settled migrant residency in urban spaces. Making use of quantitative reports, but also departing from them, ethnographers have engaged with lived and singular experiences of difference in urban Italy, in specific contexts, alongside fellow migrants and non-migrants as well (e.g., Della Puppa & Gelati 2015; Briata, Bricocoli and Bovo 2018; Dawes 2020; Cacciotti 2021). Simultaneously, and against the sedentarist and metonymical biases, efforts have been made to follow James Clifford's famous call in the late 1990's that ethnographers pay attention to “routes” rather than “roots” (Clifford 1997), and consider how people, things and values move — rather than operate from the premise that their coordinates can be settled in space. The renewed theoretical attention to mobilities (cf. Introduction) has provided a lexicon for thinking with flows, and the circulation, acceleration, viscosity or friction surrounding those flows (Urry and Sheller 2006; Cresswell 2006). In parallel, an important body of work attending to "routes" has studied how those routes and the flows they support cross and blur the edges of national borders. Pushing away from methodological nationalism and teasing out the frictions between local and global spaces and processes, this work has foregrounded transnationality[20] in the study of migrants and European cities (Glick Schiller & Çaglar 2011, 2018; Riccio 2019).

Scholars working in and around Naples have responded to the methodological challenges posed by focuses on transnationality and/or mobility (Schmoll 2004, 2012;

[20] Nina Glick Schiller usefully draws a line between the terms “transnationality” and “transnationalism”, preferring the former over the latter. "Transnationality", she writes, "indicates cross-border connective processes that are both social and identificational (...) [and] can more usefully be used to signal the simultaneous social, cultural, economic, and political processes of local and cross-border participation, sociality, membership, connection, and identification. This reading of the term transnationality emphasizes the concept of nationality embedded yet problematized by the term.” (Glick Schiller 2014:291)." In other words, it is about relations and forms of belonging that exceed national borders to operate transnationally. "Transnationalism" —also specified as "methodological transnationalism" (Anderson 2019)— is then a methodological lens or approach which foregrounds the condition of transnationality.

Lucht 2011); as have scholars focusing on the flows between Sri Lanka and Italy (Benadusi 2015; Bacciocchi 2010; Brown 2013, 2014, 2016). Attending to migrants in cities without falling into the traps of sedentarism has led many scholars to embrace "multisited ethnography", as anthropologist George Marcus (1995) famously called for: setting out to follow their objects of study by literally moving around with them (see also Tsing 2015). They have done so partly by following people across national borders: for example, migrant workers between Naples and Ghana (Lucht 2011), Naples and Marseilles (Schmoll 2004), Veneto and Sri Lanka's western coast (Bacciocchi 2010); or migrant priests between Rome and Colombo (Brown 2020). Some have also worked at "following the thing" in Marcus's words— for example, relics of catholic Saints and their cult between Sicily and Sri Lanka (Benadusi 2010); or merchandise produced and circulated in and beyond Napoli (Schmoll 2004, 2012).

Yet, anthropologist Alpa Shah reminds us that, inevitably, "to understand the social relations that the people we study are embedded in, we must work across time and space" (Shah 2017:53), as the scales that matter for people, in given spatial and temporal situations are bound to shift in and out of focus. The point is that there are multiple ways to attend to mobile and transnational spaces, people, things or practices; and "following the people or the things" is only one of them. In line with that criticism of *stricto senso* transnational fieldwork, Caglar and Glick-Schiller themselves have recently called for the more nuanced practice of a "multisighted" rather than "multisited" ethnography (2018, 10) suggesting that any given location is "always multiscalar" because always produced in relationship to other locations, within "intersecting networks linking multiple forms of disparate institutionalized power" (*ibid*); a point which echoes Doreen Massey's argument for "a global sense of place" (1991).

But what specific urban sites to consider for a *multisighted* ethnography that attends to transnational lives and difference in the city? Where should the ethnographer locate her body, and what moves should she undertake? At this point, and as the previous paragraphs have tried to make clear, the problem is no longer only epistemological (pertaining to the theoretical inquiry) but also, crucially, methodological (pertaining to the ways in which the object of inquiry becomes studied and known). The next sections will address those questions in light of the specificity of my own ethnographic research through what I term taking "Napoli as method" and "people as sites". To begin that

explanation, the following a paragraph outlines the epistemological settings upon which hinges my practice of ethnography.

2. Napoli as method and people as sites

2.1. Napoli as method: offsetting object of inquiry from object of observation

Recently, anthropologist Alberto Corsin Jiménez has invited urban ethnographers to use "the city as method" (2017)[21], in a wager to work outside and beyond ready-made categories of analysis that have been pervasive in urban scholarship. According to Corsin Jiménez, urban scholars have until now tended to naturalize their own accounts of cities and their residents "as speaking about a place (geographical or epistemic), paying little or no attention to how such places must themselves be drawn together as empirical and pragmatic problems" (2017, 454). His argument builds on previous critiques from urban scholars who have sought new territories, practices or forms of inhabitation as empirical-theoretical objects of inquiry *in* and *of* the city: so-called "slums" (Rao 2006), informality and the Global South (Roy 2009), auto-construction practices (Holston 2008), or dwelling in the margins (Lancione 2019, Simone 2018)— as well as migrant residents (Miraftab 2016; Caglar and Glick Schiller 2011, 2018; De Genova 2005; SM Hall 2021). This scholarship, strongly influenced by postcolonial theory, seeks to unsettle what may or may not count as "urban", outside of the admnistrative confines of cities and metropolises, and beyond canons and habits — in particular, those inherited from Western conceptions of the city, whether North American or European.

Drawing from his own ethnography in Barcelona, Corsin Jimenez invites urban ethnographers to merge their methods with their objects of inquiry — such that they recognize that objects of inquiry are constituted through the very methodological approach that ties the researcher to them (2017). He proposes that urban scholars give up on fixing *a priori* research sites and objects for herself, instead working with a "panoply

[21] See for example the formulation of "border as method" (Mezzadra and Nielson 2015). I ascribe to sociologist and STS scholar John Law's take on the performativity of method. He argues that there are "two great views of *method* in science and social science. On the one hand it is usual to say that methods are techniques for describing reality. Alternatively, it is possible to say that they are *practices that do not simply describe realities but also tend to enact these into being*" (Law 2009, my emphasis).

of methods inhabiting, intermediating, and upending how the *city-specific* and the *city-in-abstraction* relate to one another" and "paying attention to the ecologies of practice through which the city is auto-constructed as method of inquiry and exploration" (Corsin Jimenez 2017, my emphasis). This amounts to offsetting the analysis from what the urban scholar is producing theory about — her object of inquiry —, to where she studies it from — her object of observation (Fernando 2014).

The knowledge-making inquiry put to work in this dissertation is then empirically grounded, and operates neither through deduction, nor through induction: rather than being confined to the beginning (as in deduction) or to the end (as in induction) of the empirically-grounded knowledge-making endeavor, intervene in a recursive way throughout the entire process, an approach better thought of as "abductive" (Timmermans and Ivory 2012). Björkman (2020) spells out the logical premises of the abductive approach, insisting that "premature ideological commitments to this or that strain of urban theory not only constrain what sorts of research questions are possible to pose, but also color the knowledge that the researcher is able to produce in answer to those questions". In consequence, throughout this dissertation, my use of "theories" does not map clearly along disciplinary boundaries (planning, geography, anthropology), nor does it equate any fixed theoretical framework. Instead, the theoretical formulations I put to work accompany the recursive iterations of the knowledge-making process. They can then be confirmed, as much as they can be proven inadequate, for dealing with the surprising empirical and ethnographic encounters I engage with[22].

Accordingly, the ethnography I practice hinges on "participant observation", or what anthropologist Alpa Shah defines as "a form of production of knowledge through being and action. . . revisiting and revising the questions that we enter the field with, often making our initial ideas redundant." (Shah 2017, 49). Ethnography can then be understood both as an embodied research and collection practice, and as an operation of knowledge production through writing The resulting ethnographic descriptions offered

[22] In the words of STS (science and technology studies) scholar Annemarie Mol, "theory does not stand for an overarching explanatory scheme that results from a process of analytically drawing together a wide range of facts. Instead, it indicates the words, models, metaphors, and syntax that help to shape the ways in which realities are perceived and handled." (Mol 2021, 1-2).

in the chapters that follow are snapshots into this recursive process, moments in which recollections of experiences past are made to dialogue with theories, inside the artefact of a written text.

2.3. People as sites

Given that urban spaces may be better understood as a range mobile, "contextualising process" than as any "stabilized form" (Lieto 2017:576; see also Introduction), objects of observation can serve as tracers for the broader material processes that urban theory seeks to address. The challenge is then one of refining a localization of points of observation from which to collect insights that may, abductively, specify and cast light on an object of inquiry. In a supplementary chapter to her monograph *Pipe Politics* (2015), anthropologist Lisa Björkman spells out the relation between her ethnographic sites (her object of observation), and her inquiry into the contextualizing processes whereby access to water occurs for people in Mumbai. While her inquiry pertains to questions of so-called "neoliberal" restructuring of urban spaces and debates on privatization, her "object of observation" is Mumbai's hydraulic infrastructure — in other words, water and its access. "Water" and "accessing water" can be understood both as the *method* of her research — as she sets out to track the taps, engineering expertise, wells or bottling companies through which water flows in Mumbai, the ethnographer knows and intuits that those will provide insights that will feed into her broader theoretical inquiry — and as the *site* from which she observes the Mumbai. It is through that object of observation the *city-in-abstraction* and the *city-specific* can be made to speak to each other: in other words, that theory can be produces.

Much of the recent scholarship on urban infrastructures has offered examples of similar approaches, by choosing as "objects of observation" infrastructures as varied as housing (Fennell 2014), waste (Fredericks 2018), roads (Harris 2021), public transport (Bissell 2018), or electricity (Degani 2022)— in order to address theoretical inquiries including racial dispossession, the workings of postcolonial power, or the metabolic relations of bodies to the city. Those examples can be understood to proceed through similar attempts at taking the city as method — specifically, in Björkman's words, "infrastructure as method". In the past decade infrastructural arrangements have offered urban ethnographers with open-ended empirical sites from which to avoid ready-made categories or objects of analysis (Simone 2006; De Boek 2015; McFarlane and Silver 2016;

Solomon 2021). Instead of objects of study frozen into stabilized forms, infrastructures have provided "tracers" to track the contextualizing processes that produce the urban in (and beyond) cities across the planet.

But what happens when the contextualizing processes under study, and the broader theoretical inquiries they point at, cannot readily be associated onto an *a priori* arrangement of objects like roads or electricity networks? Even within the worlds of the experts and engineers where it was first put it to use "infrastructure" has never referred only to technical projects or to the capital embedded in those, but also to a social realm of less tangible assets such as health, education or administrative set-ups (Carse 2017). Given that the line between soft and hard — between social and technical — holds little analytical ground here, some ethnographers of urban infrastructures have chosen to focus on how "[p]eople work on things to work on each other, as these things work on them" (Simone 2012). Extending the reasoning, urban scholar AbdouMaliq Simone suggested we might consider people themselves as infrastructure. Building on empirical research in cities of the Global South, Simone identifies the ways in which people craft themselves as urban residents in contexts wherein infrastructural is routinely fallible and changing, anda ccording to which

> "individuals must in some sense delink themselves from the familiar social contexts in which they have been embedded . . . [and] convert themselves into a wide range of positionalities, becoming almost a kind of infrastructure in the assembling of new household formations, work crews and information conduits, and in ways where particular instances of use are no longer exemplary of general conditions" (Simone 2006:358-359).

Throughout the ethnographic chapters (Part II) that make the heart of this thesis, I speak of some the people whom I met in Naples. This dissertation considers people as the site of ethnographic observation, friends whom I portray as "characters" of Napoli. To paraphrase the formulations of Calcutta ethnographers Ayetree Sen and James Bradbury, by characters I mean those "curious personalities" from whom light on the can be cast on the workings of the city, and on our representation of it. In addition, attending to those characters by writing them into representations of the city draws attention to "the literary enterprise of ethnography itself — qualifying the process of representation as necessarily partial and subjective, without detracting from its real value as a form of knowing the city." (Bradbury and Sen 2021). The characters presented here are those of my interlocutors with whom ties of mutual trust and friendship grew the tightest, strangers

who were also my neighbors, and with whom exchanges of insights grew the densest. Each of their characterized and characteristic portrait constitutes the focal point of the ethnographic chapter that stars them, the center of gravity of the story, and both pretext and the substance for the argument I weave. *People* were the sites from which I tentatively set out to observe Napoli's workings.

3. Doing fieldworld

3.1. Letting go of the urge to map out: fieldwork as ongoing access

> "How many maps . . . might be needed to deal exhaustively with a given space, to code and decode all its meanings and contents ? . . . We are confronted not by one social space but by many—indeed an unlimited multiplicity."
>
> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 1991 (cited in De Genova 2005)

In September 2020, while in the thick of ethnographic fieldwork, I presented a short overview of the current stage of my work to the doctorate board, in my home university's department of Architecture and Urban Planning. As I focused for that presentation on providing my audience with an outline of the theoretical/methodological nexuses I was then wrestling with, a member of the board made an exasperated comment:

> "You claim that you study the *comunità Sri Lankese,* but I can't see them. Where are the maps that show me where I find them in the city: the neighborhoods where they live, the churches they pray in, the parcs and squares they play in? Where are the tables that tell me about their ethnicity, their religion, their salaries?"

Attempting to heed the professorial advice and initially setting out to map out the "*comunità"*, I hit dead-ends very fast. I was struggling to complete the expected maps, while finding that the information hidden by the dots and areas traced on the maps (points, lines, surfaces) largely overtook the information they provided. When I first contacted Nilupa, in the spring of 2019, butterflies were fluttering in my stomach. I was picturing her as the ideal "gatekeeper", as I had read about those in ethnographic fieldwork manuals and I placed high hopes in our meeting: perhaps she would be my key to the "inside", I told myself. The geographer colleague of Prof L. had given me Nilupa's number, suggesting that a chat with her could provide a good place to start.

The confident Italian voice I heard on our first phone call matched Nilupa's appearance, a few days later, when we met in person: a petite, brisk, middle-aged woman, golden loops in her ears, sharp features highlighted by a tight bun of thinning jet-black hair. She worked as a *mediatrice linguistica culturale,* employed through various institutional settings (non-profits, university-linked projects) where linguistic and "cultural" mediation was required between Italians and non-Italian speakers. A native Sinhala speaker, fluent in Italian, Nilupa prided herself in covering areas and situations where Sri Lankan residents in Naples were in need of assistance, displaying her expertise in navigating Italian-speaking activist circles, as well as in brokering the gap with more or less freshly landed Sinhala-speaking migrants. On that first phone call, I told her that I had found a house on *salita* Stella, and was an architect studying the ways in which people inhabited the city, planning on conducting fieldwork with Sri Lankans, she cried out loud:

—*"Oooh, la Stella? È piena di loro, la stanno ovvunque!"* [Oh, the Stella area? It's full of Sri Lankans, they're all over the place!], echoing the numbers[23] I had found in statistical reports.

But a warning quickly followed:

—*"Si vergognano, non ti lasciano entrare"* [they are ashamed, they won't let you in], she added, doubtful that I would be get inside anyone's house.

Still, a few days later, Nilupa invited me to attend a language class where she helped the Italian teacher with translating to the Sinhala audience, so I could get a chance to "meet people". The classroom was part of a first-floor apartment that had been reconverted into the offices of a non-profit aimed at providing services for migrants. Posters in red and black chromatic tones adorned the walls, pointing at the leftist stance of some of the space's users. I sat in the back, trying my best to make myself tiny in my chair.

But as soon as she entered, Nilupa pointed at me and promptly set out to present me to her Italian-language students as someone who might *"help Sri Lankans"* with finding better houses, here, in Napoli — leading to a chorus of

[23] See Chapter 2.

curious “oooh's” and “ahh's” from the audience, and to my cheeks turning brick-red from the spreading misunderstanding.

(fieldnotes, March 2019)

In those very first moments of fieldwork, I was quite self-conscious and timid. I saw myself set apart from the teachers, advisers, and cultural mediators[24] who populated the center where the language classes were taking place, including Nilupa herself. My access to both sides of the *limit* depended on her — yet, her trust felt elusive: she had positioned me as a house-bettering architect, and, back then, I took seriously her implication that my work's value would be assessed through measurable material outcomes that affected people positively. More straightforwardly still, Nilupa had little time for me if I remained an idle onlooker, as the classes themselves were highly demanding of her. Nilupa's work as a *mediatrice* was an indicator of an Italian/Sinhala “linguistic and cultural” *limit*, on both sides of which I was not finding any comfortable place.

After struggling with finding a place in the Italian classes mediated by Nilupa, I set out to find language classes for myself: what better door opener than speaking Sinhala, I thought? If only I could build up a beginner's knowledge of the language, it would be a mark of my interest and commitment for the *object of study* I had to get inside of, hopefully gaining reciprocal interest from those I was thus attempting to comprehend, and, ultimately, providing me insider's access to as-of-yet unexplored spaces inhabited by the Sri Lankan “community”[25].

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[24] For more on the role of cultural mediators, see Katan (2015) and Morniroli (2009). For a critique of the ethical tradoffs and self-fashioning processes at work for migrants who find positions as cultural mediators, see Tuckett (2018).

[25] Anthropologists and social scientists relying on ethnographic methods usually take on language training before they travel to the field — or plan out their study in a setting where they already are familiar with (some of) the spoken tongues. In Naples, both anthropologist Antonia Dawes (2020) and geographer Camille Schmoll (2012) spoke French and Italian when they commenced their research in and around the train station — an area inhabited by Naples-born Italians, as well as increasing number of people originating from partly French-speaking North and West African countries. I argue in this chapter that my lack of proficiency in Sinhala was not an impediment to knowledge production — in fact, while English, Italian and French proved alternative ways in which I accessed spaces and people, the very process of learning Sinhala came to constitute a site for the collection of relevant insights (see in particular Chapter 4).

The following ethnographic snapshot presents a subsequent attempt I made at finding "access", motivated by my desire to learn Sinhala as a means to enter what I perceived, in those initial weeks, as the inside of the "community".

•

One spring morning, strolling in the city center, I stopped short in front of a *manifestino* picturing of a pink flower in a background of green leaves, surrounded by golden wheels and lamps. All the text was written in Sinhala — save an address, in Italian. My curiosity was spiked by what I perceived as an odd juxtaposition: Sinhala and Italian in the same poster? The next day, I followed the trail I had found for myself, and made my way to the address that the *manifestino* pointed at: a huge carcass of a building, behind a stretch of four-story high façade, painted a dirty white and pierced with blind windows, making its way up a steep and narrow cobbled street. It was common knowledge in the neighborhood that the building used to be a convent, for a catholic monastic order; abandoned for decades in the center of the city, it had been reclaimed[26] by an organization of Italian activists who had opened it to local groups in need of space — including, as I had just found out, a group of Sri Lankan Buddhists. A monumental wooden door opened in the middle of the wall, with a *portone* [big door or little gate] carved into it. Past the entrance, an unkept patch of grass led to a vast courtyard, white lines of paint marking out a football pitch. On summer weekends, users of the space told me, a stage would be set in an angle, blasting music in the ears and bodies of a heaving crowd.

Asking around the social center, I easily made my way to Sanath. I introduced myself to him as I had to Nilupa, but insisting, this time, that my research on Sri Lankans, place, and uses of space happened on a more "philosophical" level than simply an "architectonic" one — after trying out "*antropologia*", I found that "*filosofia*" opened more common ground. *"Architettura e filosofia... ho capito",* murmured Sanath, shaking his head appreciatively, before telling me he had a researcher friend, in Sri Lanka, who studied religion — perhaps I could speak to her.

[26] On the Napoli's "*centri sociali"*. See Nick Dines's monograph for a recent analysis (2012).

Sanath was a balding young man in his early forties with a contagious laugh. He was a fourteen-year resident of Napoli, with a liberal use of Neapolitan expressions enlivening his Italian. As the activists had explained to me, Sanath was key in enabling the relationship between the social center and the group that Sanath himself was part of: an organization of Sri Lankan residents of Naples who used the space for weekly Sinhala and Buddhism classes addressed to children, monthly Buddhist ceremonies, and for the storage of objects and tools needed for their activities. Sanath, thanks to his fluid Italian, and his willingness to negotiate on behalf of the others, had become the *de facto* representant of the group of Buddhist for the social center's activists.

On that day, when I told him that I had heard about evening Sinhala classes happening at the center, Sanath was very enthusiastic. He warmly invited me to come along for next week's Saturday evening class, as well for the ceremony that would happen the following Sunday: this way, I could start to learn, "slowly slowly" — "*pian'piano",* he repeated several times, his hands patting gently the air, and his chin jutting out in an expression that Neapolitans use to convey certainty over all odds.

(fieldnotes, March 2019)

From that first meeting on, Sanath tried his best to convey the benefits he had found through regular religious practice. He was keen to hear what I knew about Buddhism, adding with a side smile that here, at the social center, the young people were not really into religion at all: *"Sono communisti... ateisti sai, ma tutti bravi ragazzi!"* [They're communists... atheists, you know, but all decent folks]. For him, and from that first day, I was set apart from the other Italian or European young people who used the social center: while the rest smoked, drank and partied on the Friday nights that preceded Sunday ceremonies — a reason for frequent eyebrow raising and cussing among the Buddhist group, especially on Saturday mornings, when the place had to be rendered immaculate for the monk's visit — I was a trainee in Sinhala Buddhist culture, and, for that, inspired curiosity. My time spent with Sanath and his friends kept me busy despite my sluggish progress in Sinhala (the Saturday evening lessons I attended were designed for children already comfortable, if not fluent, in spoken Sinhala, and I managed to collect only few letters, words or phrases during those sessions). I developed familiarity with people

during the rest of the activities, especially when nodding, pointing, smiling or blushing was enough to guide my movements, make myself understood, and generate amused reactions Sanath's friends. I participated in the cleaning and arranging of the place in preparation of the weekly ceremonies. I was offered food and was taught the names of dishes, and my nose ran profusely in those first months of acquainting myself with Sri Lankan cuisine. As my Sinhala remained stammering, I spoke to the Sri Lankan people who understood my Italian, such as Ayoma, one the teachers. The following presents one of our encounters.

•

The lesson had begun. In the high-ceilinged, vaulted room, a dozen children were silently seated at tables, their legs dangling off wooden benches. The *maestra* (as Sanath had introduced the teacher to me when we last met) lectured in Sinhala in front of a green-board, white chalk dust tracing circles in the air as she moved her index finger to accompany her words. A second *maestra* (whom I recognized as Ayoma, a middle-aged woman with a plate of dark hair resting on her shoulder, lips tainted a discreet yet glossy pink) stood in the back with the younger children (5 year-olds or so), hushing and patting their hands if they let out giggles or wiggled too much. In the front of the room, a deep window pierced into the thick stone wall was shaded off by a dangly rectangle of midnight-blue fabric. Framed by the curtain, sat the creamy-white statue of a cross-legged Buddha, and on the floor by the statue, a few patterned rugs partly covered the cracked tiles roughly patched with cement streaks, available for the class's conclusive meditation moment.

Sanath was nowhere to be seen, so I was reduced to hoping he would have warned the teachers about my visit. I took off my shoes and reluctantly tiptoed in, wishing at that moment that I could disappear in a nook in the wall. The children shot me a few curious stares at first, but before long, thankfully, they seemed to get bored, and turned all their gazes back toward the teacher in the front.

Following a nod from the Ayoma, I squeezed into a free spot on the younger children’s bench. Soon enough, Ayoma was joined by a wide-bellied man, and they arched over the desk on both sides of me, exchanging whispers before reaching what appeared to be an agreement. They signified with raised fingers and some head wobbling that my task was to draw lines of Sinhala letters, taking my cue from

my young colleagues —all tongues stuck out, and plump little hands pushing pens into paper with painstaking concentration. As I settled myself to begin, a soft pressure against my back startled me. The older children's *maestra* had come to gently align herself behind me so she could cover my right wrist and hand with her own, before starting to move my forearm around on the paper like a puppet's limb, slowly etching the first letters of the assignment: අ, බ, ච, ඩ. She smiled encouragingly inches from my face, while Ayoma and the wide-bellied man gave me silent thumbs up.

At the end of the lesson, Ayoma and I chatted on. I clumsily posed the usual questions (how long have you been in Italy? where in Sri Lanka are you from? where in Napoli do you live?), which she politely addressed but quickly dismissed, lighting up as she offered something clearly more interesting:

— "*Aspetta. . . ti faccio vedere casa mia. . .*" As I craned my neck over the photos she was swiping on her cellphone, a large villa appeared in a lush grove of trees. There was a kind of porch held up by with carved wooden columns, and the windows were arched in a way that reminisced roman stone architecture. She explained that this was her house, although it was currently inhabited by her sister-in-law*. Bellissimo!"* I exclaimed. "*È in Napoli*?", I went on to ask naively.

Ayoma laughed: "*Certo di no! È in Sri Lanka*. Of course not! It's in Sri Lanka".

(fieldnotes, April 2019)

•

My first contact with Nilupa, the *mediatrice culturale,* had led me to experience ambiguous limits, and people's more or less successful endeavors at overstepping them. When I first met Nilupa, I was fantasizing on *unmediated access*, access without the elusive/untrustful intervention of mediators like Nilupa to guide me in the limit-crossing. I other words, I was hoping for the dissolution of the limits between the "community" and myself, so I could become an insider. This was a fantasy akin to the anthropologist' classic urge of going native, relying on the equally fantasized notion of ethnographic fieldwork in which I could just be there with my notebooks (digital or paper), and take in "insider's knowledge", like a "fly on the wall" (Malkki 2007:173). At the same time, I was reifying the very boundedness of the "community", its enclosure within those limits I was hoping

I would break through. Some places (the houses inhabited by Sri Lankans in Napoli) I would not be able to enter, Nilupa had warned me, gesturing at the idea of unbreachable limits (here, materialized in doors and thresholds). But there were also other, more porous limits that our encounter implicitly pointed at: for example, the limits between Italian-speakers and Sinhala-speakers could be crossed — as much as it was given weight and made effective — through linguistic mediation or translation.

And so, as it unfolded, my fieldwork routinely led me to encounters that not only involved Sri Lankans but enlisted the rest of Napoli as well, putting into question the boundedness of the community and its separation from the city, troubling the very idea of *napoletanità*. Where would the mapping end? The Sri Lankan "community" in Naples was a starting point that, rather than gaining consistency, progressively unraveled itself. *"You need to knock at every door you find*", the words from that inaugural meeting with Prof L. rang in my ears, *"Some doors will slam shut in your face or simply remain closed; others will open and let you in*." What remained unclear however, was what stood on either side of the threshold. As I tried to gain or secure access to social (the community) and geographical (the neighborhood, the square, the classroom) there was always a new space I lacked access to. Even as I would knock at a door and it opened, I came to realize that my moving from outside to inside involved much more than a simple step over a threshold — such that, as I worked at gaining access to those 'objects' that I had predefined as such, they kept reconstituting themselves further ahead, with more thresholds and doors still.

3.3. Friends and calendars: pandemic interruptions and connections

As the previous examples of my "gaining access" show, in Naples, it seemed unclear that institutional mediators (*the mediatori culturali*) like Nilupa would provide "more access" or be better "gatekeepers" than unofficial mediators like Sanath or Ayoma. Those trust-building and relationship-knitting endeavors proved to be the most fertile sites for my research. Our meetings provided me with puzzles and questions, but also with collections of ethnographic insights (what is often reductively termed as "data") that addressed these puzzles without providing any final answer. The closest term I find to characterize what I knitted with those interlocutors is perhaps friendship, a shifting relationship entailing reciprocity and relatedness (Killick and Desai 2010). I found it possible to voice it in those terms after the word was used by my interlocutors themselves — "my dear friend", "*amica mia"*, "Cap' is my friend from Napoli". Friendship occurred

through accumulation of meetings that slowly eroded the strangeness of the encounter, without dispelling it entirely: ways of repeatedly finding ourselves in similar locations; of learning respective routines.

Here, the COVID-19 pandemic was an unexpected ally. After the pandemic started, various commitments held me outside Napoli, during periods that extended unexpectedly in quarantine lockdown to limit the spread of the coronavirus: first in Scotland (where I was a visiting student at the University of Edinburgh), then in France (at my parents' over the Christmas break), and again in India (at my husband's parents). After the pandemic started, I was physically in Napoli between August and November 2020, February and April 2021, July and September 2021, and a few more weeks after that until March 2022. While my absences from the city put geographic distance between my interlocutors and myself, they affected the closeness of our relationships in more ambivalent ways. For example, Sasanka, whom we will meet in Chapter 4, agreed readily to teach me Sinhala on Skype while I was in France, and again when I was in India. As I took up his calls from Chennai, and he sat in his Napoli office, he merrily quizzed me about what I had eaten, what I could see from the terrasse, the shape and size of my building, or how I managed the heat. He sprinkled his questions with anecdotes that spelt his longing for being in Sri Lanka. Maybe from where I was, he once suggested enthusiastically, I could broadcast a Jaffna radio which had a good English program — but he caught himself mid-sentence: that would have been in the 1990s, before he shifted to Italy; they had invented web radios since then!

The differences between home and field — and between field and desk — were turning murky. I was pushed to invent different temporal and spatial sequencing of fieldwork and analysis periods, then the classical year-long immersion in the field and return at one's desk to turn piles of field diaries into something to be analyzed and shared. Instead of this, my own "patchwork ethnography" (Günel, Varma and Watanabe 2020) drew me in into short, patchy, unpredictable iterrative cycles[27].

[27] See Annex for more detail on those patchy cycles.

4. Ethnography and ethics

4.1. Positionality and difference

> "The other, then, the one whom I may not know, is always my neighbour, living by my side, living 'with' me. The other is the 'stranger neighbour': she is distant in the sense that I cannot assume community or commonality with her, and yet she is close by, so that she will haunt me, stay with me, as a reminder of the unassimilable in my life, or that which cannot be assimilated into the 'my' of 'my life'." (Ahmed 2000,138)

Difference, Sarah Ahmed reminds us, writing in the wake of feminist theorist Audrey Lorde, is relational. "Strange encounters" are the sites in which difference comes to matter for those who engage in them.

In trying to make sense of the strangeness of those encounters, I might attempt to situate myself in those power-ladden relationx: what generally figures in methods chapters as the paragraph on "positionality". I can begin by describe myself a white, female researcher in my late twenties. I can add that I from a middle-class family, and a French-passport holder, both characteristics which have offered me ample opportunities to travel for leisure, studies or work. I could also mention that my hair is of a shade and texture that I can pass off as Italian, unless my lack of a tan in the summer makes me "bianca come una Ollandese" as I was once told. I could add that my French accent gives me away as soon as I open my mouth, triggering a flow of questions about my presence here, and speculations: you must have fallen in love with someone here, I was told a few times as well. Why else would I have come and settled here, fellow residents puzzled? The list is hard to put an end to, suggesting that being reflexive on one's positionality should perhaps not content itself with locating oneself in the intersection of the usual categories social science considers, as if life stories could be resumed by straight axes and the coordinates of their intersection (Weston 1996). It also has to do with the vast "range of hybrid personal and professional identities that we negotiate in our daily lives" (Narayan 1993:681). Gender, race/ethnicity, age, nationality: those categories of identity don't all matter equally in all situations; and it requires reflexivity to tease out which messy intersections of those categories matter in which positions, at which times (Pachirat 2009). As anthropologist and writer Kirin Narayan puts it:

> "In even the closest of relationships, disjunctures can swell into distance; ruptures in communication can occur that must be bridged. To acknowledge such shifts in relation

> rather than present them as purely distant or purely close is to enrich the texture our texts so they more closely approximate the complexities of lived interaction." (Narayan 1993,680)

A category like “gender” matters to expose my meeting with men on the streets as emblematic of the kind of encounters experienced by a young woman strolling alone in the city. Categories like “white”, and “urban middle-class” help explain surprised reactions at my hanging out often in “ethnic food” take-aways. I am compelled to consider my being “French” and a “Schengen-space dweller” to place people's carefreeness in quizzing me on my accent and asking where I'm from (because, for those people, it clearly can't be Napoli, and I clearly can't be “Neapolitan”; or to account for my ease in crossing back and forth the national border between France and Italy.

In addition, those categories mutate with time. I first lived in Naples for 9 months from the fall of 2015 to the summer of 2016 and moved back to the city in the fall of 2018 — before starting my first stint of fieldwork in the spring of 2019. I had, indeed, become a resident of Naples. Whether that was enough to make me “Neapolitan” remained highly contentious. I was both settled in and on the move in Naples. At catacombs visit in the summer of 2021, together with a group of friends visiting from the UK, I showed my PhD-student matriculation: — “*Ah, ma tu sei Napoletana,.* the operator matter-of-factly asserted. I couldn't shake of the feeling of surprise and satisfaction: it was the first time I heard it said to me. Similarly, my own foreignness and transnational ties drew my Sri Lankan friends and I into animated conversations about shared points of reference and comparison — despite in no way obliterating how my mobility was significantly more privileged than most of my interlocutors'.

4.2. Harmful incursions

> "[W]herever we go and whomever we seek out, in curiosity or solidarity, the stories we bring back are only worth telling when they complicate the humanity of those we share them with" (Pandian, 2019,5)

Unlike doctoral programs in the US or the UK, Italian universities do not require any ethics comities of compulsory consent forms to authorize ethnographic fieldwork. Hence, the assessment of the potential harms to vulnerable subjects, or potential necessity of fieldwork for social and political reasons are left in the hands of the researcher herself (Cseke 2020,77). As a minimal requirement, I preserved the anonymity of my research

interlocutors, using pseudonyms to mention them, and changing some of their spatial and temporal coordinates to further anonymize them. I have also refrained from including any pictures which could lead to any identification of the people I speak of.

> "Encounter is not just about proximity or participation: it is about the qualities of relationships and intimacies that develop in the process of responsible commitment and accountability to others, whom we as ethnographers constitute and draw upon as native interlocutors. This cannot be reduced to a formal procedural ethics, such as of informed consent, as enshrined in institutional review boards." (Sunder Rajan 2021, 6)

Echoing Nilupa's warning that people would be ashamed of letting me inside their houses, an Italian activist and resident of Napoli gave me a hard look in the spring of 2019 when I spoke to him of my interest for what, at that time, I called *l'abitare* (inhabiting) of people of Sri Lankan nationality or origin in the city. "*Sei entrato nelle loro case?*" — have you been inside their houses/homes? — he frowned down at me, suspicious. I blushed and admitted I hadn't yet. What I didn't dare admit then is that, whenever I caught a chance on walking by, I had grown used to flashing curious peeks into the dark insides of the *bassi*, many of which host Sri Lankans in a few sectors of the historic center. The activist's comment clings uncomfortably still, as a reminder, of course, that, as a white female researcher from an urban middle-class background, I do not live the constraint of residing in damp obscurity, and as a question: what solidarity was I activating, what good would I do in forcing myself into the lives of those who *did* live under such constraints?[28]

I have no final answer to offer. I choose to keep in mind anthropologist Anand Pandian's (2019) suggestion, from the quote that opens this paragraph, that neither curiosity nor solidarity are enough, on their own, to orient the ethical outcomes of ethnographic research. But that perhaps, ethnographic findings might contribute to refine readers' understandings of the intricacies and complexities of what we have in common with those people whose lives we write and read about — starting from the shared lot of limits to what we can ever grasp fully in knowledge. From here, let us borrow from anthropologist David Graeber the last words to this chapter, a humbling recommendation for researcher or planners:

[28] See Catherine Fennell's inspiring take on debates about an athropology of the good and the suffering subject, in the conclusion to her book (2015).

“taking one’s interlocutors seriously means, not just agreeing with everything they say (or even, picking out their most apparently strange or contradictory statements and trying to imagine a world in which those statements would be literally true) but starting from the recognition that neither party to the conversation will ever completely understand the world around them, or for that matter, each other. That’s simply part of what it means to be human. Most of what obviously and immediately unites us across borders of every sort, conceptual included, is the recognition of our common limitations”. (Graeber 2015)

Chapter 2. Napoli as borderscape

Opening vignette. Joseph, a seventh man

I slowed down before reaching *piazza* Dante. My eye caught on the inside of a shop window: cricket bats and balls, coconut graters, Red Label whisky... and a steamer for *idlis*[29]. I stopped dead in my tracks: I love *idlis* and this was the first time I noticed any sign of them in Napoli.

In the back of the shop, in line with the entrance door, a large man was tucked behind the counter. A plump moustache sat on his upper lip; his flower-patterned shirt opened on a hairy chest, and a facemask was neatly tucked under his chin. From his station, he could keep a watchful eye on the entirety of the shop and on what moved outside, in the street. I stepped in, swerving cautiously around polystyrene crates of short bananas, drumsticks and curry leaves, snake gourds and avocados until I was within earshot of the man.

He raised an eyebrow as I pointed at the window and asked about the steamer, in my French-accented Italian. But when I explained that I had just spent the spring in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, a second eyebrow and a corner of the lips went up as well. The man took out a small notepad, tore off a page, and wrote down a phone number. He handed the piece of paper to me.

—"*Ogni tanto, preparo idlis... Chiamami a questo numero... ne metto da parte anche per te."* [I cook *idlis* every now and then... Give me a call... I'll save some for you.]

And so, within minutes, the conversation (in Italian) had kicked in and the man, Joseph, had introduced himself as one of the first Sri Lankans to have moved to Napoli.

—*"Quando sono arrivato, eravamo solo sette".* [There were only seven of us back when I arrived], he smiled in recollection.

Joseph had grown up in a village south-west of Jaffna, in a Catholic Tamil family. He had followed his sister to Napoli in 1979, two years after she had herself

[29] Little rice cakes from South India.

earned passage to Italy through a Sri Lankan Catholic missionary. The priest had put the young woman in contact with a Neapolitan family in search of a housemaid.

How was it that the missionary had chosen their family, I asked?

— “The priest... he just helped poor people, whatever their religion...and whether Tamil or Sinhala”, Joseph brushed away my question.

He went on to explain how, a few years later, he had married a fellow Tamil woman who had also moved to Naples. Overtime, they managed to save quite a bit of money, and succeeded in setting up a long-lasting grocery store business (first in piazza Dante, then here, close to piazza Cavour), from which they sent regular remittances and food parcels to relatives and friends in Sri Lanka (as he said so, he pointed to tins of powdered milk and packages of pasta). They had been able to help their daughter move to London to study medicine, and had even bought an apartment here, the value of which had soared up in recent years (in line with the rest of the housing market), leaving them with a small gold mine.

Joseph and his wife were now both in the process of acquiring Italian citizenship, Joseph casually added — but their plan was not to stay in Italy, he made sure to tell me.

—"*42 anni...adesso basta*." [42 years... that's enough].

As soon as he got the Italian passport, he would move to London. Most Tamil migrants, he explained somewhat evasively, had relocated in *better* places in *better* countries — in England, Canada, Germany, Switzerland, or France. He himself had siblings and cousins dispersed in cities all over the world: this is what *asilo politico*, refugee status, granted Tamils, the possibility to move to better destinations. The Sinhala, he remarked loftily, had no such choice, *asilo politico* was not an option for them: it was either the Middle East, or Italy.

—"*Allora, vedi, noi Tamil che siamo qua... a Napoli... abbiamo sbagliato".* [So you see, us Tamils here... in Italy... we've made a mistake.]

Joseph insisted — he knew what he was talking about, he had been here for so long: the two thousand (according to his estimate) Sri Lankan Tamils who lived in Napoli, alongside a much larger number of Sinhala people, had done so by

sbaglio, it had been a mistake, an accident. He might have chosen otherwise, might have been led elsewhere.

(fieldnotes, September 2021)

Origin story: Sri Lankan Catholics migrating to Italy

As much as Joseph's story is a singular tale of migration, it also fits into a larger historicized narrative that exceeds his own life and choices. Upon leaving Sri Lanka, Joseph became a "seventh man" (Berger and Mohr 2010 [1974]), a migrant worker seeking a better life elsewhere. The geographical and historical coordinates of Joseph's move locate him into vaster accounts of migrations spanning Sri Lanka and Naples (Morlicchio 1992; Amato 1999; Bacciochi 2010; Benadusi 2015, Brown 2012, 2013, 2014; Pathirage and Collyer 2011; Näre 2010, 2012). It entangles him into stories that drew together Catholic missionary priests, small fishing boats sailing across the Mannar Gulf to the Suez Canal, middle- to upper-middle-class Italian families in a declining welfarist system, networks of kin and relations, "ethnic businesses" in southern Italy, civil war tearing through Sri Lanka, and the Schengen space, a young man's fears and dreams.

Scholarship interested in those stories foreground Catholicism as a key trigger for the migration flows between Italy and Sri Lanka. Anthropologist Bernardo Brown (2014) sums it up in a recent article that I quote at length:

> "There is no general consensus as to how the process of Sri Lankan migration to Italy took off. The most popular versions tend to agree that it was in the late 1970s when Sri Lankan Catholic priests who traveled for their studies to Naples met Italian families interested in hiring female workers to help in the care of their elderly at home. These priests liaised prospective Italian employers with families in the Catholic areas along the western coast of Sri Lanka. Soon after this, a few women from towns like Kochchikadde and Wennappuwa traveled to work as caretakers. As these first migrants developed solid work relations with their employers, they also started arranging opportunities for other aspiring migrants who would find jobs as nannies and domestic workers." (Brown 2014)

From her research in Catania (Sicily), anthropologist Mara Benadusi suggests that material objects like the relics of Catholic saints have, over the years, come to constitute an "in-between space spanning 'here' and 'there'", stabilizing the connection between Sri Lanka and Italy, the sign of "a civic-religious cult that crosses borders" (Benadusi 2015). Along with the religious, economic factors are considered as well. Sociologists Michael

Collyer and Jagath Pathirage foreground the role of social networks that multiply into migration chains, and the social and economic capital involved in maintaining those links, and in reconfiguring life in towns like Negombo or Wennappuwa (Pathirage and Collyer 2011; see also Lucht 2011). Anthropologist Lena Näre, building on ethnographic research with domestic workers in Naples, alludes to the familialistic Italian welfare regime and ageing demographics to find elements of explanation for the Sri Lankan employment in Italy (Näre 2010).

Joseph followed his sister who had herself followed a Catholic missionary priest. His trajectory and moves sit both within flows of refugees and asylum seekers (like Sri Lanka's Tamil minority) and flows of so-called "economic migrants" (like Sri Lanka's Catholics from the west coast), — despite the efforts of governments, policymakers, and some scholars to draw strict lines between those different moves. Historian Michele Colucci underscores this categorizing tendency, suggesting that, with the so-called "migration crisis" hitting Europe and Italy in 2011, "one of the most hotly debated issues in Italian migrant policy has been *the reason for these flows* and, in consequence, institutional responses in terms of access to rights and granting residency" (Colucci 2019; my emphasis). Non-EU foreign nationals can legally enter and reside in Italy for one of four reasons: to study, to stay with their family, to seek political or humanitarian asylum, or to work. Therefore, institutions and policymakers concerned with issuing residency or work permits need to maintain a strict divide between the different rationales behind migration flows.

How Joseph's story departs from the "origin story"

But Joseph's story also invites us to think differently about the reasons for which people move and cross borders. Despite introducing himself as one of Napoli's very first Sri Lankan migrants, he doesn't fit seamlessly into any "chain migratio" story, or any simple and univocal "push-and-pull" explanation for Sri Lankan migration to Naples. For one, Joseph was somewhat an exception to the rule, as he and his family were Tamil and not Sinhala, and did not originate from the majority-Catholic areas directly to the north of Colombo, off Sri Lanka's west coast. It had been years that he didn't do domestic work anymore. And, for all his initial desire to come to Italy, and his economic success in Naples, he would much rather (and was firmly planning to) be elsewhere — like those members of his family who did not follow his sister and the priest to Napoli, and found lives in

Canada or in Switzerland. His past trajectory and his aspirations for ongoing mobility gesture at the messy entanglement of economic, political, and affective motivations for transnational mobility. Inspired by my encounter with Joseph, I also propose to question some of the scholarly urge to find the reason for these flows (Colucci 2019). People like Joseph can choose, make mistakes, or change their minds, as they move in and out of places and situations[30]. They set out on trajectories that are not limited to linear paths between A-origin and B-destination, and not entirely contained in the appreciation of their status as "refugee", "asylum seeker" or "economic migrant". They are not simply members of cohesive diaspores or imagined communities. Nor are their mobilities animated entirely by push-pull political-economy factors that would link a pair of nation-states together.

This of course does not mean we should forego the analysis of the reasons that may induce people to move. Instead, I suggest that those reasons, however contradictory and messy, must be considered not as competing rationales to be assessed with respect to each other, but rather as all entangled into a "borderscape" (Mezzadra and Nielson 2015, Lindquist 2009) which people on the move are compelled to navigate. I show how the economic, political, religious and affective transformations that animate Naples, Italy and Sri Lanka all partake in the production of this borderscape.

Joseph's story "emplaces" Napoli

In Joseph's story, Naples looms large, intersecting and overlapping uneasily with Italy. Naples both converges and diverges from the rest of Italy in several ways. A destination some forty-two years ago, Naples had now shifted for Joseph into a place from which he sought to leave. In fact, the in- and out-bound flows that traverse the city have transformed alongside nation-wide shifts: while there has been a sharp increase of migrants coming to Italy since the 1970s, those flows have stabilized as more people have wanted and attempted to leave in the past decade (Colucci 2019). Naples is also exceptional within the Italian context. On one side, it is represented as a place of heightened repulsion, a "panic city" riddled in problems (d'Acierno and Pugliese 2018), recurrently figuring at the bottom of lists of Italian cities classified according to their

[30] See Introduction, section 3.2.

livability (Finizio, et al. 2021). At the same time Napoli is portrayed routinely as a cosmopolitan port-city, as place where difference is casually welcome (see Dawes 2020,3).

For people like Joseph, who have crossed national borders (and keep doing so), Naples can be understood and evaluated only if the city is as emplaced within a context that includes not only Italy, but also "hierarchies of political, economic, and cultural power that extend within and across nation-states" (Brenner 2011, 63). Moreover, it is by adopting such an outlook on cities that we can foreground "the active role of migrants as place makers and scale makers shaping neoliberal restructuring and rescaling through their multiple social positions within and across space" (*ibid.*).

Chapter outline

My encounter with Joseph opens this chapter as a narrative ploy to interrogate the multiple and entangled reasons for which people have been (and still are) moving between Sri Lanka and Napoli. In a simplifying analytical move, this chapter gives an outline of those reasons by organizing them into two parts. The first part (*why do people leave Sri Lanka?)* goes through the political, military, economic, religious and affective reasons that may lead people to emigrate from Sri Lanka. The second part *(why do people come to Italy?)* goes through the legal and economic reasons that can explain why foreigners from Sri Lanka might migrate to Italy. In practice, it is the conjunction of all those reasons that produces the "borderscape" (Mezzadra and Nielson 2015, Lindquist 2009) through which people navigate their mobile lives. The third part of this chapter considers the "emplacement" of Napoli (Caglar and Glick Schiller 2011; Brenner 2011, Miraftab 2015), outlining its contrasting representations.

1. “Why do people leave Sri Lanka?”

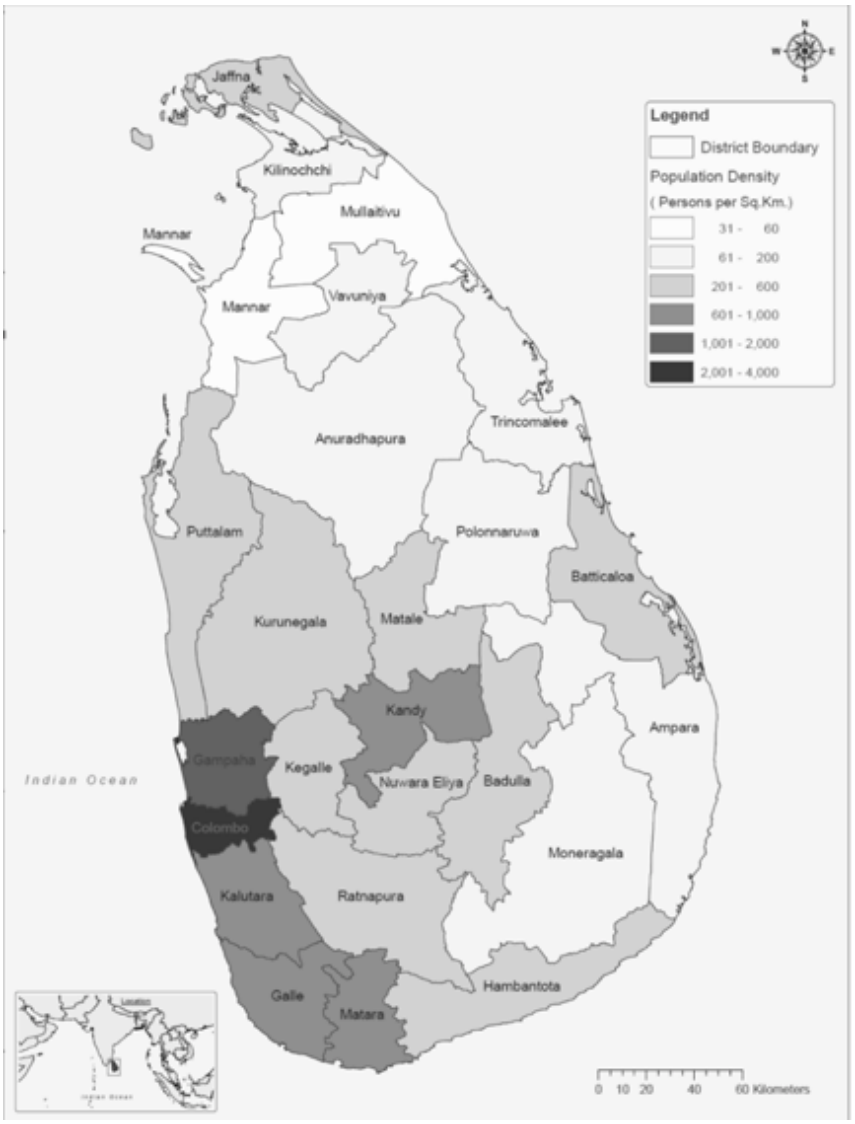

Figure 17. Population distribution by district (reproduced from Brown 2013:38)

1.1. Religion

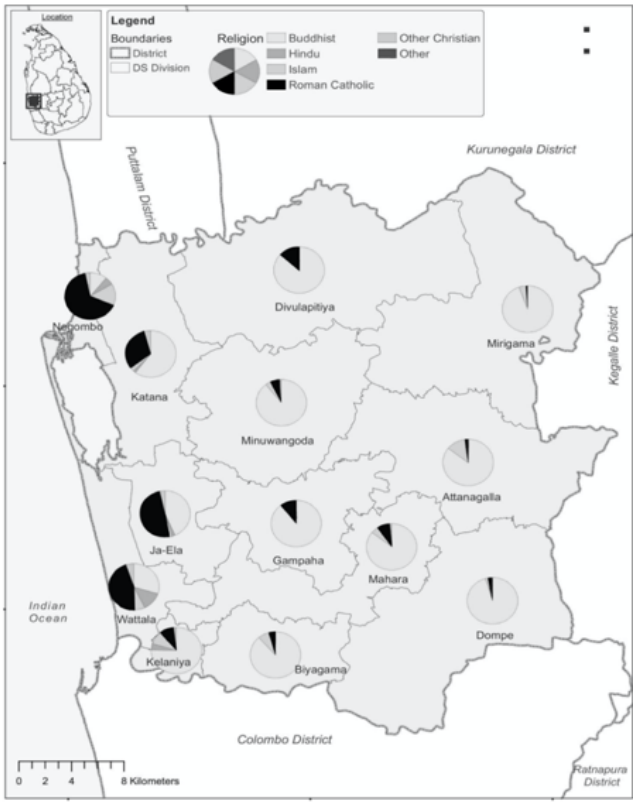

Figure 18. Gampaha district, religion distribution in the population (reproduced from Brown 2013:39)

Joseph had brushed away my questions about the priest's reasons for choosing his family: they were Catholics, the priest had offered them an opportunity for a better life — quite simply, they had followed him. Catholicism, however, if far from a given, in a country notorious for a particularly robust brand of state-sponsored Buddhism. In the early 1990s, there were around one million Catholics in Sri Lanka, over two thirds of whom identified as Sinhala, and the rest as Tamil (Stirrat 1992, 6). This figure has increased to 1.2 million according to the latest 2012 census, amounting to only 6% of the total population (Sri Lankan Department of Census and Statistics 2012).

Catholicism in Sri Lanka can be traced to the arrival of Portuguese colonialists in the island, in 1505, and to their settling of trading outposts on the west coast, throughout the 16th century. As anthropologist Robert Stirrat writes, of the few remaining signs of the Portuguese's presence in Sri Lanka, the most obvious are perhaps the family names (Stirrat 1992, 14). *Perera*, *Fernando*, or *da Silva* are common enough, to this day, on the intercoms of Neapolitan flats, to easily denote Sri Lankan presence in the building. The subsequent replacement of the Portuguese by Dutch colonialists, from the mid-1600s, led

to the persecution for Sri Lankan Catholics. In the 1980s, Stirrat met people from the Catholic coastal villages who still told stories of the work of the Oratorian missionaries from Goa who, in the 17th and 18th centuries, had preached the gospel in defiance of Protestant Dutch control (*Ibid.*).

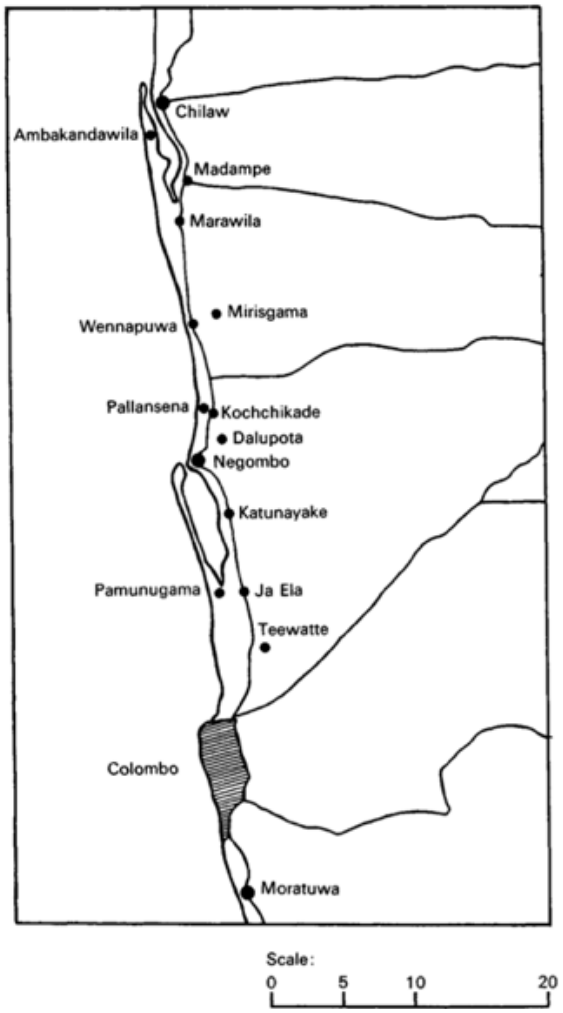

Figure 19. The Catholic coast (reproduced from Stirrat 1992)

The arrival of the British colonialists in 1796 signaled the start of a period of tolerance for Sri Lankan Catholics, and eventually led "to official recognition of the Catholic Church" (Stirrat 1992, 15). By the 1830s, Goan missionary priests had been replaced by Europeans in the island, in particular by the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, an order based in France. In the 1920s, the first Sri Lankan seminaries opened, such that by the 1960s, local priests had largely taken over the island's clergy (Stirrat 1992, 35). However, despite the "indigenization" of the clergy, European missionaries retained a particular prestige among the laity, continuing to "dominate the local hierarchy" (Stirrat 1992, 38), while local priests acted "as European in their values and outlook as the

missionaries" and retained strong links with the Vatican and Rome (Stirrat 1992, 22). Stirrat further suggests that these missionaries "were largely responsible for the strong sense of identity which existed among Catholics by the time Sri Lanka achieved Independence in 1948" (Stirrat 1992, 15).

In the late 1970s, when Joseph's sister met the priest who introduced her to her future Neapolitan employer, Catholic clergies around the world were still readjusting from the jolt caused by the Vatican-II reform (1962-1965). In the Sri Lankan context,

> "in the pre-Vatican II Church, the priest had been the mediator between man and God, the channel through which grace flowed. In the new vision of the priesthood [post-Vatican II] he became not the mediator but the exemplar. Grace comes not through such sacramental channels but rather through individual action." (Stirrat 1992, 44)

Stirrat goes on writing that

> "At the level of the Church as a whole, one manifestation of this change was in the foundation of new specialised institutions concerned with economic and social 'uplift' (...), usually funded by European charities, [which] began to investigate the problems of the laity and set up various development projects. (...) Individual parish priests also participated in such activities. Either in association with specialist Church institutions, or by themselves, priests set up small-scale development projects throughout Catholic Sri Lanka. Funds which had previously been used to build churches or support spiritual activities were now used to set up small farms for unemployed youths, handloom factories for girls or new co-operatives for impoverished farmers or fishermen." (Stirrat 1992, 46-47)

If religion, and religious contacts, indeed enabled the first moves of Sri Lankans to Italy in the late 1970s, developmentalist rationales, pervasive among both laity and clergy, were also central in triggering those early flows, as some of the priests themselves sought "economic and social uplift" for their parishioners. By the 1980s, however, the situation had further complexified, as smoldering ethnic tensions escalated into civil war, prompting increasing out-bound flows from Sri Lanka.

1.2. "This divided island": civil war

> "A time of war is a time of unfathomable flux. The terrains of the soul and of the body, of the family, of the community and of geopolitics itself all undergo extensive renovation. It can seem, sometimes, that even the very land rearranges itself." (Subramanian, 2014:xv)

> "..the local is not a place but a process" (Spencer 2014)

Following Independence from British colonial rule (1796-1948), postcolonial Ceylon — to be renamed Sri Lanka in 1972 — underwent several periods of economic, social, and political upheavals. In 1956, the infamous Sinhala Only Act introduced by government triggered a wave of government laws and everyday practices in frank disfavor of the Tamil minority. As Tamils' access to university or government jobs was rendered increasingly difficult, and everyday discriminations spread, many of those who could emigrate chose to do so. In the early 1970s, socialist-inspired reforms triggered additional flows: the professional elite, both Sinhala and Tamil, reacted to what they deemed excessive taxation or nationalizations by leaving for Australia, Europe or North America (Jayawardena 2020).

By the end of the 1970s, persecutions against the Tamils had swollen into a number of riots, answered heatedly by increasingly organized Tamil separatist rebel movements, among which the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, or Tigers). The most violent of episode of those, the “Black July riots”, in 1983, led to the killing of at least 3000 Tamils, opening to the first consistent flows of people fleeing Sri Lanka (Thiranagama 2014). By 1986, the Tigers had emerged as the dominant Tamil militant group, and their conflict with the Sinhala government was acknowledged internationally to have had degenerated into civil war.

In 2002, a cease-fire kindled fleeting hopes for peace (Spencer 2010). But on Christmas Eve of 2004, Sri Lanka made the headlines again when the tsunami that swept Indian Ocean coastal towns and villages claimed over 30 000 lives — the second largest national death-toll after Indonesia's. While Sri Lanka's western coast was spared much of the damage, stories of the disaster in the east coast haunted the imaginaries of all (Gamburd 2013). The wreckage caused by the tsunami provided some of the grounds for the government to reignite military intervention against the remaining LTTE bastions in the East and North of the island (Choi 2015), ultimately bringing the war to a brutal end in 2009. From February to May, the Sri Lankan Army bombed the LTTE, killing its charismatic leader Prabhakaran, but also an estimate 40 000 civilian Tamils who had retreated in the North of the Island and were held hostage by the Tigers (Thiranagama 2011; Subramanian 2014).

The war, and the additional destruction from the tsunami have led to considerable flows of Sri Lankans, both internally and internationally. By 2005, the total stock of

internationally displaced Sri Lankan Tamils had already exceeded 800 000 (UNHCR 2006), a figured that continued to increase. Today, approximately one in four Sri Lankan Tamils lives abroad, making them one of the largest asylum-seeking groups (Thiranagama 2014, see also Jayawardena 2020), and a paradigmadic case of a modern "diaspora"[31]. In consequence of the warring parties' respective sizes and military capacity (Sinhala majority against Tamil minority) refugee status for Sri Lankans is always already ethnically colored — as Joseph was well aware, political asylum and humanitarian status is delivered principally to members of the Tamil minority (and to a comparatively small number of Sinhala political dissidents).

The total population of Sri Lanka recently reached 21.8 million (Central Bank of Sri Lanka 2019) and was broken down ethnically in the following way (Sri Lankan Department of Census and Statistics 2012): 74.9% "Sinhala" (majority ethnic group), 11.2% "Tamils", 4.1% "Indian Tamils" (mostly descendants of indentured labour and "coolies" brought in from India by the British, to work in the tea plantations in the 19th and early 20th century) and 9.3% "Moors" (Tamil-speaking Muslims). But those categories have shifted over time, and it is has been observed many times and in many places that "in contexts of civil war, violence often absorbs and makes harmfully meaningful historically shaped ethnic, racial, kin-based, or religious differences" (Basteman 2016,37; also Brubaker 2002).

Sri Lanka is no exception, and the categories of 'Sri Lankan', 'Tamil', 'Muslim' or 'Sinhala', have been made to work as "porous sieves" (Tambiah 1986, cited in Thiranagama 2011), instrumentally manipulated for political and military reasons before, during and in the aftermath of the conflict (Spencer 1990, Thiranagama 2011; Rambukwella 2018). In addition, as Joseph's tale shows, migrant categories from Sri Lanka — student, low-skilled worker, skilled worker, asylum seeker or tourist

[31] Thiranagama (2014) recalls that "the term diaspora is commonly applied to those with a "triadic relationship" between "(1) a collectively self-identified ethnic group in one particular setting, (2) the people's co-ethnics in other parts of the world, and (3) the homeland states or local contexts whence they or their forebears came". Thiranagama remarks that the analytic efficacy of the term "diaspora" is limited and that "there is a tendency to understand diasporas as actors in themselves by virtue of their empirical movement as opposed to their own crafting of themselves as actors" (Thiranagama 2014, citing Vertovec 1997:279). See Chapter 4 as well.

(Jayawardena 2020)—, together with categories like age and gender, can overlap and intersect untidily with ethnic categories (Hydman and de Alwis 2004). Yet it remains clear that for all Sri Lankans

> "the conflict has had high direct and indirect costs island-wide in terms of lives, livelihoods, and slower economic growth. Not surprisingly, the largest increases in both migration flows [asylum seekers and workers] have occurred since 1983. While the majority of political migrants have been Tamils directly affected by the conflict in the north-east, the conflict has also indirectly fuelled the increased flows of predominantly Sinhalese labour migration from the south-west." (Sriskandarajah 2002)

Joseph and his family can be located between the case of Tamil refugees and asylum seekers, and the case of mostly Sinhala "economic migrants" — pointing, here again, at the conjunction of multiple factors in producing contexts within which people navigate their mobile lives. And yet, the binary between the Sinhala "Sri Lankan maid" and the Tamil "Sri Lankan refugee" has dominated much of the literature on the subject (Sriskandarajah 2002). In doing so, it replicates a larger binary between asylum seekers and economic migrants, which is pervasive among scholars, and instrumentally used by policy makers (Colucci 2019). The following paragraph focuses on that later category 'economic migrants' from Sri Lanka.

1.3. "Economic migration": the "foreign employment industry"

After the election of J.R. Jayawardene and of right-leaning, Sinhala-nationalist, United National Party (UNP) in 1977, a series of pro-market institutional changes and policies were instigated in Sri Lanka. The economy rapidly opened to foreign exchange, through what were advertised by the new government as a series of reforms addressing the financial disarray caused by the previous left-leaning and welfarist administration, and as a strategy to tackle rising unemployment and fuel economic growth (Brown 2013:36; Frantz 2011,28; Spencer 1990).

Contemporaneously, the Indian Ocean area was transforming dramatically, as the 1974 and 1979 oil crises and ensuing rise in petrol value turned the Persian Gulf nation-states into booming economies. With the development disparity growing between the UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and neighboring Indian Ocean states, new transnational mobility patterns emerged: in particular, people began to emigrate from South Asian and

South-East Asian countries (including Sri Lanka, Southern India, Indonesia and the Philippines) in search of opportunities as overseas workers[32] in the Gulf.

From the late 70s, Sri Lanka's government saw an opportunity in emigration, and aimed to tackle its own rising unemployment through the placement of overseas workers, while channeling back in the remittances sent home by laborers, in support of the country's economic liberalization and growth. To facilitate emigration to the Gulf and Middle East, the Sri Lankan government began to introduce a regulatory and bureaucratic apparatus in support of the new "foreign employment industry" (Brown 2013:37-40; see also Gamburd 2000, 2004; Frantz 2011; Pathirage and Collyer 2011). This involved the creation of passport services and consular facilities, the implementation of low-interest loan-schemes with state bank, and the funding of scholarships for the children of migrant workers (Pathirage and Collyer 2011; Frantz 2011,53). From 1985, those schemes and offices came under the supervision of the Sri Lankan Bureau of Foreign Employment — hereafter SLBFE, or Bureau.

The contribution of foreign employment workers' remittance amounted for nearly 7.8% of the country's GDP in 2018, making it the largest foreign exchange earner, overtaking exports of garments, and tea. The Bureau registered over 200 000 people leaving for foreign employment in 2018 (SLBFE 2018) and by 2010 it had been estimated, at any given time, that there were over a million Sri Lankan women working in the Gulf and Middle East (Smith 2010; Brown 2013). From 1995 onwards, the Sri Lankan government set out to track the valuable flow of workers departing for foreign employment, opening a desk at Colombo's Katunayake airport to attempt to register at departure the emigrants who had not yet done so (SLBFE 2018, 4), but evidently failing to account for those who travelled on tourist visas, or through longer routes punctuated with intermediary stops and destinations. While irregular low-skilled migrants evade

[32] Foreign employment is divided along the "manpower level" categories of "housemaid, unskilled, semiskilled, skilled, clerical, middle level, professional level" (SLBFE). From the onset, work migration has been heavily gendered, as men have found "skilled" and "semiskilled" work in the construction sector and on the oil rigs, and women have mostly been employed in the domestic sector as "unskilled" workers in the garment industry or "housemaids" (Osella & Osella 2000; Pathirage and Collyer 2011). In 2018, 39% of Sri Lankan recruitees for overseas work were women, and 76% of those had been recruited as "housemaids" (SLBFE 2018).

censuses, so do many of the higher-skilled departures (Pathirage and Collyer 2011). In a moderately successful move to try and limit irregular departures, refine official statistics, and monitor the flow of remittances, emigration policing has intensified over the years: for example, in 2009, the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment Act was amended to grant the Bureau's civil servants the power to arrest the would-be workers who failed to comply with the required travel documents (Frantz 2011,53; Jayawardena 2020).

In 2018, an estimate 80% of migration from Sri Lanka was destined to Qatar, Kuwait Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, making the Gulf and Middle East the central focus of scholarly work considering Sri Lanka's transnational migration (SLBFE 2018). But it is also the abuse faced by expatriate workers, many of them women, in the absence of enforcement of labor rights and protection, that has attracted considerable media, activist and scholarly attention. In response to frequent reports on what the Bureau describes lightly as the "negative socio-economic and other consequences" of work emigration to the Gulf (SLBFE 2018,v), the Sri Lankan government's successive administrations have issued stern statements over the years, promising, in particular, to limit the number of women migrating as housemaids. But this has been followed only by sporadic measures[33], while simultaneous incentives remained in place to boost departures and the funneling-in of expatriate remittances (Frantz 2011,52). Concomitantly with the inception of Sri Lanka's foreign employment industry in the 1970s, the Gulf states began implementing stricter policing at their borders, epitomized by the infamous *kafala* (sponsorship) system, through which "guest" workers remain bound to their employers for the terms of their service (Frantz)[34]. In her work with Sri Lankan women between Jordan and Sri Lanka, anthropologist Elizabeth Frantz describes the implementation in 1994 of SLBFE-ran "training programs" targeting Gulf-bound female "housemaids" — a means for the Sri Lankan government to juggle the

[33] limitation of the age for departure is one of those (REF). Temporary bans on domestic helpers being sent to given destinations (e.g. in 2010, departures to Jordan were forestalled for 1 month, see Frantz p.65).

[34] Note on the kafala (Frantz). Human rights watch reports. Headlines today as well with upcoming soccer worldcup in Qatar (the Guardian).

contradictions between the negative image of the risks born by migration, with the centrality of foreign employment for its GDB[35].

In contrast, migration to Italy was not planned-for by the government. Aspiring labor migrants to Italy are not required to attend training programs, either by the Sri Lankan state, by the Italian state, or by Italian employers. But they make use of many of the administrative services introduced in support of Sri Lanka's foreign employment industry, such as offices for passport delivery (Brown 2013:37-40). Moreover, the gender profile is different, with men also filling in "housemaid" positions (Näre 2010), such that, in Italy, the population of Sri Lankan residents is close to gender parity.

While initially designed to account for overseas workers in the Gulf nation-states, the statistical offices of the SLBFE have long moved to tracking other flows as well, including the smaller proportion of Europe-bound migrant workers. Based on fieldwork conducted in 2008 and 2009, sociologists Jagath Pathirage and Michael Collyer estimated that, in some areas of the western coast around Negombo, over 80% of migrants were directed to Italy, a relative anomaly when compared to national trends (Pathirage and Collyer 2011). Those areas happen to include the majority-Catholic villages and towns from which, as previously explained, Catholic priests brokered some of the first connections between future Sri Lankan domestic workers and prospective Italian employers.

[35] Frantz found that the programs placed emphasis on the "instruction of bourgeois values with regards to cleanliness", on "obedience", and on would-be migrants embracing aspirations of "personality development". The Sri Lankan state's rationale for the creation of "training programs" was that workers' compliance with host countries' norms and customs would spare them mistreatment and abuse, thereby minimizing issues while maximizing the flows of remittances funneled back to Sri Lanka (Frantz p.71). Rather than teaching workers their formal rights (such as a minimal wage for overseas domestic workers guaranteed by the Sri Lankan state; or the right to hold on to their passports), the State-managed training facilities placed responsibility for abuse on migrants themselves —rendering any formal labor rights wholly inefficient in practice (Frantz p.63-64; 72).

2. "Why do foreigners come to Italy?"

2.1. Coming to Italy for work: the Italian immigration law from 1986 to 2008

In Italy, from the mid-1980s, public discourse on immigrants and immigration became concerned with legislative, policy-making, and penal issues, pointing towards an increasing "politicization of immigration" (Colombo & Sciortino 2004). The first comprehensive immigration law (the "Foschi law") was passed in 1986, later than in neighboring countries to the west and north of Europe, and it aimed to cover the access of foreigners to Italy's labor market. From 1990 to its abrogation in 1999, the so-called *chiamata nominativa* or "nominative call" system was introduced (Näre 2007; de Filippo and Pugliese 2000), linking would-be migrants to prospective Italian employers, thereby granting them entry in Italy, most often for domestic work. The kind of mediation done by the priest who introduced Joseph's sister to her first Italian employer in the mid-1970s, would have been among the forerunning practices later formalized inside the legal framework of the nominative call.

The next immigration law to be voted signaled a hardening of Italy's position on the control of the national border: the Turco-Napolitano law passed in 1998, under a center-left government, "aimed to prevent and combat illegal entry in the Italian national territory, regulate incoming flows of foreign workers, promote the integration of immigrants holding valid residence permits, and grant basic rights to “illegal” immigrants." (Tuckett 2018). An emblematic and consequential turn followed in 2002, with the introduction of the Bossi-Fini law, under Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi’s center-right government. This law sought “to make legal status more dependent upon employment" and to increase the control over illegal entry (Tuckett 2018). The Bossi-Fini law tied aspiring migrants' legal status to their possession of a work contract, introducing the necessity of a "contratto di soggiorno" or contract-to-stay in order to obtain a work-motivated residence permit:

> ‘first, the concept of a contract-to-stay was introduced, that is an agreement between the migrant worker and the employer, necessary to obtain or to renew the residence permit. The maximum duration of the contract-to stay was two years, in the case of an open-ended work contract, one year, in case of a temporary contract and nine months, in case of a seasonal job. Since the residence permit was dependent on the contract to stay, its expiration dates were automatically linked. Consequently, the length of the residence

> permit was always dependent on the nature of the work contract, in contrast to the previous legislation, whereby a renewal of the work contract meant that the residence permit would automatically be renewed. Second, the new law lowered to six months the length of the residence permit, in cases where the individual was unemployed. Third, it extended, to six years (from the previous five) the length of stay before a *Carta di Soggiorno* could be requested. Fourth, the expulsion measures for undocumented migrants and overstayers were further strengthened." (Mottura and Rinaldini, 2009, cited in Grappi 2010)

Over the next two decades, the Italian government continued the legislative process. In 2009 the so-called Security Packet (Pachetto di Sicurezza) "dramatically increased the cost of permit renewal and made the status of illegality a crime" (Tuckett 2018,10). Historian Michele Colucci notes that a turning point was marked when 2008 economic crisis hit Italy by 2011, and as the numbers of asylum seekers rose (2019). As unemployment rose in Italy, for Italians and foreigners alike, work-related flows were overall tightened.

2.2. Ambiguities in the law: quotas and amnesties

For all their "institutional racism" (Grappi 2010), the 2002 Bossi-Fini law and successive legislative moves all had very ambiguous consequences for immigration and migrants in Italy. On the one hand, there was the clear souring up of the governmental rhetoric, and the tightening of the ensuing legislative apparatus into an "apparently tough stance" (Tuckett 2018). This rhetoric pushed out an agenda oriented toward an apparent limitation of incoming illegal flows, claiming that a "just-in-time and to-the-point" approach to foreign labor could resolve the problem of immigration by simply matching up the incoming workforce offer to a demand for labor that exceeded what the national population could fulfill (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013, 138). On the other hand, and consequently, quotas were put into play to enable the arrival of labor from abroad: the *decreti flussi*. Those quotas were based on a "cautious forecast" of Italy's needs for foreign workforce (Ambrosini 2008:568; cited in Tuckett 2018,10). Such forecasts, however, generally fell short of predicting actual market trends, most often underestimating them. As a result, migrants have been able to bargain on a persistent (if un-officialized and uncertain) demand for work, thousands of them entering the country illegally every year, finding irregular (contract-less) jobs. Instead of shutting those migrants out, successive government administrations have responded by regularizing them through chronical and

sweeping *sanatorie*. Since the late-1980s, those mass amnesties have granted undocumented migrants already working in Italy (albeit unrecognized and unacknowledged) with the possibility to obtain a permit to stay[36].

In contrast with the anti-immigration stances vehemently proclaimed by the government, the *decreti flussi* and chronic *sanatorie* have then served to maintain a situation in which migrants continue to arrive and to find work in Italy, while eluding both the statistical and the legal apparatuses in play, and while remaining the focus of a criminalizing penal system. An important consequence of the ambiguous functioning of Italy's migration laws is indeed that a "majority of migrants in Italy complete a stint of "illegality" in the country before obtaining legal status" (Tuckett 2018) — despite "illegality" being precisely what the goverment claimed to be combatting[37]. Moreover, owing to "the contingency of legal status on work", individuals are constantly prey to falling (back) into "illegality" (Tuckett 2018). Illegality, then, is a condition that virtually all immigrants in Italy must navigate, at one point or another of their mobile lives.

The 2002 Bossi-Fini law itself came along with or mass amnesty. It was in fact the fifth of its kind[38] and the most important numerically, regularizing over 700 000 people (Arbaci 2019), Initially planned only for domestic workers, following negotiations within the governing coalition, the 2002 amnesty was eventually extended to all undocumented migrants.

2.3. Border externalization and sailing to Italy

> "Non si va dove c'è poverta. In Bangladesh, nessuno vuole andare. Tutti vogliono andare dove ci sono i soldi. (...) Io volevo andare o in Italia, o in Australia, o in Nuova Zelanda. Per

[36] Tuckett highlights that the decreti flussi themselves have increasingly been working as sanatorie: they "have not served to bring in new migrants from abroad, but in the majority of cases have enabled migrants already on Italian territory to regularize their status" (Tuckett 2018).

[37] see next chapter for more on this topic

[38] Following the Foshi law in 1987 (an estimate 119 000 people regularized; **of whom 9400 Sri Lankans**), the Martelli law in 1990 (an estimate 217 000 people regularized; **of whom 4000 Sri Lankans**) and in 1996 (an estimate 148 000 people regularized), and the Turco-Napoletano law in 1998 (an estimate 193 000 people regularized) (Arbaci 2020:114; Amato 1998). Sonia Arbaci (2020) documents the specificity of those amnesties not to Italy only, but to the Southern European nation-states more generally.

> queste ultime due però avevo paura. Noi sapevamo che lì è difficile e il mare è più pericoloso. Invece per andare in Italia è più facile. Solo il Mar Mediterraneo è pericoloso, ma sono quattro giorni di viaggio. Prima no. Dal Cairo fino in Sicilia, non è molto."
>
> (Grassi 2022, 144-45)

The previous quote is from taken from a discussion between ethnographer Paolo Grassi, and Sampath, a Sri Lankan man who worked as a janitor in Milano's Barrio San Siro (2022). Sampath's story illustrates the sea route that used to connect Italy to Sri Lanka, a route alternatively sustained and hindered by cycles of bilateral agreements between nation-states. Italian *decreti flussi* are the product of such agreements between Italy and "sending countries", in particular those susceptible to send over large number of migrant workers. Such agreements are emblematic of a rising trend which has been termed by critical migration scholars an "externalization" of the borders of western nation-states. By "externalization", they refer to

> "the displacement of border control and its technologies beyond the territorial edges of formally unified political spaces" (Mezzadra & Nielson 2013,171).

The year 2002 and the increased "politicization of migration" accompanying the Bossi-Fini law marked a turning point in Italy and an acceleration of border externalization. As such, this turning point was felt from "inside" the borders of Sri Lanka as well, as Italian authorities increased cooperation with local law-enforcement agents to stop migration at the point of departure (Brown 2012). In April 2002, the ASEM (Asia-Europe Summit)[39] held its first "Ministerial Conference on Cooperation for the Management of Migratory Flows", bringing together foreign Ministers of individual states, but also representatives of the EU and ASEAN. Stating as their focus the dismantling of smuggling networks and the curbing of illegal migration, European and Asian Ministers of foreign affairs initiated various cooperation processes and the sharing of so-called "best-practice" technologies and policies (ASEM 2002; see also Brown 2013). Among those exchanges of knowledge and material, Brown reports the donation of an Italian patrol boat to the Sri Lankan Navy in 2006 (Brown 2012). Another well-known example is Italy's cooperation with Egyptian coast guards to police the Suez Canal route, stopping migrant boats from going forward across Mediterranean waters. The year 2002 also

[39] An emanation of the UN, United Nations

coincided, as Brown writes, with the last large smuggling operation[40] of Italy-bound people emanating from Sri Lanka's western coast (2012).

2.4. Anxious fashions

> *Syracuse is the story of the island of Sicily*
> *Genoa Messina you fooled me*
> *Verona Marina Carmela Theresa*
> *Pronto I was alone in Italy*
> *Como I was alone in Italy*
> *Ciao I was alone in Italy*
> *Allora I was alone in Italy*
>
> Dhanapala Udawatta, "*Mam Italiye tani una" [I was alone in Italy]* (2014, my translation from Sinhala)

For people I met in Naples, the passage between Italy and Sri Lanka was not merely the consequence of the Catholic Church's transnational networks, and of their activation through the brokering actions of missionary priests. A story I heard among Napoli's Catholic Sri Lankans was that the "power of God" itself, as some of my friends put it, had willed the connection between Negombo and its area, and Italy. In such explanations, *Punchi Italia*'s exceptional development (in regards to other parts of the country), signified by the lavish landscape of 'Italian style' houses, was seen as proof of divine favors being extended to Catholic devotees. Whether or not motivated by faith, a persistent mood floated about the Negombo area, within to which "Italy" could oscillate anywhere between denoting a place of depraved moral standards, or pointing at the fastest route to wealth, stability and prosperity (Brown 2014, see also Pathirage and Collyer 2011).

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[40] Nevertheless, boat-crossings remained in the narratives of my interlocutors. In 1983, the violent anti-Tamil riots marking the start of the civil war — the Black July — occurred in the North of Colombo, and in the Negombo and Kochchikade areas (Stirrat 1992:187). However, by the time the fighting had settled in, the Negombo area was spared most of the gunfire between the Sinhala Army and the Tamil separatists (Brown 2013), which affected predominantly the North and the East of the island. But the lives of the coastal populations were havily disrupted by the war. Brown describes how the rhythms of the fishermen were interrupted; fishing-motivated seasonal migrations brought to a halt. In turn this led to a popular idea: that circular migration to Italy had replaced the circularity of seasonal migration (2013,118).

For example, in and around Wennappuwa or Negombo, landscapes bear visible traces of transnational connections with Italy. Scholars have noted how the "Italian style" of houses Negombo extended *Punchi Italia's* reputation across Sri Lanka, demonstrating through elaborate gates, the assumed wealth and economic success of the return migrants from Italy (Bacciochi 2010, Brown 2018; Grassi 2022, 144-145). Whether it has to do with architecture and design —newly built houses boasting Roman arched window frames, doric-inspired columns, or terracotta-style ceramics and bathroom appliances—, food — restaurant menus proposing pizza or advertising the chef's experience of Italy's hospitality industry—; or fashion and clothing, the influence of what locals term the "Italian style" on punchi Italia is unmistakable (Brown 2014, see also Ayoma's intervention in Chapter 1). In the face of high unemployment and meagre perspectives, the move to Italy is amongst the best career plans a young Sri Lankan from Wennappuwa or Negombo may hope for, to the point that many of them give up on education and university's comparably feeble promises (Brown 2014).

The "structure of feeling" (Williams, cited in Lakin 2013) floating about *Punchi Italia* — what my friend and interlocutor Sasanka called a "fashion", and what Brown's interlocutors termed a "frenzy", and Frantz' "fever" — was to emigration to Italy. This, along with Joseph's story, "evokes a world in which human mobility is not only intensifying and increasingly regulated, but also driven by desires and emotions" (Lindquist 2009,6). More than depicting it as an "industry", then, it can be helpful to think of foreign employment of Sri Lankan workers (domestic or otherwise) as part of a reticulated "migration infrastructure" (Xiang and Lindquist 2014) that facilitates mobility — even as it fails enhancing migrants' ability to choose the speeds and directions of their trajectories, fashioning ready-made subject positions and disciplining individuals into conforming to those. This gestures at an understanding of Napoli as part of a border-spanning "migration infrastructure" which comprises humanitarian, technological, legal, and affective aspects.

3. Emplacing Naples

3.1 Working in Italy: ambivalent Napoli

In 2018, the volume of remittances sent back to Sri Lanka by migrant workers resident in Italy amounted to over 300 million euros, a sum that was the sixth largest of similar

international flows of money originating from Italy's foreign residents[41]. Strolling around Napoli's *centro storico*, one would inevitably encounter money transfer offices with their blinking signs keeping track of the volatile rates of change of Sri Lankan Rupees into Euros, a daily reminder of the centrality of those financial flows for many Sri Lankan residents (fig. 20).

Figure 20. Money tranfer agency in the centro storico, notifying the current rate: RS 361,00 for 1€.

But the weight of Italian regions and provinces in channeling out remittances was unevenly distributed, in marked favor of the North (ISTAT 2018, Banca d'Italia). While together, in 2018, the southern regions of Campania and Sicily amounted for 28,6% of Italy's Sri Lankan resident population, they only provided 20,8% of the outflow of remittances to Sri Lanka. Conversely, 53,3% of the population had declared residency in the North regions of Lombardia, Veneto, Toscana and Emilia Romana, yet the cumulated remittances they sent out amounted to 59,2% of the total sum. Those numbers offer only a partial representation of lived realities: here, they point at the idea that a Sri Lankan

[41] From 2012, the Italian Ministry of Work and Social Politics (MLPS) has commissioned yearly reports on the national "communities" of *extra-communitari* residents (i.e. non EU) strangers holding permit to stay in Italy, focusing on the 16 largest of those.

migrant living in Italy is likely to transfer more money to Sri Lanka if they reside in the North, than if they reside in the South. At the provincial scale, those numbers gesture again at the same notion (table 2): in 2018, in the Tuscan provinces of Lucca and Firenze, the average yearly amount one is likely to transfer to Sri Lanka is respectively of about 3600 and 4400€/year. By contrast, in Napoli, it is only 2100, while it dropped to 1450€/year in Palermo.

And yet, despite this sign that the South offered scarcer opportunities to mass up savings and wire them to relatives in Sri Lanka, the cities of Catania, Palermo and Napoli continued to boast a high number of Sri Lankan residents — with population counts that kept increasing. This was flagged as an anomaly by the institutional reports, as this Southern concentration did not match expectations as to where migrant "communities" might be found (MLPS 2019:13). Indeed, the general trend located the majority foreign residence in the North of the country, with the Southern regions amounting for only 15% of Italy's total foreign resident population.

	Total yearly emittances (thousand euros)	Average yearly remittances per resident (thousand euros)	% of total remittances sent to Sri Lanka from Italy	Sri Lankan residents in the province	% of total Sri Lankan population in Italy
Milan (Lombardy)	73440	3,399	24,0%	21 607	20%
Napoli (Campania)	**35140**	**2,103**	**11,5%**	**16 707**	**15,5%**
Rome (Lazio)	42880	3,869	14,0%	11 084	10,3%
Verona (Veneto)	27910	3,265	9,1%	8 547	7,9%
Messina (Sicily)	8570	1,926	2,8%	4 448	4,1%
Catania (Sicily)	9460	2,379	3,1%	3 975	3,7%
Palermo (Sicily)	5320	1,462	1,7%	3 635	3,4%
Firenze (Tuscany)	15630	4,417	5,1%	3 538	3,3%
Lucca (Tuscany)	6730	3,629	2,2%	1 854	1,7%
Total of 9 most populous provinces	*225070*	*2,985*	*73,6%*	*75 395*	*73,6%*
Italy total	**305690**	**2,831**	**100%**	**107 967**	**100%**

Table 2. Province distribution of Sri Lankan residence and remittance sent to Sri Lanka, for the 9 provinces totalizing the higher number of , 2018 (sources: ISTAT, Banca d'Italia; compilation by author)

Focusing on Campania, a 2013 survey led by sociologists and activists Salvatore Strozza and Elena de Filippo investigated in the "integration" of migrants through population sampling and interviews (2015). In Italy, the trend is that sectorial occupation

often maps onto ethno-national identity: for example, in Campania, Burkinabe do agricultural work fields while Ghanaian are enrolled in day-laboring, Indians and Pakistani work with cattle, Senegalese and Bangladeshi are street-vendors (Cseke 2020, Lucht 2012,26-2; Harney 2007). The report compiled by Strozza and de Filippo follows those trends, estimating in that seven out of ten Sri Lankan residents in Napoli worked in the domestic sector (whether male or female), as cleaners, gardeners, babysitters, or *badanti*; while only two out of ten could be found working in the restaurant business (mostly as dishwashers and kitchenhands) and in retail or as vendors; while only a slim 5% had found factory jobs (de Filippo and Strozza 2015, 28-30). The Sri Lankans interrogated reached a monthly average salary of 580€/month, their salaries figured as among the lowest, while Ukraininans (55% of whom were employed as domestic workers) and Russians (59% employed as domestic workers) reached monthly estimates of respectively 671€ and 640€. The report went on estimating that only one fourth of interviewed Sri Lankans worked in *modo irregolare*, without a contract. But interestingly — and here again, gesturing at an anomaly of sorts — report also indicates that up to nearly one out of three Sri Lankan residents interrogated had declared themselves *molto soddisfati*, (very satisfied) with the work they did, a higher rate of satisfaction than most other migrant communities — despite the low salaries they earned, and the limitations of being restricted to domestic work.

Rather than only standing as an exceptional case, the concentration of Sri Lankan migrant settlement in Campania and in Sicily may point at other formulations: notably, that Italy's South, and in particular its metropolitan areas, can be understood as a destination to be investigated in its own right (Colucci 2019), neither simply a steppingstone, nor only a forcefully inflicted dead-end[42]. The trends seemed to indicate that while work in Napoli was not paid as well as in Florence or Milan, the city remained attractive enough that people would find themselves settling there. What I have done in this paragraph — merely brushing the surface of the economic context that conditions work and access to work in the city; and how this relates it to other places and scales — sketches an oddly ambivalent picture. Naples, despite being epitome of South Italy's

[42] Examplified, for example, in what has been described as the "bleakness" of the Caserta region and its emblematic Castel Volturno, where African migrants from Ghana or Nigeria find themselves stranded (Lucht 2011).

problems and limitations (as the next paragraph will explain), seemed to offer possibilities that might enable some degree of satisfaction with lives led in the city.

3.2. Panic Napoli: the crisis narrative

> "Naples has always been a city in crisis, a "panic city," as a result of its vulnerability both to acute shocks (eruptions of Vesuvius, earthquakes, cholera outbreaks, the aerial bombings in 1943–44 by the Allies during World War II as supplemented by the ground-level devastation inflicted by the German occupation) and chronic stresses (its endemic poverty, its congestion and traffic jams, its garbage crises and illegal toxic waste dumping, and, above all, its culture of violence that has come to be organized into a system by the Camorra)..." (d'Acierno et Pugliese 2018, 2).
>
> "This is a very important moment... the city needs to be driven firmly and effectively, the situation is complicated: there are daily exigencies, and we must give a concrete answer to the citizens who demand of us more livability and a normal city" (Gaetano Manfredi, 2021)[43].

The idea that life in Napoli was hard remained echoed by a range of reports and representations of the city, with nation-wide "quality of life" assessments recurrently rating the city in the very last (Finizio, et al. 2021). Consider an overview of the situation, presented in an interview of Neapolitan activist Emma Ferulano, whom I quote at length:

> "There are numerous examples illustrating how everyday life is far from "easy" for urban dwellers in Naples and in other Southern European cities. (...) public transport, which is one of the most extensive and advanced networks in Italy, suffers from bad administration and rivalling political interests; the garbage crisis is periodical and never-ending, a result of bad governance and an absence of civic public training; public health care is increasingly inaccessible thanks to budget cuts and extensive process of privatisation, despite an excellence in research. Public spaces are not easily or always accessible (...) Gender discrimination is also a big issue with gender inequality a deep- seated and central feature for the greater part of southern Italian culture. There is also a palpable discrimination in local government policy between the urban centre and the hinterland, which reinforces a cultural discrimination ingrained in the population. Chronic unemployment, a parallel illegal workforce, a youth in crisis, emigration, exploitation, lack of adequate accessible

[43] "Questo è un momento molto importante... la città ha bisogno di guida ferma e operativa, la situazione è complicata: ci sono esigenze quotidiane e dobbiamo dare risposte concrete ai cittadini che ci chiedono di avere più vivibilità e una città normale" https://www.fanpage.it/napoli/napoli-mafredi-presenta-la-nuova-giunta-daremo-risposte-concrete-ai-cittadini/

> housing, refusal to recognise rights to citizenship, all these issues are as stratified as the secular layers that characterise the city (...)" (Lancione and McFarlane 2021, 300)

But escalating from such descriptions beyond the reality of complex issues faced by the city, as illustrated by the voices in the quotes opening this section, tropes of crisis consistently amplified representations of the city. The opening quotes reach out from two platforms — an academic text drafted in New York by Americans of Neapolitan or Campanian ancestry, and the speech of a freshly elected mayor for Napoli, Gaetano Manfredi — to make stringent judgments about the city. A "vulnerable" city, liable to crises caused by "acute shocks". And a city always already "panicked", and chronically "stressed"[44]. Not long after my meeting with Joseph, a polemic swelled in the media: center-right French newspaper *Le Figaro* had just published a page-long story on how Naples was best described as "Europe's third world city". The journalist concludes by wishing good luck to the newly elected municipal administration. That position elicited outraged responses from public Neapolitan figures such as actor Toni Servillo, filmmaker Paolo Sorrentino or mayor Gaetano Manfredi (Repubblica 2021).

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[44] Consider an overview of the situation, presented in an interview of Neapolitan activist Emma Ferulano:

"There are numerous examples illustrating how everyday life is far from "easy" for urban dwellers in Naples and in other Southern European cities. For instance, in Naples, public transport, which is one of the most extensive and advanced networks in Italy, suffers from bad administration and rivalling political interests; the garbage crisis is periodical and never-ending, a result of bad governance and an absence of civic public training; public health care is increasingly inaccessible thanks to budget cuts and extensive process of privatisation, despite an excellence in research. Public spaces are not easily or always accessible, even with thousands of people flocking to the streets in their leisure time, especially as life in the "vicolo" in the city centre is a natural expansion of cramped houses and green spaces often closed for "security reasons". The city's outskirts lack adequate play areas for children, with cars ruling the streets and pavements, despite the fact that Naples had the youngest demographics for the entire country. Gender discrimination is also a big issue with gender inequality a deep- seated and central feature for the greater part of southern Italian culture. There is also a palpable discrimination in local government policy between the urban centre and the hinterland, which reinforces a cultural discrimination ingrained in the population. Chronic unemployment, a parallel illegal workforce, a youth in crisis, emigration, exploitation, lack of adequate accessible housing, refusal to recognise rights to citizenship, all these issues are as stratified as the secular layers that characterise the city. The outcome is far from a modern scenario." (Lancione and McFarlane 2021, 300)

According to those views — professed from the distance of a parent's crossing of the Atlantic, from the "North" of Europe, or from the rhetorical heights of political leadership — something has “gone wrong” in Napoli (Roitman 2014). Migrants feed into that appreciation — especially those, like Dimuth, who arrive in the aftermath of the economic crisis (post-2008), the migration crisis (post-2015), and the covid crisis (post-2020). They are all too easily reduced to threshold dwellers in a "panic city", itself engulfed in world-spanning problems and crises. The following paragraph, in contrast, lays out the positive views and representations of Napoli, as a porous, open and cosmopolitan city.

3.3. “Porous” Napoli: the cosmopolitan narrative

In 2018, the province of Naples made for 15,5% of Italy's overall Sri Lankan population (with Campania totalizing 16,1%), second only to the province of Milano. Since 2012, Sri Lankan residents have overtaken Ukrainians to become the largest group of non-Italian co-nationals residing in the commune of Napoli, making up nearly a quarter of the city's foreign residents — which amounts to one percent of its overall population. In 2018, 87% of Campania's Sri Lankans had their address in the *comune* di Napoli, the highest metropolitan concentration in the country (seconded only by the sprawling municipality of Rome, where 82% of Lazio's Sri Lankan residents had declared residency). In contrast, only 56% of Veneto's Sri Lankans had declared residency in Verona at that time; 52% of Lombardia's Sri Lankans resided in Milano; 55% of Tuscany's Sri Lankans in Firenze and Lucca; and 74% of Sicily's Sri Lankan residents were distributed between Palermo, Catania and Messina.

	Sri Lankan residents in Naples *comune*	Foreign residents of Naples *comune*	Sri Lankans over total foreign residents of Naples *comune*	Foreigners over total Naples residents
2004	1 525	10 879	14,02%	1,10%
2006	2 655	16 972	15,60%	1,7%
2008	3 469	21 484	16,15%	2,20%
2010	4 891	27 481	17,80%	2,9%
2012	7 197	31 433	22,90%	3,30%
2014	11 614	47 031	24,69%	4,80%
2016	13 474	52 542	25,69%	5,40%
2018	15 195	58 203	26,10%	6%

Table 3. Naples resident Sri Lankan population, January 2004-2018 (source: ISTAT, compilation by author)

Social scientists have found that amongst migrants settling in or moving through Italy, the country was often experienced as a "soft option", characterized by a "relatively flexible permit system" (e.g. Tuckett 2018: 132). Such a conception can be understood as "shaped by, and constructed on, the basis of stories, rumors, and experiences, as well as pragmatic knowledge about laws" (Tuckett 2018: 133).

The city of Naples is famously described by people situated at varied positions of closeness or distance to it— locals and foreigners, academic experts and touring profanes — as the *porous* city. In a mineral analogy with its the soft, friable *tuffo giallo* stones, the original *porosity* metaphor crafted by travelers Walter Benjamin & Asja Lacis (1978; see also Chambers 2008; D'Acierno & Pugliese 2018) signals both a quality of the environment itself, and a propensity of its inhabitants to enact dwelling and city-making as slithering through and founding themselves from within the real-imagined pores of the rocky substrate. From there, the porosity narrative expands generously, encompassing the welcoming attitude of a multiethnic port city and its people (Chambers 2008: 119), and filtering up and down in various genres and registers of discourse. Migrancy scholars across disciplines (geography, sociology, anthropology, urban studies, cultural studies) have written of Naples as a locus for a particular "porous" iteration of the urban informality found in other cities of the Global —or, most often in those accounts, *Mediterranean*— South.

According to those renderings, as a set of urban spaces that, from being an easy a "stepping stone" (Schuster 2005; Tuckett 2016), has become a secure footing to those who seek persistence residence in it. They add that Naples grants opportunities to migrants by virtue of the porous character of its landscapes and life worlds (Cattedra 2003; Amato & Coppola 2009; Schmoll 2004, 2012). Geographer Camille Schmoll (2004, 41) cites Coppola's point (Coppola 1999) on the structural importance of informality (*l'informel*), along with the minor weight of official reglementation, in lowering barriers to the reception of migrants. Sociologist Rafaele Cattedra (2003) builds on similar ideas to speak of the porous mesh of both Naples' diffuse illegality and of its public space, drawing the hypothesis that such a loose fabric holds a consubstantial capacity to welcome that he reads as an intrinsically Neapolitan "cosmopolitanism". For the displaced, migrants and strangers in transit, as for their 'local' neighbors, the porosity narrative has it that Naples offers spaces of 'informality' in which openings and opportunities exist along various

registers/domains and render circulations possible: from everyday sociability; to livelihood and economies, (Amato 2017, Schmoll 2012, Harney 2007), to faith and religious practices; to leisure, play and free time. According to the general porosity account, *trajectories in informality and/or porosity* are most often made possible within a socio-material porous urban fabric that is *already* out there, an open substrate waiting for those circulations to occur. Porosity, understood as the feature of an "innate welcoming" city, works as a blindspot.; this dissertation would show how this porosity is actually created, and not a given.

Conclusion.

Neither reducible to economic or political push and pull rationales or to tales of cohesive diasporic communities, Joseph's story resonates with Lindquist's call for "an ethnography of globalization not as a series of impersonal transactions, but rather in terms of relationships that bind individuals together over large distances" (Lindquist 2009,8-9). The multiplication of borders possibilities of subjectification and attachment, changing the very objects with which ties can be struck. This chapter has helped me historicize and contextualize the mobile ties between a category like Sri Lankan, and the real/imagined Napoli.

The city's chaos and crisis is not a given, but nor is its porosity and openness. This chapter has outlined what I mean with "Sri Lankan Naples": more than simply a landscape, it can perhaps be productivelly thought of as a "borderscape" (Mezzadra and Nielson 2015), mediated by residents/navigators, some of them — migrants — mobile across vast distances. This chapter also set the stage for what comes next: a rush of stories (Tsing 2015) that attempt illustrate some of the workings of the borderscape that the city partakes of. Napoli, I argue, is best understood when inching closer to the moving perspectives of the people who navigate it.

PART II

Navigating the borderscape

Chapter 3. Dimuth. Not only crisis.

Opening vignette. “A book about my life”

— “Sometimes, I think... I would like to write a book about my life”, Dimuth chuckled.

It was May 2021, we were strolling in the heat of *piazza* Cavour[45], and our chat had just brought him to juxtapose in quick succession a few recent scenes from his life.

— “You see Cap’”, he insisted, “In Sri Lanka, I come from a poor family... no one believed I could go to Europe... Europe was my dream.”

He went on with recollections from his days working at a hotel in the Alps — “The first time I saw snow!”, he marveled. Anecdotes from his current job in Napoli cleaning animal cages in a vet clinic followed, and he illustrated those with pictures of dogs from his cell-phone — “It is not with them that I will be learning Italian…”, he half-joked. Then he added scenes from his new part-time job, as a handyman for a lavishly wealthy Italian family — “You know, my *signora*… when I make a mistake... she only touches my cheek like this, and laughs... Cap’, my *signora* and her family… they are good people... you don't need to count your work hours with them”.

As he recorded and narrated them, those moments fed into a longer story of his life, unfolding along a trajectory that had begun in inland Sri Lanka, and proceeded toward Napoli, while gesturing at futures that were both exciting and threatening:

— “When I get my residence permit... I want to travel everywhere”, he asserted in a determined way.

(fieldnotes, April 2021)

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[45] See maps in the Introduction to this dissertation for a situation of referenced localities.

Dimuth confided his story to me in many instalments over our weekly meetings, with new experiences triggering more recollections. As anthropologist Anna Tsing puts it, any history "is both a human storytelling practice and that set of remainders from the past that we turn into stories" (2015,168). Dimuth himself confided his life to me in ways that enabled him to choose and give importance some "remainders" over others, and to the meaningful sequences in which they could be weaved together. The biographical paragraphs which intercept this chapter make up my own account of his story. Ethnography and biography merge together as I rephrase Dimuth's voice, and what he himself thought to be worth narrating (Giordano 2014): he joked that his story would make for a good "book", adding cheekily that he had acquired a taste for adventure and wanted "to travel everywhere", and his ongoing lack of a regularized permit to stay in Italy (his "visa") did not fully dampen those dreams, nor entirely foreclose the possibility of such futures.

I suggest that we take seriously Dimuth's own claim that the story of his life might be considered as such —as a curated narrative of historicized remainders, patterned and sequenced in ways that continued to matter for his present life. What does "taking his story seriously" entail? First, inspired by the work of literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin on narrative forms (1981), I propose that we investigate the temporal motifs that patterned his story. Specifically, the "book" of Dimuth's biography reads as a set of haltered sequences, ruptures, turning points, dead-ends and impromptu openings: in other words, those times were riddled in *crises*. I call this temporal texture "crisis-time". Second, by "taking his story seriously", I insist on the importance of tracing the meaningful and practical repercussions of Dimuth's biography (together with the pasts it recounts, and the futures it gestures at) into his present life (Ringel 2016). The following will show how crisis-time echoed consequentially into Dimuth's present, such that his life in Napoli was infused in the recollection of its own dramatic moves, both geographical and existential. Accordingly, I argue that Dimuth's residing in Naples can be thought of as navigating and mediating between multiple different *times* that co-existed in "dynamic simultaneity" (Bear 2014, 2017).

The word "crisis" can stand for a few linked, yet different things, especially when associated to the idea of migration. First, crisis often serves as a qualifier for an ongoing conjuncture, as when post-2015 Europe is said to be engulfed in the so-called "migrant's

crisis" (Giordano 2020; see Introduction). Here, the use of crisis establishes a judgment which problematizes on the long run the conjuncture spoken of as "in crisis", leading to questions like "what went wrong" (Roitman 2014; Dines, Montagna et Vaccheli 2018), and building on assumptions according to which migrants are a problem (Anderson 2019). Secondly, and relatedly, crisis, as in "crisis migration" (MacAdam 2014) can designate a dramatic set of punctual events (such as wars, pandemics, natural disasters, religious persecutions, etc.) which are positioned, at a precise moment in time, as the cause, instigation or justification of another set of events (here, a given flow of people). In both those cases:

> "Framing [the current] time as [crisis] implies approaching the present moment as a state of emergency that activates the different functions and modalities of sovereign power. European nation-states and supra-national organizations are mobilized to simultaneously save and care for lives in need of rescue, on the one hand, and to enforce stricter border control, on the other. Both postures of sovereign power are framed within a grammar of life that identifies certain events as worth accounting for and as crisis producing, and others as ordinary, thus uneventful and unaccountable" (Giordano 2020).

Crisis, in its pervasive and unquestioned uses by governments and policymakers, does the work of "sovereign power", drawing a line between who and what is worth accounting for, and how; and who and what is cast out of sight as uneventful.

Alternatively, and this is what I will attempt to do in this chapter, we might work closer to the term's etymological roots from "the ancient Greek *krino*, which means to separate, to choose, to decide, and to cut" (Giordano 2020). Here, "crisis" turns to naming a rupture inside a temporal texture; it signifies the motif of a turning-point inside a story. Used in this manner — as "crisis-time" — crisis can then designate the *time* which animates what Bakhtin defines as the chronotope of *threshold* (Bakhtin 1981,248), the "most fundamental instance" of which appears as

> "the chronotope of *crisis* and *break* in a life. The word "threshold" itself already has a metaphorical meaning in every day usage (together with its literal meaning),and is connected with the breaking point of a life, the moment of crisis, the decision that changes a life (or the indecisiveness that fails to change a life, the fear to step over the threshold" (ibid.).

Here, "crisis" — rather than playing the partition of sovereign power by normalizing states of exception — points at the ways in which a life can be infused in the recollection of its own dramatic moves, both geographic and existential, and the shifting futures that

those moves prepare one for (or distract one from). In this third acceptance, and for the sake of the argument built in this chapter, I specify "crisis" as "crisis-time". Over the past decades, scholarship in geography and urban studies has increasingly pushed for more robust conceptions of *time* associated to *space* (Lefebvre 1991; Cresswell 2006; Simone 2018). Geographers Nigel Thrift and Jon May (2001:2) have taken up Doreen Massey's argument that "space and time are inextricably interwoven" (Massey, 1994: 260–1). Anthropologist Laura Bear has recently furthered this approach by refining Bakhtin's "chronotope" into a loose container for "diverse representations, technologies, disciplines, and rhythms of social time" (Bear 2014). For Thrift and May (2001:2) contemporary conjunctures are always composed of "a *multiplicity of times*, a number of which might be moving at different speeds and even in different directions" (2001:12; emphasis in the original). Similarly, for Bakhtin, chronotopes are "mutually inclusive, they co-exist, they may be interwoven with, replace or oppose one another, contradict one another, or find themselves in ever more complex interrelationships" (Bakhtin 1981, 252).

Outline for the rest of the chapter

In this chapter, I begin by insisting that, for a newly arrived, not (yet) legalized migrant in Napoli (like Dimuth), crisis-time was far from the only temporal register that mattered. Crucial among the discrepant times that patterned Dimuth's life, as I will go on to show, was the linear time of development and modernity, at the culmination of which stood something that he called "Europe". Napoli's awkward position along this timeline has been the subject of much handwringing among commentators, residents and non-residents alike, who have lamented or celebrated Napoli's frustrated modernity (Glynn 2020; Dines 2019; Chambers 2008). My point here is that it also troubled Dimuth on a practical level, as it came into a bizarre conflict with the spaciotemporal reference points he had acquired in his own crisis-infused life.

The core argument made here is that Dimuth's residing in Naples can be usefully thought of as navigating and mediating between multiple different *times* that co-existed in "dynamic simultaneity" (Bear 2014, 2017). Those times involved, but also exceeded, a number of pre-defined other times, rhythms and "temporalities" (Ringel 2016). Ultimately, I ask what kinds of temporal agency those coexisting times opened up to (or foreclosed) for a resident like Dimuth (Moroşanu and Ringel 2016, Bedi 2021). To mediate

the gaps and conflicts between those multiple times, Dimuth had to put labor into play, as a form of temporal agency, or navigation, which, I show, yielded variously "easy" or "difficult" evaluations of Napoli.

1. Crisis-time and not-yet-modern times

1.2. A newly arrived migrant: crisis-time

But let us start from the beginning —or at least what Dimuth presented to me as such: the ruptures and turning points that preceded his move to Napoli, the first of which was a burgeoning friendship.

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Dimuth liked to trace his first steps on the way to Napoli to what he termed the "luck" of an encounter, in 2017, at a restaurant close to Colombo, where he used to work as a waiter — and this is how he began narrating his story to me, on the day we met, after he recommended I try a breakfast of *parippu*-covered *idiyappam* in the damp and quiet dining room of another Sri Lankan eatery, this one in Napoli's Sanità neighborhood.

Dimuth was in his late thirties, but people often believed him to be younger, perhaps because of the air of ingenuity and earnestness that floated around him, His English was fluid and lively when he met Isabel and Sam in 2017, a young German couple on a honeymoon through Sri Lanka who had stopped at the hotel where he worked. Soon enough, he was setting up some off-the-beaten-track touristic visits for them. As mutual trust grew, Dimuth confided in them how he had been in and out of work for over a year now, scrambling to repay a debt left from a small retail enterprise of handbags and perfumes that had backfired on him. "The shop's slogan was, *make your life colourful*", he recalled with a mirthless smile, as he narrated his story to me too. By 2016, his shop had been working quite well, and he had taken a bank loan in the prospect of opening a second store. He had even travelled to Thailand once, to buy some bags and perfumes; he had a "good eye for rich looking articles", he said, the pride still in his voice. But within a few months, the bank he had borrowed from suddenly closed, leaving him to repay on his own the investments he had already made. He was stripped of his savings,

forced to sell off everything his wife and him owned, from their gold to their house. So, when Isabel told him of some friends of hers, who managed a hotel in the Alps, and might be in search of South Asian kitchen staff members, Dimuth couldn't refuse her offer. Europe shone with the promise of a turn of fortunes, the security of monthly remittances tripling his current pay, the perspective of someday reinvesting in a house of his own — and the glimmer of adventure.

Dimuth grew up in a Sinhala family, in a small town in Sri Lanka's North Central province. When he was still a boy, in the 1990s, his father was furloughed from his position as a government clerk, losing both salary and status. He had to take on a meagerly paid position as a bus driver; and at times when the household's expenses threatened to overtake its income, Dimuth's mother took up work as a housemaid in Dubai. Dimuth remembered fondly the taste of the strange food she would bring back for her children when she visited them — exotic things like paneer, Indian cottage cheese — and he insisted to me that he and his two siblings had not lacked anything growing up. But the threat of greater precarity had always weighed on them. That was also the time that civil war was raging across the island. While they were spared direct gunfire from conflicting factions, Dimuth mentioned once to me that he and his family lived very close by a hospital, which reminded them painfully and daily of the thin thread by which their lives hung, as they witnessed the cycle of the bodies of the wounded come in, and of those of the dead come out.

With the help of Isabel, the hotel managers paid for his trip, with a stop in Delhi— his first encounter with how “dense” and “dirty” a city can be — and they booked his plane ticket. Within a few months, one of his favorite WhatsApp profile pictures had become a selfie framed in a snow-capped alpine range. He found himself in a kitchen staffed by a team of Indian men from Kerala, working under a German chef. The Indians took him under their wing, taught him how to deal with the chef’s sharp ordering around. Although he was only a kitchenhand, he learnt recipes and cooking tricks from his new friends, which he would fondly replicate, reminded of them, after he moved to Italy.

Dimuth's bright European dream took another unexpected turn in March 2020, when the coronavirus pandemic drove governments into enforcing strict

lockdowns over national and regional territories, cities, and households — drawing the hospitality and tourism industry to an abrupt halt. He lost his position at the hotel, finding himself stranded without a job, on a work visa that would soon expire — with the creeping responsibility of debts to be repaid, and of remittances to be sent home. Dimuth's only chance, he figured then, was to stay in Europe, bargaining on the work-related permit which he still held for a few months, and which enabled him brief visits to other states in the Schengen space. During the 2020 spring lockdown, he learnt from Dinesh, his cousin in Milano, that Italy was in the process of implementing its latest *sanatoria* or amnesty scheme: the mass regularization of "illegal" immigrants in the country, providing them with a permit to stay, for work contracts in a few key sectors like agriculture or domestic work (see Chapter 2). And he knew that acquiring a permit to stay in Italy would enable him to move again within the rest of Europe's Schengen space — maybe even go back to Northern Europe, at some point.

There was, however, one problem: Dimuth would only be able to enter Italy *after* the deadline fixed by Italy's Interior Ministry, making him technically ineligible for an amnesty devised for migrants *already* settled and working in Italy. But he had heard other rumors as well. Through his cousin, he learnt that antedated certificates of presence in Italy could be gotten hold of — with a little negotiating, ready cash, and provided one asked in the right place.

One of those places was Napoli.

('Biography of Dimuth', from fieldnotes from August 2020 to October 2021)

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As I listened to Dimuth's account of his own (more or less) recent past, wrote it into a biographical entry, and read it many times while assembling this chapter, a temporal motif kept recurring: his biography was laced in the pattern of *crisis*. During the first months of the covid-19 pandemic, "frenetic updates and insights, rumors and theories" circulated at high speed world-wide, building into a critical conjuncture for Dimuth and countless other foreigners in Europe, and monopolizing attention to the point that most other threats had vanished from global media feeds (Redfield 2020). But Dimuth's story was infused in crisis-times and breaks even *before* the dramatic entrance of the covid-19 pandemic. There were the haltered decades of war, experienced in the constant sight

maimed bodies that moved in and out of the next-door hospital to where he grew up. There were the shocks of economic recessions, endured at national, international and household scales. There were the brutal losses and sudden encounters that opened unforeseen turning points in his life: the "crisis-time" that patterned his biography.

As the following will illustrate, having a biography patterned in the motif of crisis, or what I call crisis-time, mattered for Dimuth's present in Napoli, and specifically for those months in which he began his life in the city as a newly arrived migrant. Dimuth had arrived in Napoli only ten months prior, when he told me about his life making for a good "book", in April 2021. In his own terms, his voyage was simply not over yet: he dreamed of "travelling everywhere". In other words, his border-crossing lingered with him, such that his experience was indeed marked by "a migrant's crisis", but, clearly, not in the sense of an overarching condition supposedly plaguing Europe. Not only did the crisis-time of his biography affect the way he saw things, people, and practices, but it somehow leaked into his present, coming into conflicting, sticky relationships with other times which were occurring in the city in "dynamic simultaneity" (Bear 2014).

One such sticky conflict arose as he started to evaluate his life in Napoli, and along with it, evaluate the city itself, and another temporal motif (a narrative form and a representation of time) came up: not-yet modern Napoli. This is the subject of the following section.

2.2 Modern timelines and (not) living in "the city of Romeo and Juliet"

> Dimuth was comfortably reclining in his chair, stirring as much sugar as he could into his foamy cappuccino. We were sitting at the terrace of the bar where his roommate Stanley worked as *guaglione* (coffee boy), at a place called *The Godfather's Espresso*[46]. Dimuth was observing distractedly the throngs of tourists walking past us when he suddenly laughed—
>
> — "Oh Cap, I have to tell you! You remember Viraj? ... His wife said something..."

[46] I am avoiding its real name while alluding to the play on words that this name contained.

Viraj was his former housemate. I had never met him personally but could place him from Dimuth's numerous descriptions. Eyebrows arched up in his forehead, Dimuth spelt out his incredulity, as he explained to me how the wife of his friend Viraj claimed, when she returned to Sri Lanka for short visits from Napoli, that she actually stayed in a different city...

— "...What is the name… The city of Romeo and Juliet..."

— "Verona?" I offered.

— "Yes!", he burst out laughing. Viraj's wife was too "proud" to admit to her relations in Sri Lanka that she lived in Napoli, he scoffed, and so she pretended to be a resident of Verona.

(fieldnotes, July 2021, 1/2)

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Dimuth's mobility, like that of millions of other people on the move, had been triggered by dreams and aspirations (Benadusi 2015; Ghosh 2019) which fed on discourses and images of elsewhere: representations which were often polarized between the East and the West. His idealized migratory route would have moved him from the postcolonial ruins of Sri Lanka — *In Sri Lanka, I come from a poor family... no one believed I could go to Europe... Europe was my dream* — to success, riches and modernity: in a word, "Europe", his "dream". Napoli, set in Italy and in Europe, initially, and from afar, had appeared to him as a destination for his journey Westward. But, as he edged closer to the city, encountering accounts such as those professed by Viraj's wife, Dimuth began to realize that Napoli did not fit tidily in the East/West polarized geographical story he had held in mind till then. On entering the city, he found himself comparing it to other places, and integrating in those comparisons what he was experiencing, along with what others were telling him based on their own experiences. The trick performed by Viraj's wife — pretending that she lived in Verona and not in Napoli—, and which Dimuth reported to me in incredulous laughter, blurred out the supposed uniformity of "Italy" (and therefore of "Europe"), situating Napoli as inferior to Northern Italian cities. It suggested that Napoli's reputation among those Sri Lankans who were concerned with it — whether they resided in Napoli itself, elsewhere in Italy, or even in Sri Lanka — was problematic enough

that one might want to hide any association with the city, as they returned Eastward from a time spent in Europe.

Napoli has long been a contentious site for polarizing comparative discourses —at the very least since the 18th century and Grand Tour visitors seeking to spell out "their reactions to a city that has often provoked contradictory responses and been experienced as an assault on the senses" (Glynn 2021). Since the Grand Tour, the comparative geographies in which Napoli has figured have most often worked along a polarizing and moralizing North/South binary. Anthropologist Jane Schneider (1998) made this point clear by building upon Edward Said's argument on "orientalism" to show that there was a correspondence to be found between Italy's North/South divide (extendable to Europe), and the West/East discursive binary that Said had identified. The depreciative Northern view on Southern Italy crystallized among the Italian elite at the end of the 19th century (and in the aftermath of Italy's unification) into the still-ongoing discourse of *meridionalismo*. For proponents of *meridionalismo*, Napoli (at times in alternance with Palermo) figured as the city emblematic of Southern Italy's "backwardness", construed as the "ideal Other" of an undifferentiated Northern Europe (Said 1978 cited in Glynn 2021). Those geographical comparisons equally served to temporally situate the city, on an axis that went in the direction of modern development (Chakrabarty 2000)[47], and on which Napoli was lagging far behind, cast in "backwardness". The legacy of *meridionalismo* is not confined to an elite of outsiders or scholars[48]: it lives on in residents' everyday

[47] Chakrabarty (2000, p. 7) observes that European historicism "posited historical time as a measure of the cultural distance [...] that was assumed to exist between the West and the non-West' and that served to legitimize the 'civilizing' discourse of colonialism. Thus, 'Europe's acquisition of the adjective "modern" for itself is an integral part of the story of European imperialism" (Chakrabarty 2000, p. 43). See Glynn (2021).

[48] Comparative assessments of cities like Napoli may be professed by Grand Tour visitors and contemporary tourists, by planning and policy actors, by the media — and inter-city comparison has even been taken up by scholars and theorists as a way to escape (Robinson). Cultural theorist Ruth Glynn (2021) argues that the Orientalizing of Napoli into a "not yet" modern city is pervasive enough, that most of the corpus of critical theory engaging with Napoli, in its attempts to produce new understandings and renderings of the city into a more complex (even positive) light, has dealt uncomfortably with *meridionalismo*: at times plainly perpetuating it, at other times perpetuating the polarized North/South view it offered (e.g. Benjamin and Lacis 1986; Bloch 1988; Cacciari 1992; Chambers 2008). In Glynn's words, this theoretical corpus has

characterizations as well, such as that professed by Viraj's wife. But it is rarer that those representations are considered seriously when they are produced and circulated by residents who are labelled not as '(Grand) tourists', but as 'migrants' and whose presence is marked as subaltern and contingent (Dines 2019).

Dimuth didn't only repeat the words of Viraj's wife, and the judgement they placed on Napoli. It was clear that he had to deal with this representation of the city, that it mattered that he take it on himself to evaluate the city as well — otherwise, how was he to figure out if he had made the right move in coming here, of all places? He was compelled to wonder: how did Napoli hold its ground in comparison with Delhi, Verona, the Alps or Europe? How developed, modern, or backward a place was it? Crisis-time — and the ongoing ruptures and openings it had attuned Dimuth to — intersected disturbingly with this blunt realization of the pervasiveness of another temporal motif: one that suggested that Napoli was somehow lagging, not-yet modern, perhaps even not-yet Europe.

Dimuth was rattled by that thought: was settling here even worth the effort, the *labour* he was putting in it? To make better sense of how Dimuth managed and navigated this particular temporal conflict, let us now return to the cappuccino and conversation at the *Godfather's Espresso* previously described. As Dimuth pondered on Viraj's wife's statement, his friend Stanley entered the picture, and triggered another set of connected reflections.

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> As our exchange hung in the air and we resumed sipping our coffees, Stanley walked out of the bar and shot a few sentences in Sinhala at us, all smiles and winking. Dimuth laughed in response, while Stanley sped away with a plastic tray balanced in his extended palm, full of little disposable espresso cups topped in aluminum foil, to be delivered nearby in the tight fabric of streets. Dimuth rolled his eyes as he translated his friend's words to me: Stanley would be out fishing

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retained "a binary understanding of the relationship between Naples and Northern Europe, a preoccupation with the city's relative modernity, and the dominance of what I have termed the 'Northern view'" (Glynn 2021).

tonight on the seawall at Chiaia, with a few other men — he had just offered him to come along.

—"Cap, I told you before...." Dimuth chuckled on, "people like Stanley... they think that Napoli is just like Sri Lanka". He put his cappuccino down and waved a finger, intent on making his point:

"But Sinhala people, here in Napoli... they are *not updated.*"

This immediately rang a bell for me. The first time Dimuth had spoken to me about people in Napoli "not being *updated*" had been six months earlier, in February 2021, after he had quit his job as a cashier at a take-away restaurant in the Sanità neighborhood called *Ceylon Flavors*. Frustrated by how the place was ran, he had spilled out his grievances to me: he was fed up with the incessant fights between the restaurant staff and its owner, a honey-spoken man called Indika. The pay was scarce and the hours long under Indika's steely management, and of course, there were no contracts. But equally troubling, in Dimuth's eye, had been everyone's lack of interest in what the restaurant catered: neither the owner Indika nor his staff knew "how to make delicious food" or even "cared about the customers", Dimuth lamented.

"They don't have an update", Dimuth had insisted then, discrediting not only the low-qualified staff[49], but also Indika's obtuse stance with managing his restaurant: all that mattered to him was "profit", he wouldn't invest in anything unless the returns were immediate.

As we were sitting at *The Godfather's Espresso*, Dimuth reiterated this sweeping claim: Sri Lankan people who had settled in Naples were all just like Stanley, consistently failing to update themselves.

[49] The men who worked at Indika's restaurant mostly came from the Negombo area, like Stanley. Some of them had undertaken similar journeys to Italy, along dangerous more or less routes strewn with illegalities. While Stanley was one of the few to have come over seas, when the Suez Canal route was still open, most of the younger kitchen helps (boys barely out of their teens) had taken newer air and land routes leading to Italy through Eastern Europe, smuggled from Romania in trucks. In their case, the lack of an update was due to their being "poor people, from fishing villages" with "no education".

—“For them, Napoli is *heaven*!” he exclaimed as he went on enumerating everything they found here: "Sri Lankan food, Sri Lankan grocery shops, Sri Lankan women..."

But why was that a problem, I pressed him?

I had to understand, he explained, that people came to Italy from Sri Lanka with an idea:

—“They want to make a lot of money”, he plainly stated. But here in Napoli, jobs were paid significantly less than in Verona, Parma or Milano — not to mention France or Germany. And in Napoli, there was hardly any way to find anything but domestic or cleaning work, unlike in the North, where you could find factory jobs. And that was without mentioning work contracts. Take this *bar* here... Along with claiming prowess in coffee making, Dimuth explained to me that the Italians who ran the *Godfather's Espresso* were involved in murky dealings[50]: they had employed Stanley without a contract for as long as he had lived in Napoli, after he had arrived illegally from Sri Lanka by boat, seventeen years ago.

So, people here worked so long and hard, to earn so little, often without the formal guarantee of a contract — and yet, they stayed on in the city, believing they had made it to some kind of "heaven". They even acted all "proud" and "high" about it, Dimuth added in incredulity. And furthering his point, he insisted:

—“So actually, Cap”, here raised his eyebrows, “all Sri Lankan people here, they are *cheated* by Napoli!”

(fieldnotes, July 2021, 2/2)

Dimuth couldn't shake off his puzzlement: while some people like Viraj's wife were aware that there was something “bad” enough in Naples that they should dissociate themselves from its reputation, Sri Lankans stayed on, in the city. Tens of thousands of them lived in Napoli, he knew that; and it still seemed as if many among those — Stanley included — had forgotten that the city was initially only a stepping-stone in a longer migration and economic project (Schutser 2005; Della Puppa and Gelati 2005, Tuckett 2015; see also Chapter 2). What he called people's failure at “updating” was based on his

[50] Pine on camorra's elusiveness. See also Branciacco. I won't get into the details here.

own observations that their mobility had all but stopped, that their economic success was limited, and that they contented themselves with subaltern work, most often without the formal guarantee of a contract. Dimuth's conclusion, then, was that Naples acted as a deceitful environment: it “cheated” people, impersonating a blurred-out version of Sri Lanka that nevertheless seemed a “heaven" to them. More dangerously still, it blinded fellow migrants as to how stagnant their mobile and economic careers — which, he assumed, could be summed up along the lines of amassing wealth in Italy or Europe, for themselves and for their families — had become. Take Stanley: he had no documents, his job was paid poorly —and yet, he had stayed on in the city for seventeen years. He even seemed to enjoy himself, holding on to the habit of fishing acquired in the "village" (as Dimuth put it) where he was born, translating it into a hobby which rang oddly in an urban European context.

But in effect, and Dimuth recognized it, Napoli *did* resemble Sri Lanka in ways that would make it comfortable for a person grown up a place close to Negombo: there were grocery stores that sold South Asian vegetables, flown in weekly from Colombo; restaurants where extended families could rent out rooms for karaoke birthday parties; Buddhist temples and churches with Sinhala-speaking monks and priests; and the sea to fish and swim in was, all summed up, not that far off. Dimuth himself was no stranger to Napoli: familiarity was everywhere in his account of his life in Napoli, albeit oddly distorted. What remained disturbing for him, then, was the experience of a temporal discrepancy, a mismatch he struggled to make sense of.

It was *precisely this mismatch* that triggered Dimuth's unrest and confusion: attuned as he was to a time of ruptured experiences, and aware as he was of the uncertain futures it made him yearn for, how could he deal with his neighbors’ comfort and ease at residing in not-yet modern Napoli? In one way, a multiplicity of past experiences cadenced through crisis-time provided him with points of leverage for comparison. Ruptured existential and geographic mobility, if not quite making a migrant akin to an “adventurer” might provide them still with a savvier take on things, an experience in operating in changing contexts (Kleiman 2019). Such an expanded outlook was built on comparisons made through space but also time, such that Dimuth, in relating to Viraj's wife's claim, had not merely absorbed

an orientalist/*meridonalista* outlook[51]; he had gained other points of reference as well that were slowly building up in his own mental chronotope of development. He placed on that mental map localities he had visited — Colombo; his hometown in Sri Lanka; Delhi; a distant Alpine resort; Milano and Napoli — and others he had only heard about: France, England, Germany, but also Parma or Verona. And he situated and evaluate Napoli's position in this timeline, such that he could try and make sense of his life and presence in it.

Intersecting with this timeline of progress and modernity, crisis-time created a painful temporal conflict. Crisis-time left its mark into Dimuth, a pulse, a momentum to which he was attuned — which matched awkwardly with both narratives and representations of not-yet-modern Napoli; and with the "not updated" practices the city afforded. He displayed an acute awareness of representations and evaluations of Napoli forged by lingering echoes of crisis-time I insist, it was neither simply the echoes of crisis itself, nor the numb comfort of settlement in Napoli that triggered his confusion: what troubled him was their mismatched coexistence (Bakhtin 1981), and how his life in Napoli demanded that he dealt with this mismatch (Bear 2014, Bedi 2021).

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And yet, however deceitful Napoli might be, "cheating people" in merely passing out as a modern European city, and however brutal and awkward was the temporal mismatch for Dimuth, he admitted that *he could live here.* Consider an earlier tirade in which he made this clear, professed on a chilly April morning when we had met up for a chat, and a coffee on the go. As I made a casual comment on the "rules" (a word he himself had recently used to speak of Italian food and foodways) that guided practices like espresso-drinking in Napoli, he snorted out his dismay:

> "People here... they all say things about *rules*, they put social pressure, they make boxes and limits. But I say, *why*? ... They say that people in Napoli they are like this, or like that. That Napoli is a good city... or a bad city. They say that Napoli is a good city, but Sinhala people ruin it... They say that other Sinhala people in

[51] Glynn (2021) notes that "in a documentary interview with Sut Jhally (1998), Said asserted of Orientalism that "to think past it, to go beyond it, is virtually impossible, because there is no knowledge that isn't codified in this way." Though reductive, this statement has circulated widely.

Napoli want to be your friend... then they say it is not true, they are cunning, they want money... They say that people are not good here."

—"You mean", I interrupted "Do they tell you that it is Sinhala people or Italians who are not good here?"

—"Both! Sinhala people and people of Napoli." He continued, increasingly intent on making his point.

"People... they say, *'I have experience, my life is not a bed of roses, I know this because of my experience'*... And so, they say, *'this is how things are, this is how you must do in Napoli'*. But Cap, you cannot compare! .... I also have my experience. I can live here," he concluded simply.

(fieldnotes, April 2021)

In this brisk tirade, Dimuth expressed his confusion about representations and narratives that finalized judgements on Napoli and its residents. Napoli was claimed to be "good", as much it was said to "bad", and those diverging narratives were constantly circulated around him. Napoli was "bad" enough a city that Viraj's wife would seek to hide her affiliation to it. But it might also be "good" enough that, given the right "experience", one could find ways of living in it. Never fitting neatly in "good" or "bad" characterizations, Napoli opened to more practical meanings and possibilities. Some things were almost too "easy" in Napoli, Dimuth later said to me (as the following will show), attracting people and numbing them as they were deceived and tricked by the city's apparent comfort. But he also spoke about the city as being "difficult", clogged and dangerous, and he brooded on how "disappointed" and depressed it sometimes made him feel. The following will explore the temporal conflicts that produced ease or difficulty. Alongside the mismatch between 'crisis-time' and incomplete modernity just recounted, Dimuth had to deal with other temporal conflicts. Those conflicts opened to pitfalls and opportunities which he needed to evaluate, on practical levels that were less about absolute representations ("good" and "bad"), and more about situated efficacy ("easy" and "difficult").

Anticipating on the following sections, I spell out a key point here: "easy" and "difficult", as Dimuth intended them, and as I explore them here, are not to be taken as intrinsic qualities of Napoli. Rather, as I will show, they appeared, materialized or dissolved for Dimuth as he navigated the temporal density that made up the city — and

of which crisis-time and not-yet-modernity, as I tentatively call them, were only two, among an impressive diversity of different chronotopes. As ethnographer AbdouMaliq Simone puts it, in a recent article inspired by the shifts in urban temporal textures that COVID-19 triggered or made more acute: "discrepant temporalities tend to co-exist, even if the terms of co-existence tend to disallow the capacity of any one of them to posit its own trajectories of implication" (2020). The following will show that Napoli was patterned in one such dense co-existence of discrepant times, and that the task and labor of residents like Dimuth was to navigate those, in the absence of any clear set of coordinates.

2. Napoli is too easy: the labor of finding work

2.1 Tricking time

> In the summer of 2020 Europe's borders reopened after the first wave of national lockdowns, and Dimuth boarded a train for Milano. His goal was clear: apply for the *sanatoria* in whatever way possible, get an Italian residence permit and stay in Europe to make enough money to send home to his family, and repay his depts. His plan was simple: he would go meet his cousin, Dinesh, and then see where that led him. Dinesh lived in a tiny apartment and had told Dimuth he could only host him for a few days; and none of the people he knew in Milano had any room for guests in their own flats. So, he recommended his cousin to a contact of his, a Sri Lankan monk who lived on the premises of a small Buddhist temple, in a town nestled in the mountains north of Milano. From the monastery, Dimuth continued to collect hearsay and rumors to devise his next steps.
>
> He learnt more about Napoli and met people who offered to introduce him into Napoli's Sinhala Buddhist circles. He heard that Napoli was cheaper than Milano: rent, food, and transport were all said to cost less. Jobs were supposedly easier to come across than elsewhere in Italy, and Sri Lankans worked in slots of

the economy where, as rumor had it, monthly salaries hovered around 600€[52]; while others claimed that stipends could regularly rise to twice as much.

Dimuth also heard that in Napoli there was a profusion of Sri Lankan-owned "agencies"[53] that offered monetized assistance with documents and bureaucratic proceedings, and translation services from Italian to Sinhala. Around that time, they had been selling all-inclusive packages to *sanatoria* applicants, hovering around 1500€ — and he already knew that the cost for something similar could go up to 3500€ in the Milano agencies.

Through his wife's brother (back in his hometown in Sri Lanka) he also got in touch with a Sri Lankan resident of Napoli, Subbu. "He said he would provide everything for me... a house, a job, a work contract", Dimuth recalled, hoping Subbu might act as a translator with potential Italian employers, perhaps introducing him to the Napoli agencies where he might sort out his residence permit, or to other people and places where he could find support. In fact, Subbu quickly found him a single bed deal in a shared flat tucked deep into one of Napoli's central neighborhoods, which he called *Cavour*. The bed would cost him 90€ a month: for such a centrally located flat (from what Subbu had explained), it was far cheaper than anything he could get in Milano. "I am a lucky man", Dimuth chuckled. Within two weeks, the project to move to Napoli had gained enough consistency for him to leave the monastery. He returned to Milano to bid his cousin goodbye, and his pocket heavier with 1500€ loaned by Dinesh for his initial expenses, boarded a Napoli-bound train.

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[52] A 2013 report situated the average salaries for Sri Lankans in Naples to 580€ (de Filippo and Strozza, 2015). See Chapter 2.

[53] Those agencies were also called "centri di consiglio", or counselling centers, providing (as a paid service) assistance in legal and bureaucratic matters. Some of them were registered as "Centri di assistenza fiscale" (fiscal assistence service) or CAF, bureaucratic offices widely spread in Southern Italy. People I spoke with agreed that the agencies were a new phenomenon, of particularly large scale in Napoli. There are many less of those offices in, say, Milano than here in Napoli (and that's one reason why the prices are lower). According to some of my interlocutors, it's also a fairly new phenomenon that assistance is formalized in those kinds of offices. This is something I still need to look into in more detail. For a discussion on CAF offices in Naples, but not the "migrant" kind, see Brancaccio (2018).

> Within weeks, through the Buddhist contacts he had made at the Milano monastery, he had gotten a letter to be signed and drafted for him, testifying that he had been in Italy before the limit-date of March, and could therefore apply for the *sanatoria* scheme.
>
> ('Biography of Dimuth', from fieldnotes from August 2020 to October 2021)

Even as crisis-time seemed to rule over all other temporalities and rhythms, Dimuth remained able to bargain, speculate and plan on other moves and trajectories to navigate uncertainty (Vigh 2008, McFarlane and Silver 2016). Vague hopes that he would get "lucky", coexisted alongside his active, planned efforts of "applying agency" over the future (Ringel 2016). Anthropologists Roxana Moroşanu and Felix Ringel write about "time-tricking" to refer to "the many different ways in which people individually and collectively attempt to modify, manage, bend, distort, speed up, slow down or structure" different times (Moroşanu and Ringel 2016). Ringel draws attention to the ways in which people can both transform a given "*perception* of time's succession", and act upon the very "*contents* of time's succession" (2016, emphasis in the original). On entering Napoli, Dimuth found himself involved in both sorts of tricking. Despite reaching Napoli well past the official deadline fixed by the Italian authorities, he had arrived in the city in time to obtain an antedated certificate of presence (as anticipated through the rumours collected beforehand). In that way, he had convincingly appeared to the authorities as already present in the city before the deadline, effectively tricking the government's perception of time's succession — at least as far as Dimuth's recent past was concerned. Simultaneously with this tricking of calendar time, Dimuth accomplished the second kind of trick Ringel speaks of: by securing the possibility of his legitimate and legalized presence in Napoli (and of the obtention of a permit to stay in Italy), he was no longer forced to return to Sri Lanka, and had rekindled his aspirations for a life in Europe. Opening his life to new possible futures, he had effectively transformed the contents of time's succession.

2.2. Peopled infrastructures of density

> As soon as he arrived in Napoli, Dimuth set out to find work. Subbu, despite his promises, had proven lest trustworthy than imagined by Dimuth: he was taking his time to return his calls, keeping evasive as to when and how he could help again.

Dimuth didn't insist. "If I smile with you, I do not expect you smile with me", was how he put it to me: Subbu was busy elsewhere, it was understandable, there was no point being resentful.

But in any case, with or without Subbu, things accelerated for Dimuth, as he set out to look for a job. He immediately began asking around, starting with the people he shared his flat with: a handful of single men who shared a room repurposed as a dormitory with him; and two couples with their children, each family sub-renting a bedroom of their own. Dimuth spread the word, asking around as his contacts snowballed from his flat to the rest of the Cavour neighborhood. At the same time, he set out to find an “agency” where he could get help with the sanatoria legal paperwork. Here, he realized that “finding work” meant two very different things: finding paid work *and* finding a work-contract. And as he soon understood, those didn’t necessarily overlap. One could make money through all sorts of undeclared paid jobs — while simultaneously holding a contract elsewhere.

"I tried all the agencies", he explained his attempts to orient himself into the vagaries of seeking work, "all of them: *Lanka connect*, *Serendib agents*, *United service*...". He listed out the names for me, pointing assuredly around, as if dispersing them across the city. (At that time, he knew hardly any street or neighborhood names; effectively, the agencies where the landmarks that he built his orientation of in city around). Eventually, he chose one, finding himself both convinced that he would not find a better price elsewhere for a *sanatoria* package, and seduced by his first impression of the manager, Indika. In fact, as soon as they met, Indika complimented him on his "good looks" — preppy glasses, perfectly combed hair and polite ways—straight away offering him a position in his restaurant *Ceylon Flavors*. On that same day, Dimuth entrusted his sanatoria paperwork with him.

Simultaneously, things were stepping up pace as Dimuth made new “contacts” and "friends": stopping to chat at *Sampath's Minimarket* around the corner, bumping into people on the street, taking a break for sweet tea and a *vadai* with clients at *Ceylon Flavors*, connecting with other residents on online, Napoli-

dedicated social media groups[54], or even in the sitting room and kitchen he shared with an average of six to ten other people living with him in the apartment (depending on the day of the week, and the week in the year — as the flat's occupancy varied with work shifts and periodical moves out of the Napoli).

He had just met the previous "owner" of that apartment, Suresh: by which he meant, the tenant who held a contract with the landlord, and sublet the rest of the beds and rooms. Suresh had left the flat and handed over his "ownership" to another one of the occupants, as he was about to attempt his own move to Germany. He was also giving up his contractual job as a cleaner in a vet clinic and had offered to hand this over to Dimuth. "Cap, I am a lucky man", was how Dimuth summed it up. "My *signora*, at the clinic, she is a good person. Suresh asked her, *'please, can you help my friend, we are poor people'* and so on... and she agreed. She gave me a genuine contract", he concluded, with a hint of amazement in his pride.

('Biography of Dimuth', from fieldnotes from August 2020 to October 2021)

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In the span of a few weeks, Dimuth had found the two kinds of jobs he needed. The temporal sequence that dominated his life in that period was no longer the ruptured and dispersed cascade of crises. Entrusting himself to people and situations he met along the way, he was gathering speed while remaining on track. Safeguarding his contract with the clinic only required of him two dozen hours work a week, which left him with ample time to fit in shifts at Indika's restaurant.

Other times were unfolding simultaneously, however. A few months after Dimuth reached Napoli, COVID-19 restrictions escalated across Italy through the winter of 2020-21, leading Indika to harden his treatment of his restaurant staff. Unannounced pay cuts, salaries that arrived later and later, and erratic schedules increasingly drew the men to argue with their boss and among themselves, and bitterness and anger rose. The vast majority of residents of Napoli had also begun to keep to themselves and to their households, and the temporal density that Dimuth had experienced in his first spring and summer in the city brutally thinned out. By the time the restrictions lifted in the summer

[54] The most well know of which is *Api Napoli*, *Our Naples.*

of 2021, Dimuth had quit his job at *Ceylon Flavors*, and spent a few months idle, bidding his time in fruitless job search, tied only to his contract at the clinic.

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September 2021. Several weeks had went by without hearing from Dimuth. I was a little worried, as our last phone call having ended on a pessimist note. It had been, by then, over six months that he had quit his job at Indika's restaurant, and after that, Dimuth had constantly been on the hunt for a better job: better pay, better hours, better employers, better work conditions. But as the months had gone by, the hunt had never seemed to end, and he had been on and off brief stints that all fell very short from what he sought. Most recently, exhaustion had just forced him to quit a night-time *badante* position, which left him to virtually sleepwalk through his shifts at the vet clinic.

As I walked to our usual *Cavour* meeting place, hoping his morale was not too low and pondering on ways that I might cheer him up, a surprise awaited me: Dimuth was in a sunny mood, and happy to announce that the last few weeks had been packed with work. I was curious to hear more, and we sat at a bar for a coffee and a pastry. As I licked the creamy pastry off my fingers (by then, pandemic restrictions had all but lifted), he proudly announced: he had finally secured paid work on two fronts. Relieved and impressed, I congratulated him, but was still puzzled. How had he managed?

There had been several reasons, we both knew, for his difficulty in finding a stable job position, and the pandemic was only one of them. Another was that his days were bracketed by the contract still binding him to the vet clinic, as he waited for his residence permit to come through: two hours from 7 to 9am, and two hours from 7 to 9pm every day of the week — and as his permit to stay application hinged on the contract with the clinic, it would remain so until his documents got sorted. He had also realized a while ago that the job market was no longer what it used to be: over the past few years, opportunities for domestic work had become harder to get by in Naples. As Dimuth put it, Italians now had "too many servants".

Additionally, unlike people who, through time and various experiences, had acquired spoken Italian (and Neapolitan) skills, he only knew Sinhala and English. His evening shift at the clinic made it impossible for him to commit to the free

Italian language classes set up throughout the *centro storico* by religious charities or activists' organizations, as most of those happened in the evenings. With no fluency in Italian or Neapolitan, Dimuth's prime interlocutors remained Sinhala-speaking residents who translated for him with prospective Italian employers: unlike him, those speakers of both Italian and Sinhala had grown "rich with language".

Back to the coffee and quizzing Dimuth on the cause of his current satisfaction:

—"So how did you do? How did you find work?"

—"Well, there is a man here... Kushal... he is very famous in Napoli. He is like a *middleman*, a middleman for restaurant jobs... He takes people with no documents, and finds jobs for them in restaurants, in places like Posillipo."

Kushal collected the pays of the workers he helped place in the restaurant, keeping a 15% commission for himself before handing them the rest in cash. He specialized in matching workers and employers for very short shifts: three or four hours here and there, at varying times of the day, irregularly scattered along the week. As his business was based entirely on undeclared, contract-less work, *al nero*, Kushal obviously did not spread word of his services on public social media. Instead, he relied on word to mouth, and that was how, by chance, Dimuth had recently heard of him. Kushal spoke fluent Italian and his contacts spanned a pool of Sri Lankan (generally undocumented) residents who needed intermediation to find paid work; and a growing address-book of restaurants, cafés and hotels dispersed in the city's posher neighborhoods.

Kushal also had long standing experience in that kind of middleman business, as Dimuth explained:

"He is also a famous man in Sri Lanka. Before, he smuggled people, on boats... he had many contacts back then, with the border police", Dimuth went on. "Then there was some problem, he had to stop his business, and he had to come here... to leave for Europe".

Here, Dimuth marked a pause and looked intent. Slowly, he spelt out his thoughts:

"Cap, I think... everyone has a virtue. Sometimes it is good, sometimes it is bad.... But sometimes it is good *and* bad. Kushal, what he did, smuggling, it's bad for the government. But for the person who comes here, to Europe, it is good. I think Kushal is a good person: sometimes I forget to ask my money from him, but he will remind me, I will always get it. People warn me, *Kushal is not a good person*... But I say: for four hours' work, I get paid thirty-five, and I give him five — this is good for me. Those people who warn me, they didn't find work for me when I needed it. Kushal gives me work, money — I take it."

(fieldnotes, September 2021)

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Following his election in May 2011, Napoli's mayor Luigi de Magistris (heading a left and center left coalition) set out to promote the city's economic regeneration through tourism. The municipal government's punctual and often rhetorical incentives came with only limited overall planification and control. As a result, small businesses spread out across the *centro storico* and its surroundings in a fairly disordinate manner: a new landscape providing for tourist consumers, made of restaurants advertising folkloric food, ordinary cafés refurbished into newly fashionable winebars, appartments turned into BnB's, etc.[55] At the same time, austerity measures following the 2008 global recession were being enforced across Italy, with drastic effects on small Neapolitan business owners who did not manage to reconvert themselves to tourism-oriented services, precipitating a number of households into economic difficulty and increased precarity.

As Dimuth described him to me, Kushal had a sharp enough understanding of the city's labor markets and economies, that he had been able to comprehend their transformation and speculate on them: he saw the drop in resources of part of the city's middle class, and ensuing difficulty in hiring domestic workers; he also realized the opportunities held in the booming 'tourism industry' and hospitality sector. In fashioning himself as a middleman, Kushal was investing in his past experience as a smuggler to insert himself successfully inside worker/employee links. He was also capitalizing on a prized currency in his possession: his fluency in both Italian *and* Sinhala fluency, his

[55] This was condemned by some residents, local activists and a number of scholars as an extractive process of *turistificazione* generating a profit that failed to be redistributed to the rest of the population.

"richness with language". Simultaneously with grasping the longue durée shift in current and future job markets, Kushal was also attuned to other more minute transformations in temporal patterns. He had realized what workers like Dimuth needed: flexible work shifts, that they might insert in weekly schedules punctured and bracketed in constraining and uncertain ways; and employers who would turn a blind eye on the illegality of workers.

The labor of finding work in Napoli required of Dimuth that he size up the usefulness of a moral judgement of residents like Kushal (*is he good or is he bad?*) against other situated criteria for evaluation (*is the pay he promises worth the work he asks for? can I trust him with paying me?*). He was investing in different forms of value-imbued currencies: trust, proximity, reciprocity and luck, and he was finding out that — provided they were used savvily — all those currencies held the risky potential to accelerate his moves toward other positions in the city.

Dimuth's quest for work in Napoli illustrates the density of people, spaces and times that coexist in a city which is chronically branded as chaotic, aporetic and stratified — a hasty labelling which often falls short of being empirically specific (e.g. d'Acierno and Pugliese 2018). Urban density, as architect Vyjayanthi Rao writes in the case of Mumbai, should not be taken as a given or reduced to the broad lines of apparent physicality. Not only a physical character, but density also operates practically on different levels of experience (Rao 2007). Writing about Mumbai as well, anthropologist Tarini Bedi gives a sense of the mind-boggling multiplicity of different chronotopes patterning residents' lives[56] (Bedi 2021). She suggests that such temporal density requires of its residents that they remain attuned to their own entanglements with chronotopes co-existing in cacophonic ways. Similarly, navigation of the city hinges on residents' ability to "arbitrage" temporal conflicts, overlaps and concatenations, selectively investing in labor through which they might harness collective and individual gain (Bedi 2021,168-169; see also Bear 2014). Along with outlining the effectiveness of a concept like time-tricking for thinking of a resident's latitude for temporal agency, Dimuth's experience shows how

[56] Bedi writes that in Mumbai, those times and temporal scales can include elements as diverse as “the rush hour and the mealtimes (...) the cycle of gestation and birth (...) the pace of technological obsolescence (...) a desired future (in this life or the next) of improvement and development (...) the rise and fall of the global market and trade (...) the breakneck speed of “fast fashion” and consumer taste (...) temporalities of municipal water (...)” (Bedi 2021,169).

Napoli itself was determinant in enabling his time-tricking to occur effectively. Napoli's density, peopled with layers of social infrastructure (Simone 2006, 2020), facilitated Dimuth's ongoing circulation, activating his capacity to bargain on moves that might yield yet more possibilities and further accelerations.

3. Napoli is difficult: city of chokepoints

"This is Indika's agency", Dimuth mouthed in the lowest voice he could manage while still overcoming the motors roaring past us, as we were nearing the shop. I attempted a peek through the window, but the blinds were drawn down — and Dimuth was gathering pace, ever slightly, ahead of me.

— "Have you had any news with your work contract? When is your appointment with the *Questura*", I asked, keeping up with him.

— "No Cap', I am waiting still..."

After stealing a glance behind his shoulder, in a voice discreet enough to elude any curious overhearing presence (despite the surroundings being empty of fellow pedestrians at that moment) he explained:

— "I am a lucky man. I have a genuine contract at the clinic. But..." he hesitated, "the people in the agencies, they are cunning, they will trick you".

His voice dropped again as he explained what happened to those who, unlike him, had no "luck". Dimuth explained the "tricks" that agencies played on their clients.

"Sometimes, they will put five or six people on the same contract... sometimes people have a contract with a dead *signora*... Some people, they paid, but then the agency closed, and its owner disappeared..."

He went on explaining how one of his ex-colleagues at *Ceylon Flavors* had made the mistake entrusting all of his *sanatoria* application with Indika, which included paying for a fake contract. Despite sharing much of Dimuth's dislike for his restaurant job, if he wanted Indika to go through with the paperwork, he had to comply with his demands and keep on working for him.

"He is now locked there", Dimuth concluded darkly.

(fieldnotes, April 2021)

Kushal and Indika had made an impression on Dimuth. Together with a cast of other such middle-men and -women[57] who monetized their translating work, they often came up in the stories he told me of his life in Napoli. But while they could facilitate his moves in many instances, he was well aware that the trust he invested in them was a fraught currency, and that arrangements could backfire unexpectedly. For example, work contracts, he found out early enough, did not have to be "genuine" in order to be recognized by the Italian authorities. This was part of what the agencies could sell: not only assistance with legal paperwork, but also fabrication of paperwork evidence.

Whether such practices were "good" or "bad" was something Dimuth had given up on trying to settle once and for all. What he feared, rather, was the potential of non-genuine documents to backfire and "lock" him in place, put an end to his moves, submitting him endlessly to the middlemen they had entrusted himself to: (time) tricking could turn against the (time) tricker. Instead of the promised accelerated circulation, Napoli's peopled density could backfire on people, making things difficult for them by trapping and locking them in stasis, compelling them to wait without end.

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—"Yesterday, I asked Indika again: *'Aya [uncle], what about my documents?'* — '*Don't worry, be patient... I will give it to you soon'*... One day soon... he will help me..." Dimuth muttered, unconvinced, as he responded to the negative when I asked if there were any news about his residence permit.

Dimuth had entered Italy in the summer of 2020, immediately starting the procedure to be regularized. Nearly two years later, his permit was still not ready. "It's not like this in Verona and Milano" he once insisted heatedly on a phone call with me. *Here*, everything got difficult. *There*, he claimed, people's appointments with the authorities for the regularization of their residence permits through the *sanatoria* scheme had occurred far quicker.

[57] There was the person who translated at the pharmacy; the person who translated to Sinhala-speakers at the Bangladeshi fruit and vegetables grocery store. See in particular Tuckett (2018) for immigration documents brokerage.

"In Napoli, it is easy to do something *another way*... it's not like this in another place... this is why a lot of people come here... but then the government has a lot of work".

This troubled Dimuth on another level, I realized, as he went on wondering aloud: how could he explain his situation to people from outside Napoli? The waiting was becoming embarrassing. Take his friends in Germany, Isabel and her husband. He was afraid they would soon think he was telling them "lies": how could it be that, after two years, he was still waiting for his Italian work visa and resident permit to come? They had invited him to visit Germany countless times and they were eager that he met the rest of their family as well.

He was ashamed of keeping them waiting, and of being unable to explain to them convincingly why the wait was so long.

(fieldnotes, October 2021)

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When the COVID-19 pandemic reached Italy, numerous reports of undocumented migrant workers flooded headlines across different media outlets, suggesting an intensification of Europe's ongoing “migrant's crisis”. In parallel, among an estimated 200 000 “illegal migrants” already residing in Italy, many had lost their work and income with the instruction of a national lockdown and were thereby left with no rights to access the hardship funds that were provided by the state. Thousands of people were also enrolled as seasonal agricultural workers, and their detention or repatriation was deemed to threaten upcoming harvests. As a consequence, and under pressure from various civil society organizations, the Italian government opted in March 2020 for the implementation of a *sanatoria* scheme to tackle the “migrant's crisis”: offering a mass amnesty of “illegal migrants” present on their national territory. But by May 2022, barely half of the applications had been processed (Ero Straniero 2022). As the 'crisis' ebbed away, tens of thousands of undocumented migrants were left waiting with only a receipt in hand, unable to leave the country if they did not want to lose their bid at being regularized.

From his experience of waiting for his documents to be regularized, Dimuth derived his own explanation for the stasis he experienced in Napoli. Here, in Napoli, there were

some things here that were "easy", and "not like other places" such as Milano or Verona[58]. And this ease attracted people from all over Italy and the world, resulting in an overload for the "Italy government" — by which he meant the offices in charge of issuing legal documents. Napoli was too "easy" a place, and it was the very easy-ness of some things — the possibility to do them "another way" — that made other things "difficult", precipitating some residents into spirals of waiting. There is an important scholarship on the stagnation and uncertainty that immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers are subjected to, as they are enlisted in binding and oppressive contemporary bureaucratic processes, fashioned into more compliant subjects (e.g. Tuckett 2018; Giordano 2014; But bureaucratic stagnation — waiting for paperwork and documents — is not only a mechanism and a consequence of the policing of national borders. Studying the politics of waiting for paperwork in Mumbai, Björkman has shown how waiting can also be a practice that distinguishes variously entitled urban residents, with multiple (and at times unpredictable) effects on the resources they can access or lay claims to, collectively or individually (2020,b). For residents of cities, whether migrants or not, bureaucratic stasis could participate in a "thickening of border density across global space, which suspends and extends the citizenship process through combinations of constraints around visas, the right to work, and access to resources" (SM Hall, 2021,51). From the vantage point of Dimuth's own interminable wait for documents, Napoli appeared as a site of painful constriction. Napoli's promise of ease of circulation (within and beyond its confines) — what is often glossed as its "porosity" (cf. Chapter 2) — had given way to stark dead-ends. As times of stagnation intersected painfully with flaring up and accelerations, it seemed to Dimuth as if Napoli had turned into what anthropologists of infrastructures have described as "chokepoints" (Carse et al. 2020, Cons 2020, 6, Giordano). In practice, Napoli's famed ease had bottlenecked into stagnant difficulty, its pores felt blocked, turning the city into a piece of broken infrastructure "that disrupts as well as makes

[58] By the end of March 2022, the three *prefetture* that had received the highest number of sanatoria applications demonstrated very low rates of processed applications: 21% in Milano, 18% in Roma, and only 14% in Napoli. In contrast, Verona boasted a 65% rate, and Torino a 47% rate of received applications. In addition, after being received, a significant number of applications were rejected, in particular where they failed to conform to the restrictive *residenza* requirements: for example, in Caserta, while 41% of the applications had been processed by March 2022, out of those, a third had been rejected (Ero Straniero 2022).

possible the terms on which life depends... facilitating and impeding the circulation of people and goods in time" (Sur 2020).

Dimuth had no choice but to be patient. While the causes for his wait were tied to the administrative chokepoint I just outlined, it is a story than could easily be made to coincide with what many commentators portray as a characteristic of *napoletanità*: Napoli's (in)famous temporality of patience and suspension. *Pacienza* in the Neapolitan spelling (with a *C* substituted for a *Z* ,and pronounced "sh" rather than "tsch") is rendered in a startling economy of words by poet Erri de Luca:

> *"La sua pazienza è frutto di un vulcano che è lì per sprofondarla di ceneri. Pacienza: è parola che qui da noi mette insieme la voce 'patire' con quella del darsi 'pace'; virtù del sistema nervoso capace di reggere vite impossibili. Non è rassegnazione, ma il più alto stato civile dell'esperienza. Pacienza a occhi asciutti. Pacienza di vivere accussì che non è solo 'così', ma un andarci incontro e addosso al così."*
>
> [Her *pazienza* [patience] is the result a volcano that is there to cover her in ashes. *Pacienza*: a word that among us here ties together the idiom of 'suffering' with that of giving oneself 'peace'; the virtue of a nervous system capable of sustaining impossible lives. It is not resignation, but rather the highest civility of experience. *Pacienza* of living in this very way [*acussì*], which is not only this way [*così*], but a going toward and against this way [*al così*].]
>
> (de Luca 2006, my translation)

Living in Napoli, I met with many modulations of such assessments of the city. Whether the statement was spoken from within the geographical coordinates of the city, or from elsewhere, made little difference: the city was cast as a place of beauty and suffering out of time, and bidding its time till the next *River of Fire* (see Chapter 4) would spill out of Vesuvio's mouth. It was referred to as a place where hardship met with a "civil experience" that has been likened to "resilience" in more recent iterations of the same temporal trope. This temporality of *pacienza* feeds into the romantic valence given to "suffering" in *napoletanità* stereotypes: a suffering alleviated by beauty.

But Dimuth's patience cannot be so easily read as yet another confirmation of Napoli's supposed temporality of *pacienza*. There was no redemption, resilience, or romanticism in his wait. It was a blunt stagnancy, at odds with everything he had assumed Europe might hold for him. He was ashamed of what he experienced as the abnormality of the suspension he had to endure, as he made it clear when he told me of his incapability to fully explain his situation to his middle-class German friends. There was something in

the absurdity of the situation that, rather than grounding him in any predefined and allegedly shared temporality of *napoletanità*, instead pushed him to painfully question his presence in Napoli: had it been worth the strain, the labor he put in residing here, of all places? The question hung over his life. Dimuth's patient yet embarassing wait was simultaneous with many other discrepant times: there was an ongoing crisis-time, patterned in lurches and dead-ends; there was a risky, exciting time of infrastructural and social density that accelerated his plans and opened him access to surprising situations; there was his perception of the backwardness of not-yet-modern Napoli, a city not fit for a successful South-West migratory trajectory.

Conclusion. "An urbanization of temporality itself"

> "Here is an urbanization of temporality itself, of a process of switching back and forth, changing temporal gears, accelerating and slowing down as a means of diversifying the rhythms of enactment so as to complexify the sensory field of urban life, to engender a wider range of implications and behavioral possibilities and, as such, modalities of valuation." (Simone 2020)

As Simone puts it, residing in Napoli demanded of Dimuth that he constantly "shift temporal gears" between discrepant times, in the hope that he might trick time to increase gain and better his position in the city (Ringel et Morosanu 2016). Navigating the city was a labor in and of time (Bear 2014) that went together with uncertain valuations, and investments in fraught currencies like luck or trust (Bedi 2021), yielding ease as much as difficulty. Ultimately, I follow Ringel (2016) in insisting that we remain wary of accounts that tend to preemptively ascribe temporalities to their objects. For example, accounts that take it for granted that "crisis" accurately describes the temporal links between migrants, migration and Europe. Or accounts that fail to see how a city such as Naples, might be characterized *simultaneously* by the density flaring-up and acceleration, *and* by stagnation and waiting, *and* by contested "orientalizing" narratives — without reducing it stereotypically to either of those temporalities. This chapter shows that rather than reasoning with temporalities as givens, we might rather think of discrepant times as sites of conflict, mediation and opportunity — characterizing urban navigation as a process tangled up in time as much as in space.

Interlude. Things shared

From the spring of 2019, when I stepped out in Napoli's *vicoli* and sniffed roasted curry leaves on the hot air, the fragrance would hold an odd familiarity: it was addressing me, requiring that I shift my own phenomenological “orientation” toward it (Ahmed 2000) — summoning "sympathy" (Fennell 2014, Weston 2018) on my part — while remaining inextricably entangled with the rest of Napoli, starting with the narrow streets in which the sent lingered together with many other emblematic smells (floor detergent, cat poo, fried garlic).

The limits between Neapolitan Napoli and Sri Lankan Napoli were blurring out for me, putting into questions the integrity of the worlds they supposedly separated.

Figure 21. Celebrating vesak in Montesanto

Figure 22. Buddhist temple in Fontanelle

Figure 23. A gift from Sasanka: green tomatoes harvested from the temple's garden

Figure 24. A gift from Dimuth: pork curry and fried vermicelli

Figure 25. Impromptu dinner of thosai, green sambol and parippu.

Figure 26. A view of Napoli, from a house in Sanità. Edibles were grown by the three single men who share the flat: strawberries, yam, basil, chilis...

Figure 27. Breakfast in Sanità: iddyappams, sambol and parippu

Figure 28. Rice and curry, parcel bought from a small unregistered catering business that operated on weekends. The cook also did the delivery rounds by scooter

Figure 29. More rice and curry

Figure 30. Coconut roti bought in Sanità

Figure 31. Bitter gourd from the porta Nolana market, where an Indian-owned, Bangladeshi-managed grocery store employs a Sri Lankan vendor to translate for the Sinhala-speaking clients. Those vegetables are grown in Italy.

Figure 32. Explanations given as to what the Sinhala manifesti advertize for: a funeral note; a bus trip to Lourdes (France); a trip to a nearby river swimming spot, a party on the beach.

Figure 33. Author posing at Dimuth's request, as we reach the Certosa di San Martino (his first time to have made the walk up to the scenic spot).

Figure 34. Author learning how to use a coconut grater

Figure 35. A resident of Napoli listening to music in a quiet, scenic spot

Chapter 4. *Maestro* Sasanka, artist of making do.

Opening vignette. “People need to know”

I quickened my step to make it on time at Sasanka's flat for my weekly Sinhala class. It was a cold 2021 February evening and a damp night had already fallen on the streets, punctuated by puddles of orange light. I took a turn at the painted plaster statue of a Madonna, negotiated a dozen meters of wet, slippery volcanic-rock pavement slabs, and stopped by an arched stone gate, vast enough to make way for a horse-drawn coach. A lady bent out of the basso across the *viccolo* [narrow street] to chat with a man passing by — last time, I had picked up a couple odd words spilling out from her house into the street: *as karannawaa* [clearing up], *yamu* [let's go]. That night, however, the stream of Sinhala remained as opaque as the drizzling night sky, and I took it as a further prompt for tonight's language class. I walked through the arched gateway, texted Sasanka (there was no entry phone at the main door), and he buzzed me in through a small metal gate.

“Good evening!”, we called out to each other in English, readjusting our facemasks. We were standing in the high-ceilinged space which made up the entrance of the flat and served as his study, corners darkened with humidity spots on the white paint. To the left, a desk sat under a window facing a courtyard baroquely shaped by eclectic adjunctions of balconies, extensions, and irregularly formed annexes at every level. “Please”, Sasanka beckoned me in, pointing at his desk, which happened to also serve as a bookcase. A good two-thirds of it were effectively covered by neat piles of all sorts of handwritten and printed material: a Sinhala translation of Aesop's fables; a collection of handbooks for Buddhist meditations and sermons; photocopies of tickets confirming reception of *permesso di soggiorno* fee payment, scribbled on the other side in Sinhala or Italian. In an angle, a makeshift lamp wobbled, lightbulb softly shaded by a Padre Pio postcard (*Abbiamo sempre acceso nel nostro cuore la fiame della carità* [Always in our heart is lit charity's flame], read the caption), while a golden Buddha sat cross-legged in a calendar pegged to the wall.

I inserted my notebooks in the remaining free space on the desk, as Sasanka crammed the book piles tighter to gain a few extra centimeters. Doing so, he

congratulated himself (as I had heard him do before) on the impressive library he had accumulated here — when his attention caught upon a large, shiny hardcover volume.

— “This one, I just bought...”, he reached out for the book, a smile pushing up the corners of his facemask. “It is all about archeology.” He held it and flipped the pages, eyebrows creasing in a *connaisseur's* frown as he commented on the quality of the paper. In a satisfied tone, he explained that he had bought it for a mere handful of euros from one of the second-hand bookstalls he was used to browsing at, in Naples'[59] *centro storico*. “I need it to help me finish the book I am writing, on *Pampoi*”, he added casually.

— “*Pampoi*?” I repeated dumbly.

— “Yes, my book on *Pampoi*,” he said again, in a matter-of-fact way. I eyed him quizzically — when suddenly, I understood.

— “You're writing a book on Pompei!”

Nonplussed, he confirmed, took hold of a notebook from one of the piles on the desk, and started flipping through it from back to front. Page after page of neatly calligraphed Sinhala flashed before my eyes, each paragraph referring to an element of ancient Pompei that he had singled out: Apollo's temple, the *basilica*, the Faune's house, etc. In a few months, he planned for his book to be published in Sinhala, and in Napoli, where it would be “useful”, he insisted, “for this society here”. He had already found a “publisher”: a small printing business around the corner from where he lived in Sanità.

— “And now, I have to write what is most important: the part on *Vesuvio*, and the eruption”, he stated in a resolute way, “Because, *our people*, in Napoli... they hear many stories... but they don't know the truth”.

He finally flipped back to the first page of the manuscript, and the title appeared to me, in Sinhala with the English translation underneath: *River of Death*.

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[59] Sasanka, when speaking English to me (which is the language we spoke most of the time), always made a point of calling the city by its English name. I retain this use in this chapter, using “Naples” rather than “Napoli”.

— “People need to know”, he asserted.

(fieldnotes, February 2021)

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Initially, Sasanka's manuscript lingered in my thoughts together with what I considered his professor performances — a habitual display of knowledge that casually marked him as a respected “*maestro”* for many of Naples's residents who knew him. Sasanka worked as an English professor and “Principal” of “Saint Agatha International School”[60], an English-taught private primary and secondary school in Naples. He took his position at Saint Agatha very seriously, stressing the importance of his regular meetings with the “Director” (the man who headed the private business through which the school was managed), and often interrupting our lessons to take his calls.

But when he spoke to me of his Pompei manuscript, I wondered if he was not, this time, being a little too ambitious. Shouldn't it be clear to Sasanka — a dilettante historian — that he was not the best placed to tackle such a topic: antique Pompei's destruction by the eruption of Vesuvius in 49BC? Soon, however, my puzzle shifted*. People need to know*, had insisted Sasanka, and I came to understand that he meant they had to know *differently*, not simply *better*, on the scale of knowledge I was used to, as a university student or a social scientist[61]. While historians and archeologists might share my initial puzzlement at his dilettantism, I want to show that something else is at stake here, and that Sasanka had a clear idea of what he was doing, and of what he sought to achieve, in re-writing Pompei's story. Consider the following ethnographic snippet, taken from Sasanka's office a few months after I first heard of his Pompei book project, and how it begins to clarify what this “knowing differently” was all about.

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[60] The name is of my invention.

[61] For more on debates around the value that ethnographers can or should attach to their interlocutors' knowledge claims, see discussions between anthropologists Eduardo Viveiros de Castro and David Graeber. Following Graeber (2015), it is humbling to note that what everyone (including social scientists of course) have in common is then the fact that they can't ever fully know anything with certainty: “all of us are indeed faced with the stubborn reality—that is, immediate unpredictability, ultimate unknowability—of the physical environment that surrounds us” (*ibid*).

•

Sasanka was describing to me the latest lessons he was designing for a Natural Sciences class at Saint-Agatha, and he started flipping an A4 notebooks on his desk. He stopped at a page picturing a stylized hand-drawn wave, curling high over a beach scattered with tiny human silhouettes. As he started to explain the mechanisms that triggered tsunamis, the conversation took a turn I hadn't seen coming. At the end of a tirade on geology and oceanography, Sasanka marked a pause. Then, he stated softly:

— "It was December 2003. I think... In Sri Lanka over 30 000 people died." His brow hardened in a pained expression. Many had gone to the beach on the day of the catastrophe, he went on recollecting, after the wave tsunami first hit. They wanted to make sense of it, to see "the dead fish on the beach" — and that was when a second deadly wave caught them by surprise. If only, Sasanka lamented, those people had *known* more about tsunamis, they might have kept clear from the coastline, preserving their lives from the return wave.

— "It had happened already, a tsunami, in Sri Lanka..." he added in a low voice. "Two thousand years ago... but people, they forgot, and they didn't know... so they went on the beach..."

He cringed and stated resolutely: "*People must know*".

(fieldnotes April 2021)

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One reason why Sasanka had singled out knowledge on Vesuvio's past eruptions as "useful", was that he had himself experienced a natural disaster, thousands of kilometers away from the Gulf of Napoli. Sasanka's asymmetrical ties to both "homeland" (Sri Lanka) and "host society" (Naples) becomes visible in the juxtaposition of the two natural disasters. For Sasanka, living by the Vesuvio rekindled painful memories the 2004 tsunami; in turn, his own past experience of the tsunami gave an actuality and a concreteness to the legendary story of the natural catastrophe that destroyed Pompei. *People need to know*, Sasanka had twice insisted. Just as he had something very clear in mind when he taught the workings of tsunamis to young residents of Naples of Sri Lankan parents, Sasanka was not merely setting out to convey a fresh representation of Pompei

with his book. While the Vesuvio is a landmark in many representations of Napoli, the backdrop or protagonist of countless depictions, from postcards to museum masterpieces; and a looming silhouette constantly visible as one walks and rides across the city —, the likelihood of its eruption remained for many residents of Naples a distant, subdued menace. Sasanka, instead, had identified something actual and present in the geological and archeological "facts" he had collected about the ancient eruption. As he saw it, 49BC Pompei offered practical knowledge of vital import for people in Naples, today — while, in a strikingly similar way, the history of ancient tsunamis might have proven lifesaving for some people in Sri Lanka, had they known more about it in 2003. There was a practical orientation to his project: he meant it to be “useful”, as he put it, for Napoli's Sri Lankan “society” — for *his people* in Naples; and, through them, for his homeland, Sri Lanka.

At the same time, in projecting to instruct and school Naples' “Sri Lankan children”, he wasn't just defending “Sri Lankan-ness” against *napoletanità*. Naples was not only a negative backdrop in contrast to which his nationalism might thrive, nostalgically drawn to a homeland pictured in opposition to a corrupt host society (Malkki 1995). For Sasanka, something else was happening, tangling things up between here and there, between his own representations of Sri Lanka and of Naples. His lived experiences in Naples (such as proximity with a legendary, active volcano) rendered more palpable and effective his commitment to a faraway homeland. He meant for his Pompei book to be published in Sinhala, and he meant for it to be read and studied by Sri Lankans. This chapter shows how Sasanka fashioned himself as a charismatic navigator of the city (Hansen and Verkaaik 2009; Björkman 2021; Vigh 2009), ultimately appearing as unlikely expert in the arts of making do (Pine 2012, Dines 2002). Never a mere oppositional backdrop, the city engaged dynamically with Sasanka's personal strand of national loyalty, affording him a range of possibilities, practices and projects for “developing” his country and his people. Naples was instrumental in enabling his Sri Lankan nationalism to thrive; such that, in turn, his long-distance nationalism yielded projects and practices that transformed Naples.

Outline for the rest of the chapter

This chapter is organized in two parts. The first section opens with some of the relations that patterned and put into motion Sasanka's life in and beyond Napoli. It

includes an explanation of how we met, as the COVID-19 pandemic affected my own links to different places, across national borders that suddenly stood out more acutely, and were not altogether incommensurable to Sasanka's own transnational commitments, ties and (im)mobilities. I introduce Sasanka's role as a teacher at Saint Agatha International School, situating his national commitments in the story of a teaching career started in Sri Lanka.

The second section considers Sasanka's involvement in setting up Napoli-located, Sri Lanka-spanning shools allowing me to illustrate his expertise in navigating Naples — a knowledge and a know-how put to work in ways that resemble *l'arte di arrangiarsi*, what anthropologist Jason Pine spoke of in detail as "the art of making do" (Pine 2012,22). Yet I argue that Sasanka's story departs from mainstream understandings of "making do" which relegate migrants to subaltern positions, subjects only of varying degrees of integration.

1. *Maestro* Sasanka: national projects in Sri Lanka and in Naples

1.1. Introductions: across national borders, language, and the COVID-19 pandemic

> In the last weeks of October 2020, hospital admissions were on the rise across western Europe as COVID-19 cases spread. In France, rumors of a new national lockdown gained traction, with people bracing themselves in the suspense of President Emmanuel Macron's TV briefings. On the other side of the Alps, Italy's residents were wrestling with the contradictory announcements and worrisome previsions that circulated across national, regional, and municipal administrations — in Campania, head of the region Vincenzo de Luca was particularly vehement, and his threats sent Napoli's local media outlets in daily speculations over the imminence of a new lockdown.
>
> Through the rainy, suspenseful autumn days that preceded Macron's upcoming speech and echoed with de Luca's oscillating menaces, I found myself faced with the perspective of leaving a fieldsite to which I was only now starting to gain access, for a prolonged period indoors (either alone in my drafty Neapolitan studio, or, preferably, at my parent's house in central France). On one of those unnerving days, I messaged my friend Sanath... and a streak of luck lit up. Sanath

replied instantly with a voice note and, two days later, had put me in touch with someone in Napoli who could give me online Sinhala lessons.

Sasanka Sir, as Sanath had named him in his contact list, answered the phone in English when I first called him. He was on his way to the Buddhist temple after a long day's work of online teaching, and we quickly set up a Skype meeting for the following Thursday evening. As I explained to Sasanka that I would probably be away from Napoli and back in France by then, his response was wise and fatherly:

"Please", he insisted, "let me know when you reach your parents' house safely. And do send them my regards". He explained that out of his three adult children, only his elder daughter lived in Naples with him and his wife, while his son and younger daughter were respectively in Verona (Veneto region, Italy) and Negombo (Gampaha district, Sri Lanka) with their own children — only to state that going home to my parents in these troubled times was the right thing to do.

I bid Sasanka goodbye and hung up in high spirits. Not only would the upcoming Skype meetings provide, I thought, language skills useful for meeting more people and accessing further sites; but they would also enable me to keep a one-to-one, regular relationship with a person of Sri Lanka residing in Naples as I was in home lockdown in France.

•

In setting up Sinhala classes with Sasanka, I nursed several hopes. First, I sought to gain more access to my fieldsite (which, at that point, I still roughly thought of as Naples' "Sri Lankan community"), and I was on the hunt for a trusted "gatekeeper", as some sociological literature denotes the privileged interlocutors who let ethnographers in on the workings of their "communities" (see discussion in Chapter 1 for a critique of that approach). In addition, I was hoping that contacts might "snowball" (Lucht 2017) from my Sinhala lessons with Sasanka, enabling me to meet more people, networking them into a fabric of interlocutors I could later spend time with and learn from. Finally, in following weekly classes with Sasanka, I hoped to have cast a lifeline tying me to my field site through the uncertain, COVID-struck winter that ended 2020.

But none of those plans really succeeded. For one, I soon found the quest for a gatekeeper to be epistemologically flawed, as it would have led the notion to presume the

content and limit of groups one sets out to study (Brubaker 2002; see also Chapter 1). In addition to that, snowballing from one interlocutor to the next (whether or not they held any keys to any gate in the first place) was very much slowed down and limited by the sanitary restrictions and ongoing pandemic, and by my own efforts to avoid being a vector of harm for people who did not share my immunity or my ease in accessing health care. On top of that, my Sinhala remained too stammering to afford me any real encounters with fellow Sinhala-speakers.

Something else happened, however: weekly lessons with Sasanka led us to become "friends" — a term he used to greet me warmly as that I returned to Naples after a few months abroad — and slowly drew me to become fascinated with the character he embodied (Bradbury and Sen 2021). Rather than simply learning from him, I was learning about him. When I first met Sasanka, I had yet to realize that our encounter would open a different *site* to me — or rather, that it would push me to reconsider the extent and the limits of the city site I was wrestling with, "Napoli"; forcing me to include within it what tied Sasanka to Sri Lanka, and what tied him to Italy and Naples.

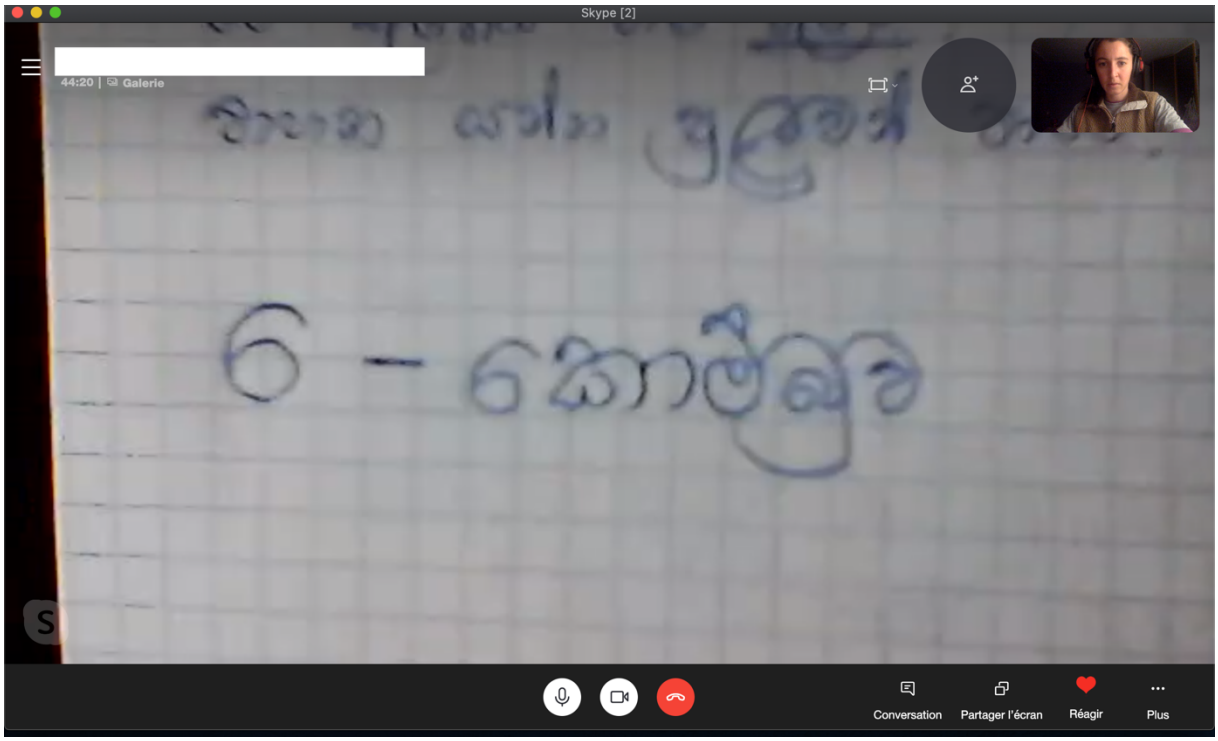

Figure 36. Winter 2020: my fieldsite, an online Sinhala lesson with Sasanka over Skype.

Whether on my laptop camera, or in our Napoli meetings, Sasanka appeared as a busy, determined and energetic elderly man, with an air of authoritative knowledge floating about him. When I met him in 2020, he had been living in Italy for twenty years;

half of those had been spent in Milano; and remaining in Naples, as an English teacher in several of the local private schools. He had recently been promoted Principal (head of the teaching staff) of Saint-Agatha International School. His weekly schedule was packed, as he often explained with a smugness only tempered by his almost juvenile pleasure at leading such a busy life. Classes at Saint-Agatha kept him busy on weekdays; Saturday mornings were spent preparing students for the Cambridge English examinations; Sunday afternoons were dedicated to social and religious activities at the Buddhist temple; and the remaining evenings were left free for tutoring, often till well-past nightfall. Sasanka usually squeezed me in after a tutoring session with fifth graders, and before a Skype call with a Sinhala gentleman who wanted to practice his English by discussing politics and world affairs (he was married to a Peruvian lady, Sasanka told me, and he hoped to soon be able to travel with her and their two children — hence his need for English).

My own slot was on Thursdays, starting around 7:30pm and finishing around 9pm, whenever Sasanka suddenly realized how late it had gotten, and had us wrap up. During our weekly meetings —first on Skype (from November 2020 to February 2021), then in his Naples office (from February to April 2021), and then on Skype again (from May to July 2021)—, Sasanka directed me as I laboriously made my way through an old children's textbook he had salvaged and brought with him from Sri Lanka. The textbook, fully written in Sinhala, moved through rhymes and stories about little boys and girls involved in what he described as customs and games "of Sri Lanka", with of rural landscapes serving as lush backdrops.

Those drawings inspired Sasanka to expand on his understanding of "Sri Lankan culture"[62]. In the first few weeks of our classes, as I waited out lockdown in France, I strove

[62] Rurality has held a large space in Sinhala mythico-historical accounts which portrayed lush rice paddy field and small villages, as the idealized pre-colonial national landscape (Spencer 1990). Yet it is a discourse that is generally loosing steam in contemporary Sinhala nationalist discourses, as Rambukwella (2018) explains: "Sri Lanka's long twentieth-century experiment whereby rural development was equated with paddy cultivation based on visions of Sinhala civilisation in antiquity, which inspired figures like Bandaranaike [politician and president of Ceylon from 1956 to 1959], has become something of an embarrassment in contemporary development and political discourse, despite its continued presence in

to hide my impatience whenever Sasanka diverted too far from my expectations with language teaching: taking my questions on grammar or vocabulary as prompts for lectures on mythology and culture. He moved to topics I could not easily relate to his life in Naples and Italy, taught me words I couldn't see the use for in the conversations I was hoping to have with Sinhala-speakers in Naples. But it was more than politeness, however, that kept my patience and my interest growing. I was beginning to understand the importance of those topics for Sasanka's current life — and presence in Napoli. And thus, Sasanka's Sri Lanka became a crucial actor in our lessons. I was grasping a larger picture of Sasanka's life in Naples, inside which his ties to his nation were impossible to erase. As he himself put it firmly:

> "You can't make it vanish... you have to keep your nation ... So, we have to go back, whatever we can do, we have to try. If we are staying here, and earning money, we can have a very comfortable life, it's okay. And we can burry our bones here... Right? But it's not the thing to do as a *person*, as a citizen of my country. You can see that."
>
> (interview with Sasanka, November 2021)

His commitment was not simply a matter of citizenship, sanctioned through birth certificates and passports. Being a "person", for Sasanka, hinged on doing whatever he could to safekeep his nation's future and maintain alive his own ties to it, however distant the homeland was or grew to be.

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popular culture. Accompanying this change has been the increasing commodification of traditional cultural signifiers such as the village and paddy cultivation, leading to them being seen as kitschy and ironic." (Rambukwella 2018:23). This suggests a kind of outdated-ness in Sasanka's unwavering reference to an imagined rural past.

1.3. "Developing students" in Sri Lanka and in Napoli

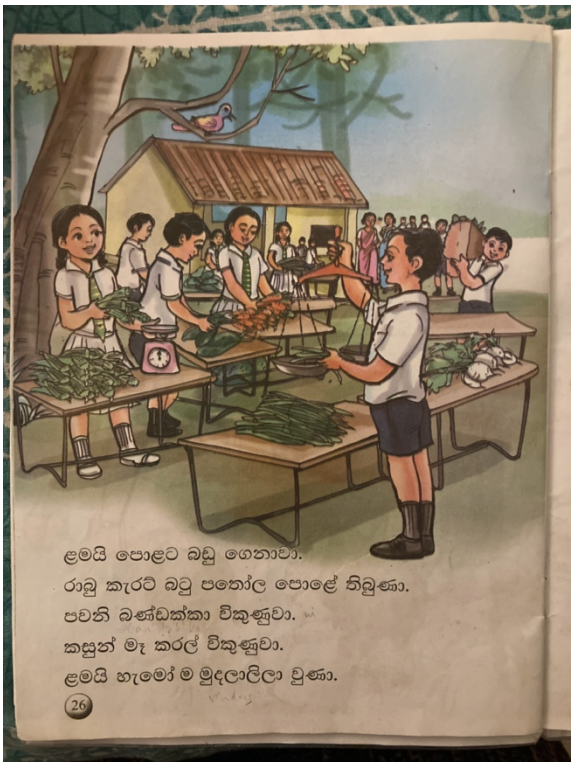

Figure 37. Extract from a lesson in the textbook Sasanka and I worked from. Here, the students are pictured organizing a fair at school, during which the collect money by selling vegetables brought from their parents' farms

During our lessons in Napoli, Sasanka became especially animated when it came to rural life: his voice turned into a suave storyteller's whisper, whenever he spoke of the “stealthy elephants” tiptoeing through sleepy villages in the moonlight. He knew those animals well, having lived close to them and to the forest before, in a remote rural area where the government had appointed him to, far from the densely inhabited coastal belt around Negombo, where he had grown up. It was the 1990s, and the village was his first appointment as a teacher, after a decade of scrambling through stints in various jobs. To his own surprise, as he recounted it, he had effortlessly managed his way through government exams and up to professorship, in a bid to follow his own mother's path and become a secondary school teacher.

In the village, a good share of his time was spent striking negotiations with the parents, most of whom were farmers: he would bargain so that they sent their kids for the days in school, leaving the remaining week free for helping in the crops. During his stint

as a teacher there, he had “created”, as he put it proudly, the possibility for two of the village children to become teachers themselves:

> “They were in grade level, now they became graduates. And they are working in our school, in that school, they are teaching. So, if we can create some more, by the same way, if we can teach them, and give them a good education, and make them graduates then we can take them to our schools, in our area, so we can *develop*...”
>
> (interview with Sasanka, November 2021)

Sasanka drew considerable satisfaction from having supervised his student's development, leading them to “improve many qualities”. Through their education, he was convinced that he had played his part in fostering his country's development. In the flow of his narrative, there was an almost seamless transition from the story of the village school to the story of the Napoli schools. It seemed that his conviction and commitment persisted in the teaching he gave to his students in Napoli, as he geared himself toward an unwavering goal, despite the strikingly different circumstances. What changed, however, he recognized it readily, was how the students approached their education and the futures it prepared them to. Reflecting on the different attitudes of his students, between “here” and “there”, he singled out “money” as the problem:

> “Because [in Sri Lanka] they didn't have any money. And therefore, we were showing them that education is the only way, if you want to come across, if you want to overcome that problem... But here, they don't care. Education is not the first [goal]. *Money* is the one. So, [students] are giving priority for earning; if you have the money, they think you can do anything you want (...). And they know their parents can afford, that they can give them more chances to go somewhere.”
>
> (interview with Sasanka, November 2021)

Sasanka saw that in Napoli, the children's access to material comfort, and their desire for more of it, did not work in favor of futures in Sri Lanka, where economic crisis brewed, and jobs remained scarce and poorly paid even for high-qualified graduates. Despite the painful uncertainty as to where this “going somewhere” might be pointing at, and the lure of easy lives and quick money in Italy, Sasanka remained steadfast in his hopes and plans that some of his students, once “developed” and “educated”, would

choose to return to Sri Lanka, to seek leading positions there, and to “support their nation”.

> “In the schools [in Napoli] we are trying to teach them 'you have to depend on yourselves', 'you have to do like this', and come a little bit higher; get to the higher state of your society, at that level of the society.”
>
> (interview with Sasanka, November 2021)

One example of this nudging students higher was his commitment to "leading" students all the way to Sri Lanka's General Certificate of Education[63] — as Saint-Agatha was not a secondary school recognized as a center for high-school entry exams. During our first Skype lessons (those I followed from France under lockdown), phone calls from the parents of Sasanka's students regularly interrupted our classes. Those calls had grown more frequent toward the end of November 2020, as worried family members required his reassurances and counsel about an upcoming school trip: he was supervising the travels of twenty-five teenagers from Napoli's Saint-Agatha International School, all the way to Colombo (buses to Milano, then flights through Doha), where they would undergo mandatory quarantine in COVID-19 government facilities, before the final preparations for the GCE. Sasanka kept in touch from Napoli with his students throughout the whole revisions period, occasionally offering them additional online training sessions. For a few months, my own Sinhala lessons started with Sasanka's update on the 11th-graders' progress: their initial thrill with the wide open courtyards that the Sri Lankan government quarantine facilities left them to play and run in — quite unlike the tightly packed spaces they were used to in Napoli, asserted Sasanka, drawing in his shoulders and elbows as he did each time he lamented Naples' “density” —; the teenagers' mounting anxieties, while parents, grand-parents, uncle and aunts started locking away cellphones and anything that could provide distraction from studying.

1.2. Nationalism from afar: grounding the study of “diaspora” in material practices

On the school's public Facebook page, there was a picture of a class of fifteen -year-olds, days before they left Napoli for their trip to Colombo: five rows of boys and girls in striped

[63] explain

ties and black uniforms, hands behind their backs or on their hips, framed spectacularly by the impressive façade of Napoli's *Museo Archeologico Nazionale*. While in the picture the *Museo* remained restricted to a static backdrop, Sasanka's teaching projects, plans and desires incorporated dynamically Naples into their seams.

The links between territorial presence or distance, and ethnic and national affiliations are subject to much debate. In a context glossed over as "globalized", scholars have asked how ethno-national projects can be made to operate "at a distance" (Anderson 1991). There has been a celebration of "diaspora" (etymologically: a dispersion of seeds), in its various forms, as signaling post-national, deterritorialized sites for the multiplication of communities that would, hopefully, supersede racial, ethnic or national markers. In some of those accounts, "the migrant" stood out as a hopeful contemporary nomad figure (e.g. Deleuze & Guattari 1980), while for scholars of race and postcoloniality it was the shared, inter-generational experiences of displacement that might lead to the emergence of collective political diasporic subjects (Gilroy 1987, Hall 1993). Hybridized and creolized aspirations and attachments were cast as alternatives to essentialist commitments to roots (Glissant 1997), hopefully signaling an end of the "national order of things" (Malkii 1992).

On the other hand, empirical evidence steadily offered an accumulation of warning signs of renewed forms of ethno-national allegiances and crispation throughout the second half of the twentieth century, as the centrality of the nation-state globally dwindled away. Nostalgia, memory and roots loomed large in those accounts, alongside violence and armed conflict. Anthropologist and political theorist Benedict Anderson writes of exile as a condition for ethno-national projects (Anderson 1991; see also Thiranagama 2014). In the 1990s, Appadurai suggested that ethnicity, no longer confined to any locality had become "a global force, forever slipping in and through the cracks between states and borders" (1996,41). Scholars have criticized the claims that "diaspora" may help supersede static ethno-national categories of affiliation, by showing that it relies on a notion of ethnicity that "privileges the point of 'origin' in constructing identity and solidarity" (Anthias 1998). There remained an often-uncritical assumption that first generation migrants, despite their transnational lives, retain solid ties to their homeland, and that those ties are generally passed on to their children (the "second

generation"), through affective, narrative or even legal means that are not always discussed in detail.

What are the material practices, then, through which those ties can be made effective, if at all? Scholars of media have reformulated the debates around "diaspora" by offering descriptions of the specific ways in which commitments to a supposed locality of ethno-national "origin" can be sustained, maintained or dissolved through the material practices (discursive and otherwise) that animate transnational lives (e.g. Anderson 1991; Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod and Larkin 2002). The suggestion is that the objects addressed by those practices can provide sites of observation (see Chapter 1) for ethnographically tracing the inquiry into national and ethnic ties "at a distance". For example, anthropologist Purnima Mankekar (2002) observed "Indian grocery stores" in the US Bay Area, to follow the circulation of texts, images and commodities that produce "India" anew for her interlocutors and their families and relations, whether they resided in the US, in India or elsewhere. More recently, publications in the growing field of Ocean and Sea studies have examined vaster sites of mediation for national and transnational commitments, by expanding the outlook across the masses of water that separate and connect nation-states. In incorporating a historical line of analysis, they belly the idea that nations may have existed in an intact way, at any original point in time. In doing so, they contribute to eroding essentializing assumptions about the ethno-national and racial categories. For example, taking the Indian Ocean as a site of observation, historian Isabel Hofmeyr (2012) has shown how Gandhi's sojourn in South Africa shaped his Indian nationalism, by offering him African points of comparison against which to imagine a future Indian subject — "later networks" that pull the analysis away from the usual colonizer/colonized binaries. Another example can be taken from anthropologist Naor Ben-Yehoyada's choice of literally using the Mediterranean Sea as his object of observation, by situating his ethnography into a fishing boat operating between Sicily and Tunisia's coasts (2017): he found that what is often glossed over as a "Mediterranean identity" might be better understood as a "constellation" of segmented patterns of connection and distance, across generations, sea routes, ports and, indeed, nations.

This chapter argues for a linked idea: that Sasanka's nationalism at a distance in Naples couldn't be divorced from the materiality of the practices which sustained and hindered it — and in particular, his daily work of residing in Naples, making a living as an

English teacher to Sinhala-speaking children. The previous sections have shown how Sasanka's national commitment hinged on the materiality of his teaching, changing yet persisting as he moved from rural Sri Lanka to Naples and found himself facing different students in different situations. More specifically, I would argue that the brand of Sri Lankan nationalism he manifested when I met him (in his own, Sinhala, Buddhist inflected variant) was affected, but also made effective, by of his applied expertise at navigating Naples. Moreover, this relation did not only operate in one way. While residing in Naples influenced, kindled, and made effective Sasanka's nationalism, his transnational ties oriented how — and how effectively — he managed to navigate Naples. In other words, the expertise he put to work in residing in the city relied on global connections to elsewhere. I argue in the following sections that that this entanglement of "nationalism from afar" and "localized know-how" sheds a new light on the contested ways in which some practices in Naples have been labelled (by scholars or residents) *arte di arrangiarsi* — the arts of making do (Pine 2012), of living by one's wits (Pardo 1996), or of getting by (Dines 2002). The following section develops this point, by first explaining how Naples was instrumental in Sasanka becoming — for the second time in his life — a teacher.

2. A migrant's "art of making do"

2.1. Tactics and entreprise in setting up the "scuole abusive"

In the fall of 2021, I asked Sasanka if I could record an interview with him. For several months, I had been collecting bits and pieces of insights on Saint-Agatha's International Schools during our classes, and Sasanka's investment in his teaching at the school had become obvious. But there was something that still did not quite fit: my impression of Sasanka's authoritative professorship came into an odd contrast with what I was hearing about the schools in the city, from other residents — Sri Lankan or Italian —, from activists or simply neighbors. Indeed, over the past decade, Napoli's International schools had indeed attracted considerable suspicion. Since at least 2012, their short-hand name in the local Italian press had sanctioned as the *scuole illegale* or *scuole abusive*[64]— despite some of the schools, in the last couple of years, having managed to hoist themselves

[64] The phenomenon was not limited to Naples. Reports on Milan's own illegal schools were recently published in the press as well.

toward legality, through various administrative and financial combinations[65]. Sasanka readily agreed to be interviewed and recorded, and without hardly any need for me to prompt him with questions, set out to narrate his side of the story.

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Speaking of professorship inevitably brought Sasanka back to earlier years. Teaching in rural Sri Lanka had animated him with a "purpose", stoking his educationalist, developmentalist, and nationalist dreams and projects. But those were melancholy memories: he had been forced to give it all up by the late 1990s, in Sri Lanka's unstable economy, and his own debts were creeping in, menacing to topple his household over. Teaching simply no longer paid enough in a country traversed by civil war and economic recession. Sasanka's voice lowered as he explained to me.

> "I didn't want to leave that. But because of economic problems and everything... I had to take care of my own children, send them to university. I had to spend money for them. And the house. Everything. We had a little house that time. So, I had to take that decision... Better to go abroad... I had to sacrifice those things."
>
> (interview with Sasanka, November 2021)

He chose to make his way to Italy in the early 2000s, through Sicily, and then Milan, where his brother lived, and where he found a job as a domestic helper. Sasanka's words came out carefully: it felt like a "collapse of the mind to become a servant", after having had so many students attend his teaching. During his years as a *badante*, he learnt Italian; practicing his comprehension by attending classes for foreigners organized by non-profits, and by attending Catholic mass (although he remained a fervent Buddhist). He bid his time composing poems that expressed his "views", jotting them down on bus tickets and scrap bits of papers as he sunk into the mineral, urban life of Milan. Ten years went by.

[65] For example, Sasanka told me, one school is under the wing of a Milan-based 'International School' that had previously secured sufficient funds to regularize itself. Three schools have an arrangement with an Italian school that "covers for them", as Sasanka put it.

Until his daughter, a resident of Naples, gave him the call which turned “fate” around. A Sri Lankan neighbor of hers had come up with a plan to set up an English- and Sinhala-taught school here, for children of Sri Lankan parents, but she needed someone with a government-sanctioned title. Sasanka explained:

> “Sujeewa did not have any career as an English teacher. So, I joined her. And we started it.... At that time, we had a small number of students... but rapidly, it developed. That means,it was famous among the Naples people. Because... they didn't have any other place to send [their children] ... So immediately they sent them.”
>
> (interview with Sasanka, November 2021)

From there, as he went on with his story, the sadness and regret in his tone dissolved, and his story took an “adventurous” turn (Kleinman 2019). He and the Sujeewa had started off their first school in a small apartment. But as the numbers of children attending rose in a matter of weeks, they were soon compelled to move to a new, larger place. Other schools and nurseries opened at the same time, emulating their example, while their own school eventually split in two: primary school in one location, secondary in another. Walking me through the story of those first years, Sasanka went on describing a fantastic waltz of multiplications and scissions, a tale of professors departing in a storm and taking with them all of the students to found new institutions, a portrait of undeterred staff members starting again from scratch. He described the managers' and teachers' continuous attempts to expand their locales in size and modernity, and to attract as many children as possible. He explained how he once had to refrain from taking up principalship in a school that was in direct competition with another one led by a friend of his.

> “Because, if I want to develop my own school, I want to take the other students... I want to increase my number of the students... so there, I would have had to take them from Angelo... so I said no. Because I wanted to keep the friendship of all... I didn't want to hurt anybody... So they appointed another one as principal.”
>
> (interview with Sasanka, November 2021)

During that whole period, he added casually, the schools were "not authorized", they were all "illegal schools". But did he and the other teachers and 'Directors' not face any problems, I pressed him, seizing my chance to learn more? He shrugged my question off:

in those early stages, there had been “no problems with the Italians”. The landlords were fine with them reconverting rented flats into schools, as long as rent was paid on time. As for their neighbors, they were generally not a problem either, provided one knew how to deal with them. He recounted one time when they had moved to a large flat, in an 1800s residential building. There had been a medical practice a floor above, which Sasanka made sure to visit regularly: "very nice people, very helpful... We also had to tell our students to be silent, not to disturb them...". He had known the doctors well, he insisted with a hint of smugness, as he had known all the shop vendors who worked in the street around the building. Even the police didn't cause them any problem — at least in the start.

> “Sometimes, we were visited by the police”, Sasanka explained, “but they didn't put any trouble. They just came and visited, to ask if everything is okay... They had marked the places... where we had the schools. They knew it. Very well. They knew that we were having these schools”.
>
> (interview with Sasanka, November 2021)

Here, Sasanka insisted that the only thing that could have gotten the police to “take action”, would have been a “complaint”; and since, in his view, Italian residents simply didn't care much about the schools, a denunciation could only emanate from Sri Lankan residents. When Sasanka explained this, I imagined a map on a police office wall, with red thumbtacks marking out the *scuole abusive*. Only later did I learn that this map had in fact existed, as I unearthed a small news article published in *la Repubblica*'s Napoli edition, at the time when the police had grown inquisitive enough to "trouble" the schools.

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In 2013, a dramatic headline appeared in *la Repubblica*'s Napoli edition: *“Immigrati, boom di scuole abusive scattano le ispezioni della Municipalità”* (Gemma 2013). The article described the situation in nine Sri Lankan *scuole abusive*, their locations “circled in red in the map of the *centro storico*”, awaiting imminent police inspection. As the article indicates, a complaint (*esposto*) had been filed four months at the Prosecutor's Office by “members of the Sri Lankan community”. Following that, a report signed by the Municipal Council's “School Commission” *(commissione scuola del consiglio comunale)* was addressed to the police. The Sri Lankan “immigrants” manning the schools were indicted with organizing classes *in nero,* demanding excessively high registration fees — around 150 euros per month for 2013, the article further specifies — and using undeclared labor

to sustain a lucrative illegal business. They were also accused to be oblivious to health and safety norms, fostering "unhealthy and dangerous environments". What looked like expired food had been found on some of the premises, the article reported, together with seemingly perilous gas cylinders stocked in poorly ventilated kitchens.

"And that's not all", the article went on, "many families send their children home in the summer to take their exams". Starting with this somewhat milder accusation, — following the list of regulatory and sanitary offenses that the schools were accused of — the article went on to list problems of a different kind. Those had to do with the *contents* of the teaching itself: what was taught, who taught it, and how. Two of those problems were serious enough that they were likely to constitute penal offenses, the article insisted. First, there was the accusation of children's withdrawal from the school system[66], since their attendance of the *scuole abusive* was obviously not recognized. Second, as none of the teachers held any form of government-sanctioned qualification (*abilitazione)* recognized in Italy, they were likely to be charged with illegal practice of teaching (*esercizio abusivo della professione)*. But there were other issues reported as well: sending children "home", meaning Sri Lanka, to take their exams was one of them; so was teaching them in English and "Sri Lankan" (*sic*); and creating "real and actual institutions" in apartments that were not designed for such purposes. For those issues, the problem was not one of legality or criminal offense. Instead, and in the straightforward words of the Municipal Council School Commission's President: "The problem does not only concern the Sri Lanka community, but all those foreign citizens who, despite being economically integrated, reject our cultural model". The problem, according to that line of comment, had become one of clashing "cultures" and of incomplete "integration": something of the Italian "cultural model" was absent from the International Schools's Sri Lanka focused program — and they signaled the "Sri Lankan community's" failure and refusal to integrate.

Simultaneously, the news article included the comment of an anonymous "member of the [Sri Lankan] community" who was part of the group who had drafted the initial complaint to the police. While also targeting the content of the teaching, this Sri Lankan commentator lamented to the journalist that "[the schools] do not even respect the [Sri

[66] A legal requirement for any child resident on Italian territory, whatever their nationality.

Lankan] educational programs... When they return to Sri Lanka the children discover that they have not even learned their language". In a surprising symmetry with the previous criticism, this one also took aim at the school's compliance with a national project. But this time, the problem was not that the schools were too "Sri Lankan" and not "Italian" enough — instead, it was that they were *not the right kind* of Sri Lankan.

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"Our aim is to teach students. That is our main purpose. *Main purpose*. To give them a good education", Sasanka softly but surely hammered in his point.

—"Not to make money?", I pushed.

—"No, no, we don't care about the money."

(interview with Sasanka, November 2021)

Whatever Saint Agatha's director was after, Sasanka himself made it clear: he held no financial interest in the schools, he insisted. In any case, he knew well that teaching in the International Schools was paid significantly less than domestic work — in fact, he added, there had been a time when his family was short on income, and that he had had to temporally quit his job as a teacher in Napoli to take up a better paid position as a domestic worker.

And despite the Italian authorities' suspicion that the schools' staff were actively refusing integration in the Italian host society, it seems to me that Sasanka's goal could not be neatly assimilated with the establishment of a cohesive Sri Lankan *comunità*, in a thrust that would go against local integration. Indeed, as he had insinuated to me and as the article confirmed, oppositions against the schools' project were in no way limited to the Italians: "members of the Sri Lankans community" themselves had strongly divided opinions about the schools, some of them taking it into their own hands to file damning denunciations to the police.

Thus, I would like to argue that if there was anything that Sasanka's story demonstrated, it was the situated, embodied knowledge and know-how that he (and some his colleagues at the schools) possessed of the urban context through which they moved, and of how it could be harnessed to his (and their) own purposes. Throughout his story of setting up the "illegal schools", I read a performance of urban charisma (Hansen and Verkaaik 2009), that ranged from knowledge of Naples' police system to that of its rental

housing market, to an ability to gather support or circumvent opposition from various other groups of residents.

Consider how Sasanka reflected on the success of the schools:

—“What you did, would it be possible in another city?”, I asked.

—"No, no... not possible", came Sasanka's answer, without any hesitation. "Because... the people... here... Naples is very easy because all are living together. Very close by[67]. But if you go to Firenze, or Brescia... Milano is also difficult... because they are living far, at a distance."

—"So here, you can pass on information..."

—"Yes, very quickly, you access it ... Renting houses also is very cheap. Now, a lot of people are living around our school, because of that, because they want to send their children to us, so they are searching houses around our school". Here, he lets out a chuckle. "So, our secretary is helping them out to find houses..."

—"He will help them to find houses?!" I exclaimed in amazement.

—"Yes, yes, yes" he went on smiling in satisfied amusement. "So, everybody is always waiting. They know when one house is going to be rented, so they come immediately and get it, and they can send their children [to our school]."

(interview with Sasanka, November 2021)

2.3 Arte di arrangiarsi

Sasanka had stated it clearly in response to my question: what he (along with the other founders and managers of the schools) had managed here, in Naples would have been impossible anywhere else. In the brief explanation to the success of his entreprise, Sasanka credited Naples' density as an infrastructure that enabled access to indispensable resources, opening to opportunities (a point explored in more detail in Chapter 3): like securing housing in areas where Sri Lankan residential concentration was already high. But other factors immediately came into play, providing further possibilities for navigation such as the low-priced housing market.

[67] see chapter 3 for a discussion on density

In a monograph on labour and everyday life in Naples's *centro storico*, sociologist Italo Pardo spares only one mention to the expression "arte *di arrangiarsi*", which he translates as the "art of living by one's wits" (1996, 11). While rejecting the term, Pardo goes at lengths to describe what *arte di arrangiarsi* is generally supposed to encapsulate: informal entrepreneurship and its tactics among the city's popular classes. In shunning the label as a "reductive category", Pardo takes aim not at what it supposedly designates, but at the stereotypes that it conveys along the way. Indeed, *arte di arrangiarsi* is often distilled in images of drying clothes roped up between buildings, mindless scooter drivers, the smell of *ragù* [tomato meat stew] floating on the hot air on Sundays, angry housewives, mischievous *scugnizzi* [street urchins], organized crime, and the so-called "informal" economy that ties it all up together. It feeds on the stereotypical polarity of *napoletanità* (see Chapter 2) summed up in the trope of Napoli's branding as a "paradise inhabited by devils".

Anthropologist Jason Pine uses the "arts of making do" in a different way, incorporating in his analysis the recursive use of stereotyping (Herzfeld 2015) that its use signals: indeed, Pine's "Neapolitan" interlocutors themselves described their own practices as *arte di arrangiarsi*. Eschewing formal/informal divides, Pine keeps the term to describe what he observed a combination of "the *entrepreneurial tactics*, *social sensibilities*, and the *performances of personal sovereignty* that people enact as they pursue possibilities for a better life for themselves and their families" (Pine 2012,22, my emphasis). Pine insists that the art of making do "entails relational thinking, improvisational preparedness and moral flexibility" (2012,22), given that "its guiding principle is opportunity in an economy of opportunity" (309 fn.12). With opportunity comes risk, which culminates, according to Pine, with the threat of organized crime and of "falling subject, through indenture or even criminal association, to a *camorrista*" (24).

Considering the place of migrants in representations of the city, Nick Dines makes the point that migrants and foreigners are often included only superficially in accounts of the *arte di arrangiarsi* in Naples (Dines 2002). Naples, and performances of making do are usually understood in causal/metonymical implications to each other. In consequence, strangers and migrants are either absent, or pictured as marginal residents who, only with time and perseverance, can demonstrate expertise in the *arts* and be praised for it — but ultimately remain bounded to a subordinate socio-political and symbolic position (Dawes

2020, 24; Dines 2002, 78). As Dines argues, such rhetorics build on the assumption about *napoletanità* [Neapolitan-ness], here thought of as a "distinct urban way of life"[68].

Sasanka possessed an embodied knowledge of the city's working that was made effective and evident in "performances of personal sovereignty" (Pine 2012,22) that went far beyond the usual repertoire of what is expected of the *arte di arrangiarsi*. I suggest that this is ground enough to characterize him as a Neapolitan artist of making do, in a moved geared to the destabilization of the stereotypes that cling to most accounts of charismatic entrepreneurship. In the juxtaposition of *napoletanità* with Sri Lankan-ness. What happens if we do that? Well, we cease to see entrepreunarial tacticts as compulsory reflections of steretypes. We also groudn Sasanka's transnatonal in the local. In other words, while the story of the schools may show that Sasanka was behaving neither 'Italian' nor even 'Sri Lankan' in many ways that were expected or required of him — he was displaying an uncanny ability to act Neapolitan, at least in as much as *napoletanità* [Neapolitan-ness] has been characterized through tropes of *arte di arrangiarsi*.

Sasanka's capacity to make plans through uncertainty incorporated the context at hand and made use of it to expand his understanding of the context at hand. Fate, as he had it, may have played a role in his journey away and back to teaching. But planning

[68] To shore up his argument, Dines considers a recent commercial short film, widely viewed in and out of Napoli, with a focus on the (in)famous, working-class Sanità neighborhood, where relationships of urban spaces to the arts find central stage. Between a group of children playing football until they scatter away as a neighbor exasperatedly throws a pail of water at them (and on what doubles up as their playing ground and her extended threshold), and a young man storming on his scooter beneath racks of cloths drying in the sun — a South Asian resident is introduced as Sassà, a common nickname in Naples, able to conveniently reference Sinhala 'Saman' or 'Sarah' together with Neapolitan 'Salvatore' or 'Saverio'. The only non-white character among a sequence of a dozen other portraits, he is walking up the vicolo, or street/alleyway, carrying a crate of water bottles on his shoulder: "Per Sassà, è una mazzatta in front' ogni volta che deve porta' le casse d'acqua sopra dalla signora Fusco", says the video's narrator in an empathetic tone, "It kills Sassà every time he has to carry the crates of water up to signora Fusco's" . And yet, Sassà smiles a tired but amused expression at the camera — before the shot moves on to the next cliché. Dines hints at the video's fairly stereotypical branding of the *vicolo* or street/alleyway, "construed as a sign of artistry, resilience or defiance" — while he also notes that it portrayed as Sassà seamlessly "assimilated into the informal economy" (Dines 2018).

ahead clearly mattered, and he took pleasure in sketching out dreams on how to stage his next moves in a wavering context.

> "Always... I am *dreaming*", he insisted on that last word and opened his hands as if collecting something from the air around his head. "When I sit in my chair, I always dream, about what to do, for the next days. I involve that imagination, and... proceed. I can see what kind of obstacles are coming ahead of me, how can I give them an answer ... What kind of question maybe the parents ask me, or the teachers ... things like that."
>
> —"For example, what can the obstacles be?"
>
> —"Some obstacles can be that... a lot of the teachers are a little bit... not interested. When I'm saying something, they are not interested *as much* as I want... or *as soon* as I want to. But here, slowly, I approach, I try to find the way... how to approach them", Sasanka ended in a wise — and perhaps slightly mischievous — chuckle.
>
> (interview with Sasanka, November 2021)

2.4. "Plan karannewa": making plans in Napoli better than "native people"

After three months of on-line teaching from Sasanka, I was back in Napoli in the first days of February 2021, and we were to have our first off-line Sinhala lesson. The appointment he had given me the previous day was at a marketplace close to *Cavour*. His plan, as I understood it on the phone, was to take me on a stroll around the neighborhood, chatting along as we went, while he "gave me Sinhala words" and I used those to speak "with the people".

Night had fallen thick when Prof. S. and I bumped fists at our meeting point, before we were prompted on by a flow of people busily elbowing past us — it was, after all, 7pm, and a time when residents swarmed the streets for the last shopping and *servizi* missions of the day. "*Yamu* (let's go), this way!", he beckoned right away, and I followed his lead, my face mask bumping into my lower eyelids, pushed up by the heavy scarf I had wrapped around my neck to ward off the chill, making the electric lights around us twinkle on and off. He carved a path through the rumble of pedestrians, cars and motorbikes, past the towering *palazzi* of the marketplace, on and off uneven sidewalks, through the covered

and uncovered stalls — shiny tarp drawn over our heads, glimmers of dark red peppers, rows of bushy *friarielli*, 5€ for a pair of plastic clogs, sparkling bangle earrings and studded pendants: vague pieces of merchandise that I caught diming in and out focus as I followed on.

He nodded at some of the people we met on the way: a young couple pushing a child in a stroller, a sullen man helping in a kitchen-ware shop, a young man working at a fruit vendor's (and translator for the Sinhala-speaking clients). Then to me:

—"*Yaluwo innewa* ! *Ya-lu-wo*, friend... Friends are here", he chuckled.

A cap was screwed down on Prof S's head, his facemask fastened above his nose so that I could hardly make out his eyes, let alone catch clearly the Sinhala he was chirping out at me, and at the people we encountered. Despite the face coverings, people recognized him, and he recognized them, and warm or polite salutes fused along our path. But as the first jottings in my phone's notepad started to suggest, the class was not going fully according to Prof S's idea of seamless learning on the move: *innewa katakerenewa nè* [we can't talk here]; *ada sénéghe* [today there is a crowd]; *godak sénéghe* [there are many people]. Pushed ahead and away from the densely packed curb, we eventually reached the end of the market, one of its openings on bustling via Foria, and a large-enough stretch of sidewalk that we managed to settle in for a moment. Loud voices and a renewed stream of car horns engulfed us again. Strollers went by, pushed by a few women, occupied with little ones in brightly colored costumes waving their arms around, painted faces and shrill laughter.

— "It is so difficult", he exclaimed. "People here, they are yelling, always!... and those children, why are they decorated?"

— "It's *carnevale* in a few days I believe", amused that he would put our failure with an on-the-move class on the account of the neighborhood's routine bustling activity.

— "Ah yes, *carnevale*. But Italians! They do not care! They take their children out, in the crowd... in this period... They do not care."

He clicked his tongue disapprovingly, considering the passers-by who kept trickling up and down the street. In a more thoughtful tone, he went on:

— “Those people they live for each day. All they do is, eat, drink and enjoy.” Here, he paused before adding: “*We* are not like that. *We* think ahead... *Plan karanawa*. We make plans. For the future... It is like their buildings... the churches... beautiful outside, but inside it is crumbling. This country, Italy, it is *only developing*. People here, they have *no future*... they do not study... they only live for each day.”

He went on to include me: had I not travelled and come to a foreign country to study, he asked? I had a *plan*, he could see that.

(fieldnotes, February 2021)

Sasanka saw himself as more knowledgeable than many of those he called the “native people” of Naples. He believed that he was equipped with a better understanding of life “here” in Naples, and what futures it might open to. Consider his response to my question: what do Italians think of your schools?

— “No, no they don't have much objection. Except... Their only objection is, when the Sri Lankans enter their classes, they are studying well, and they are becoming the brightest students... They start in our schools, grade 5 or 6, and they enter the Italian schools having a very good knowledge of English, and after they catch up very quickly... Because the native people, they don't care. ... They think it's fun to live, we want to live happily, enjoy today, and tomorrow you may die, ok, like that ... But Sri Lankans and other *foreigners*, Chinese and other ones, they are taking first places in their classes. So this worries the Italian people a little...”

— “They should send their children to your school”, I suggested playfully. He let out a laugh, but went on:

— “Actually... I would like to invite some Italians to come to my school... to follow the Cambridge courses. We have to teach them well. (...) We want to encourage them. And we have to show them: *'this is the situation of your country, so you have to study hard, and be fluent in English'*...We'll see that... I'm concerned about that, because lots of Italian boys and girls are going in front of my school, and are waving at me, and saluting me and going. So, little by little, I'm trying to drag them in..."

He chuckled again."So maybe next year. We'll see that”.

(interview with Sasanka, November 2021)

If one were to assess Sasanka's *napoletanità* based on his ease at finding his way in the city's squares and streets, they might find it tricky. On the one hand, as the market vignette illustrates, Sasanka was fully comfortable in making his way through Sanità's busy markets, pausing every other stall to greet a friend or a contact. But most of those contacts were Sri Lankan, and most of the conversation happening in Sinhala. Adding to that Sasanka's peculiar plan of teaching me Sinhala through walking me around the market's evening activity, his savviness at navigating Naples indeed seemed at odds with the more stereotypical versions of *napoletanità*. And in any case, Sasanka was liberal with his criticism of a certain way of life he ascribed to Naples' "native people": a kind of day-to-day carelessness whereby residents would only be interested in enjoying existences reduced to the basics, giving up on plan-making, on aspirations for the future to be developed through education.

And yet, at the same time, Sasanka explicitely credited the city with making his own educationalist and nationalist enterprise possible. In stating out his dreams of teaching young Italian residents of Naples, he pushed one step further this incorporation of things and people "Neapolitan" into his transnational and nationalist projects.

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Right outside the archeological site of Pompei, Sasanka told me (one afternoon that I dropped by his flat in July 2021) — there was a church, the *Santuario della Beata Vergine del Santo Rosario,* where many Sri Lankans went to worship alongside Italians. From that place, stories circulated, including an explanation for the current location of the church on the Vesuvius' eastern lip, within perilous range of volcanic lavas and ashes. In exposing this "story" to me, Sasanka pushed his hands out as if to roll away a voluminous boulder:

—"They say the power of God stopped the volcano...", was how he described people's explanation for the surprising proximity of the church to the Vesuvio and to Pompei. "But", he exclaimed, "this church was built long after the eruption that destroyed [ancient] Pompei! And the lava did not even come in the direction of the church but went toward Ercolano instead... it is falling ash that destroyed Pompei".

—"So, in your book on Pompei, you want to tell the truth... in order to *correct* those stories?", I asked, somewhat clumsily.

— "Oh no...", he answered, and his eyebrows rose up to his hairline, in an expression of mild shock at my question. He raised his hands again, but this time warding off more than pushing out. He would not write about any of those "stories" in his Pompei book, he told me.

—"I don't contest people's beliefs", he insisted "... but then, when they read the book, they will know."

(fieldnotes July 2021)

According to Sasanka, mere presence in Naples was not enough to gain the knowledge that mattered for living (and surviving) in it. He even insisted that, the city could be downright misleading, drawing people to "stories" and beliefs, and away from "knowledge" of vital matters. While he did not set out bluntly against those beliefs, he adopted a form of navigation, that relied both on his own embodied knowledge of the context at hand, and on his commitment to a faraway homeland.

2.5. Complications in Napoli: uncertain returns to Sri Lanka

In early March 2021, Sasanka proudly showed me pictures freshly received on his phone: this time, striped ties had been loosened around everyone's neck, as the boys and girls (photographed in separate takes) broke into broad smiles at the conclusion of their exams. But they had to wait until September to get their results, Sasanka explained, and in the meantime, many of them would likely be travelling back to Italy, to spend the spring and summer months there, with their families. He hoped they came back, so that their portraits could be hung up in Saint Agatha's entrance hall (not to mention, I discovered later, their results displayed nominatively on the school's Facebook page) — it would be such "a motivation for the younger ones!", Sasanka smiled.

During the months preceding the publication of the results and the start of the coming high-school term, many of the teenagers travelled back to Italy where their families lived and worked. While the students, their families and Sasanka all caried hopes that the GCE exams would grant them access to Sri Lanka's College system (grades 12 and 13, equivalent to US high-school or Italian *liceo*), it remained highly uncertain whether any of them would wish to apply for university in Sri Lanka afterwards, given the difficulty to access it (Statistics Branch of Ministry of Education of Sri Lanka 2018) and the scarcity

of the job market opening from there (Brown 2014, Gamburd) — something that Sasanka admitted, but that did not temper his resolve in taking the children all the way to the GCEs.

People were involved in oscillations between here and there, Italy and Sri Lanka (and, at times, other places as well: elsewhere in Europe — France, Germany, the UK; Dubai and the rest of the Middle East). If they had a loan in Sri Lanka (usually for building a house, buying land, setting up a business, or buying a vehicle). There was a mood of uncertainty in the lives of his fellow Sri Lankan residents in Naples which he was aware of. Sasanka recognized many children to be trapped in, and to "suffer" from. But he knew it depended on the children's parents and that other trajectories could arise or interrupt returns. Even as Saint-Agatha itself required that the students shuttle between Sri Lanka and Naples for their exams, Sasanka lamented the additional indeterminacy in the children's curriculums caused by their parents' own wavering circumstances. He knew some of his students would stay in Italy, and placed pride in those who did so and then became doctors. While he did not speak ill of those of his former students who stayed here[69], he couldn't help being disappointed by them taking such a path. But he also knew what the situation was in Sri Lanka, with a situation on edge[70] catalyzed by the COVID-19 pandemic — a mood of uncertainty that had direct effects on plan-making and making do in Naples.

Conclusion

This chapter illustrated the ways in with the “national”, the “transnational” and the “local” intersect in practices of making do in Naples. Naples' material context was instrumental in kindling and making effective Sasanka's nationalist projects and plans (Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod and Larkin 2002). Sasanka's long-distance national ties and allegiances provided him with a moving repertoire of skills and aspirations that made him

[69] For example, he spoke fondly of two of his former students who now worked in a travel agency, in Cavour. He would make sure to get all his photocopies from them.

[70] As I finish writing this dissertation in May 2022, Sri Lanka is going through its worst economic crisis since its Independance. Prices for food, basic medecine, and fuel have skyrocketed, and the political situation has become very volatile. Political protest. In Italy, protests were held in support of the “GotaGoGama” (Gota go home) protests cutting across social to bring together a vast movement demanding the resignation of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa.

savvier, at times, than those he called the “natives”. While the migrant's own arts of making do in Naples are generally portrayed as subaltern, Sasanka's story shows that authoritative positions could be inhabited as well, and performances of sovereignty claimed and enacted convincingly.

Conclusion. “Scenes”, “bridges” and *cosmopolitiques*

Closing vignette. Napoli's *Ceylon Kitchen*

A food scene and a community

I remember the first time I noticed a little shop, a block away from piazza Dante, topped with a sign reading: *“Asian Kitchen, Take a way”* (sic). It was in 2016, my first spring in Napoli. The street that the shop was snuggled into was a short pedestrian stretch, or a square of sorts, distanced from bustling *via* Toledo by a thick five meters of sidewalk. A peculiarity in the *centro storico,* the street was shaded by a handful of trees that enclosed it into a dark and fresh canopy. Black stone benches stood firmly on either end of it, blocking off any car parking urges, while gesturing to be sat upon. Tucked into a ground floor recess halfway along the length of the little street, the *Kitchen* consisted in a couple-meter-wide dent into the built façade. When closed, the little restaurant would almost vanish entirely from sight, behind a gray metal curtain that blended in with the rest of the façade. Only a few posters remained visible, pasted onto the building wall to the left of the curtain, advertisements for events or services on hire, printed out or handwritten in Sinhala.

Despite its stealthy appearance, the *Asian Kitchen* only half-succeeded in not spilling out in the street. During the day, the front of it unfolded in two glass display-tables angling slightly on the sidewalk and making the inside partly visible but not physically accessible for customers. Smells reached out in whiffs as one strolled by : steaming rice, roasted curry leaves, tangy tamarind, rich coconut. Glimpses could be caught of a neon-lit kitchen edging inwards in what seem to be a couple of further recesses in the building. It was staffed by a handful of men, occasionally a woman as well, chatting loudly in Sinhala between themselves and with customers. The stone benches were generally occupied by a few Sri Lankan men eating the odd plate of fried rice or nibbling on a *vadai*; some sat alone as if waiting, others were huddled in little groups, occasional interjections fusing out in Sinhala as whiskey bottles steadily emptied. Most of the clients of the *Kitchen*, however, only stood for a few minutes by the display shelves, while aluminum tins were speedily crammed with rice, and short-eats wrapped up in a flurry of grey paper sheets. All of it was piled up inside a plastic bag, a few euros exchanged (no more than 3€ for a

portion of rice and curry, 1€ for a roll, 2€ for a dozen *idiyappams*), and the customer was already taking off, brisk footsteps on the dark pavement.

In those days, arriving in Napoli as a student from France, I had been fairly obsessed with what I pictured as "Neapolitan food": the variety of bread, pasta, cheese, and cured meat combinations which I assumed were "typical" of this part of Italy (Herzfeld 2015). So, I would not even have noticed or stopped at the small restaurant, back then, if not for Isabella, my vegetarian friend from Berlin who had grown impatient with the *centro storico's* lack of meat-free offer. It was a wonderful surprise: I loved the rich vegetables and gravies, the steamed *idiyappams*, and the heat and spice were exciting. But I still pictured it as an odd break from "Neapolitan" food.

In October 2018, I was back in Napoli to begin my doctoral research: changes in the little street suggested its increasing popularity. Wooden tables and chairs had assembled in a terrasse around the *Kitchen*'s doorstep, shaded by a large midnight-blue umbrella that blended into the leafy canopy, such that more customers stayed put at the tables for the duration of a snack break. By the following January, two formerly empty shops across the street from the *Kitchen* had been dazzlingly refurbished: they were now fitted with luminous glowing signs on their outside (one of those unambiguously reading *Hangover*), their indoor space fully remodeled with polished counters, shimmering new fridges lined in beer bottles, shelves of pricier liquors running on all inside walls. The shop attracted an increasing number of non-Sri Lankan customers, and I got used to stopping for a bite at the place and got to agree with my friend Isabella: it was indeed a convenient place in Napoli, cheap, tasty, with ready vegetarian options, and well located.

In 2019, an Austrian journalist and food enthusiast, visitor, and occasional resident of Napoli, published a story asserting that "a Sri Lankan food scene grows in Naples". Depicting a landscape of restaurants and grocery stores stocked with shelves of spices and fresh vegetables flown in weekly through Colombo, the article suggested that the publics of customers addressed by the "scene" were clearly fellow Sri Lankan migrants seeking "the taste of home", along with the "occasional expat or tourist who craves truly spicy food" (of whom the journalist had been, and, it seemed, I had become). As for those whom the journalist referred to as "Neapolitans", they were dismissed as a possible public for the scene, portrayed as "rarely interested in anything but Neapolitan food, and

[having] no stomach for hot chiles". When I wrote the author an email, in September 2020, asking how he had come across the "scene", his answer was uncompromising:

> "I love Naples and its food, but it is very one dimensional — there is only Neapolitan food and nothing else. When my wife and I moved to Sanità, the Sri Lankan restaurants were our only possibility to get away from this food absolutism (...) I feel they are not toned down, so to speak : a Neapolitan would never go there, and that is, flavorwise, a big advantage. They don't make their food more boring or acceptable to locals in any way (...) They cook for fellow Sri Lankans, so their food tastes pretty good."
>
> (Septembre 2020, personal email exchange)

Published on the website alongside reports on stylish restaurants promoting ever-renewed subtleties in the craft of the "authentic Neapolitan" pizza, the story of the growth of a "Sri Lankan food scene" contrasted.

Ideas that perpetuated this contrast were circulated among many residents of Napoli. Around the same time, my friend Livia recounted to me her own early experience of the "Sri Lankan" restaurants. Born an Italian citizen and raised in Napoli's *centro storico*, she had already been proud of her broad ranging food tastes, developed as much through travelling in Europe, as through the generous cooking of her Italian family. She recounted how in the mid-2000s, Sri Lankan staff members would receive her in surprised when she crossed the threshold of their shops and asked for one of the spicy potato rolls that were, in those days, available for sale in Napoli. While bellying the journalist's comment that "Neapolitans" had no palate or interest for foreign food, Livia's impression was still that the food was simply not designed for being consumed by non-Sri Lankans.

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For the voices I included here — the Austrian journalist's, a recollection of Livia's, and my own from seven years ago —, the relation of the "Sri Lankan community" to Napoli was routinely conceived as a separation, mapped onto ethno-national ground, and experienced through spatial and material arrangements — such as the thresholds of shops Livia felt bold enough to cross, or the degree of spiciness which made some foods taste dull and others unbearably hot. In those accounts, the "Sri Lankan scene", in

accordance with the rising numbers of the Sri Lankan residents (Chapter 2), was expanding in contrast with Napoli's landscape, pressing against a certain idea of what the city was, or ought to be. In the Austrian journalist's piece, not only was the "Sri Lankan food scene" described as a well-identified and recognizable landscape, but it also addressed a well-defined public (Warner 2002) which excluded "Neapolitans". What commentators struggled to do, then, was to measure the integration of the former entity into the latter: the community into the rest of city. Concerns about integration grew and permeated the circulation of a range of discourses — urban scholarship, laws and policy, everyday talk in and on Napoli (see Introduction).

But the description of the *Kitchen's* insertion in Napoli's *centro storico* should perhaps require us to pause and consider, if indeed, "*napoletanità"* [Neapolitan-ness] can be conceived only in opposition with "Sri Lankan-ness", and their relation only as one of varying degrees of "integration" of the foreign element in the native whole. After all, quite a few Sri Lankan-passport-holders and Sinhala-speakers had become residents of Napoli in the past thirty years. Some had even acquired Italian citizenship in the process. Others had opened schools for children born in Napoli, in Sri Lanka, or elsewhere (Chapter 4). Others made plans to move in and out of Napoli, through Italy, Europe and beyond (Chapter 3). And some had set up shops and restaurants that, like the *Asian Kitchen,* were intricately imbricated inside the city's fabric. The *Kitchen* pushes us to wonder: is "integration" the only means by which the relation of Sri Lankans to Napoli be conceived? Is "community" the best way in which a group of foreigners can be imagined and described? What other perspectives on the question would open if Napoli were considered "like Sri Lanka", if *napolitanità* were considered compatible with Sri Lankan-ness — to the point that the boundedness of both categories would seem to dwindle out, the "community" losing ground to the point that concerns over the "integration" of its members would ring hollow?

Bridges

In the early spring of 2021, a few weeks before a renewed hardening of sanitary restrictions would make meetings trickier, I had coffee with Dilip, (the young artist from the Introduction). After sitting for a while in *piazza* San Domenico, we agreed to keep chatting over a meal at the nearby *Kitchen*. Sitting at the terrasse, we nibbled at pieces of crispy prawn and fried rice and our attention and talk moved to the next-door bar. As the

state- and region-enforced sanitary restrictions had eased and contracted in lurches over the past months, restaurants and cafés in Napoli kept shifting their spatial arrangements to provide take-away or outside dining options. The bar next-door to the *Kitchen* was one of those: at the end of August 2020, it had taken over two of the street's stone benches, encircling them within a terrasse space that it had newly carved out for itself. Strikingly, it had used thick stone flowerpots to hold up a rectangular line of bushes between itself and the Ceylon Kitchen's outdoor space. The new hedge gave Dilip the nagging feeling of a border. "You'll never see Sri Lankans on the other side", Dilip frowned. And indeed, the crowd at the pub was mostly composed of young, white Italians in fashionable clothes, sipping wine from glass chalices, or beer straight from the bottle. "*Bisogno creare dei ponti*." Bridges have to be built, Dilip brooded.

With the pandemic, something else happened around the *Kitchen*, in early 2021, which suggests that borders were perhaps, at some times and for certain residents, more porous than what the hedge gave to imagine. As the curbs on gatherings hardened in the winter, following a relative easing over the summer of 2020, some of Napoli's residents came up with tactics to evade police scrutiny and continue meeting for outdoor drinks in the evenings in the *centro storico*. One of those was to shift some of the formerly popular meeting points (*piazza* Bellini, *piazza* San Domenico, *largo* Banchi Nuovi, etc.) to other more covert areas— like the little street. In the evenings, between the *Kitchen* and its adjacent beer and liquor joints, a small crowd of Italian youngsters would mass up, facemasks tucked under people's chins or strapped around their elbows, ready for use in case of police controls. The crowd resembled uncannily that of the next-door bar's former customers, yet this time, they stood on the other side of the hedge, on the "Sri Lankan side". On those evenings, when I decided to stop at the *Kitchen* for a tin of rice to take home for dinner, I had to wiggle my way through the group huddled under the tree canopy, and wait in line at the display counter, as many of them bought short eats to have along with their drinks. I once stood behind a tattooed young man in leather boots who was chatting in Italian with the Sri Lankan man behind the counter, ordering a handful of samosas after having confirmed that he would be able to handle the spice. "Many clients, eh?" I winked through my facemask at the waiter when my turn came. "*Tantissimi*!" was the waiter's unmasked response from behind the counter, along with a large slightly smile.

Around the same period, I had lunch with Dimuth (my friend from Chapter 3) at the *Kitchen's* terrasse, soon after he had quit his job at *Ceylon Flavors*. As we settled, he quickly relaxed in his chair and cast an appraising gaze at the surroundings: “This place is good for business” he nodded approvingly. And indeed, at the time, it was the only “Sri Lankan” restaurant in the city that benefited from such a large outdoor space, with a terasse that, on that day, was packed in its eclectic mix of customers. The very shape, size and location of the street meant that it was easily reachable from busy piazza Dante or Montesanto station, while remaining nicely snuggled under the fresh tree canopy. Yet Dimuth (who prided himself in being a gourmet and boasted experience in several kitchens around the world) was not convinced with the food they served. “They don't know how to make delicious food”, he asserted in a final tone, poking with little conviction at an oily slab of pork in his plate. The food at the *Asian Kitchen* simply didn't taste like what he hoped it would — not as curated as what he had been used to prepare for the tourists he catered for, in Sri Lanka and in the Alps; and definitely unlike the “taste of home”, or anything he would have carefully cooked and eaten at the various “homes” he had lived in Sri Lanka or elsewhere.

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Dilip, a 25-year-old self-identified “Neapolitan”, as “Sri Lankan” and a “second generation” “*italo-srilankese*” had expressed a wish for more “bridges”, born from what he experienced as a life lived simultaneously on opposite sides of painful borders and binaries. In that sense, he spelt out a need for more “*integrazione*” of the “Sri Lankan community” into Napoli (see Introduction). His wish was that Sri Lankan residents like his parents would somehow overcome the real-metaphorical hedge that he felt demarcated the *Asian Kitchen* from its neighboring bar — and from the rest of Napoli. Nonetheless, while Dilip experienced daily a multiplicity of borders cutting across Napoli, differentiating things “Sri Lankan” from others “Neapolitan” — among the most brutal of which, the *ius sanguinis* line that conditioned citizenship, for residents of Italy born of foreign parents, to a strenuous and uncertain application process — , he did not shy away from his own quotidian attempts at moving across and negotiating those divides. That task and that labor required all the more skill that, as the story of Napoli's *Asian Kitchen* illustrates, borders themselves kept shifting along with the changing city.

Dimuth criticized the supposed "Sri Lankan-ness" of the food sold and eaten at Napoli's *Asian Kitchen*, as much as he praised the *Kitchen's* exceptional location in Napoli's fabric, making it a destination of choice for some of its customers who blithely skipped across the hedge. In doing so, he considered the restaurant outside of strict ethno-national boxes, as an uncertain and changing situation, and as part and parcel of Napoli. Conjunctures in Napoli afforded the little shop with unforeseen possibilities: its location in the city and the cheapness of its meat-free options ; COVID-19 curbs which enabled the Kitchen to cater to the needs and projects police-defiant young Italians, and of its business-focused restaurateurs. As Dimuth put it, simply: "This place is good for business". The city "afforded" space that could be used in unforeseen and unplanned ways, changing the very ways in which the city could be pictured.

What would happen to our understanding of diversity in Napoli, this dissertation has asked, if the analytical focus were cast not on the supposedly cohesive realms of a "Sri Lankan community", and of the rest of the city's *napoletanità*— but, instead, on the multiple ways by which those borders are crossed, mediated and navigated daily? This *mediating labor* I suggest, is akin to a form of *navigation* that bellies assumptions that groups are intrinsically bounded and internally cohesive. While scholarship generally holds it clear that "second generation" residents like Dilip live as border-crossers, blurring out the categories "Neapolitan" and "Sri Lankan", I argue that savvy navigators can be found among other residents not necessarily born or come of age in Napoli or in Italy, people often portrayed as migrants confined to the inside of "their community", awkwardly foreign to the city. Instead, by simply foregrounding the expert mobility of migrants — a not-so-obvious methodological and epistemological move —, I sought to offer the story of characters who expand the repertoire of navigational practices or residing in Napoli. Sasanka, who drew hopes and strength from the idea of his upcoming return to Sri Lanka, while bidding his time by stoking his own brand of nationalism through teaching his students. Dimuth, who had "only been here a few days", and yet displayed uncanny expertise in navigating the net of overlapping chronotopes that composed Napoli's landscape in space and time.

From cosmopolitan port-city to *cosmopolitiques*

Before our first meeting, I wrote Dilip a message telling him about my puzzles and inquiries, mentioning my interest in forms of "cosmopolitanism" that I believed existed in

Naples. After he accepted to chat with me, and once the conversation flowed in reciprocal curiosity, Dilip asked: what had I meant by that word, *cosmopolitanismo*? I thought for a second, and told him that my interest had to do with my training as a planner, and my commitment to studying the causes and directions for change in cities, making them more livable for the more vulnerable of their residents. I believed that there was something in "cosmopolitanism" that might have offered a horizon that could inspire urban planners committed to change.

As an attitude embraced by people and groups, "cosmopolitanism" designates the willingness to engage with difference (Hanner 1996). When used to characterize a city, cosmopolitanism can be extended to describe form a sociality, patterns of built environment, or structures of feeling that might entice residents toward openness. A cosmopolitan city, it is assumed, would not only generate occasions for encounters, but would also foster, in the words of sociologist Ulrich Beck, "a spirit of recognition of the Other's difference, capable to apprehend ethnic, national and religious differences, and to make them thrive through mutual exchange" (Beck 2003, 13). The outcome, for thinkers in line with Beck, would be the recognition of a shared *cosmos*, a form of belonging oblivious to national borders and making "us" into "citizens of the world".

"Porous" Napoli is an ideal candidate for accounts that attempt to locate cosmopolitan propensity. With ethno-national conflict wringing its way through 20th century Europe, there have been chronic resurgences of images of Mediterranean port-cities portrayed as cosmopolitan havens, their loss or the imminent threat of it kindling the narrative with renewed intensity and nostalgia (Ben Yehoyada 2017,9-10). Napoli's own history spans millennia, its foundation by Greek sailors inscribed in the grid of its antic core, and the subsequent centuries of flows of peoples from all provenances providing commentators with endless inspiration for cosmopolitanism claims. Easily, sweeping connections can be made between an *aperçu* of this historiography, and accounts that, to this day, declare that Napoli is indeed cosmopolitan. *Una città porto, una città che da sempre accoglie.* Yet those appreciations, to paraphrase anthropologist Naor Ben Yehoyada, run the risk of carrying "no palpable political implication because they reach to a moment too far in the past and postulate a brotherhood too homogenous and inclusive" (Ben Yehoyada 2014).

A second step takes us to the turn of the 21st century, as scholarship rose in reaction to universalizing, liberal bias of cosmopolitanism that tend to flatten brotherhood onto unquestioned tolerance. Historians and anthropologists pointed at the assumptions undergirding the idea that people and groups may be set apart from each other, yet prone to elicit encounter: there was a bias there, they argued, toward the reification of nations and ethnicities into internally cohesive, culturally homogeneous groups, such that "cosmopolitan practices come to be seen as mixtures of things believed to have been previously unmixed" (Breckenridge et al. 2002). Instead, they asked,

> "[What] if we were to try to be archivally cosmopolitan and to say, 'Let's simply look at the world across time and space and see how people have thought and acted beyond the local.' We would then encounter an extravagant array of possibilities." (*ibid*.)

The ethnography present here has attempted to contribute to this archive, documenting the practical, material ways demonstrating, yet again, that there has never been any point in time when Napoli was not cosmopolitan. This is not merely to repeat that the city has always been welcoming and tolerant of the multiple Others to have set foot on its shores. Rather, it means seeing how the mixing has always already occurred, and how the encounter with difference cannot be distilled into the shock of purified entities colliding with each other. It also means accounting for the multiplicity of ways in which "Napoli" itself takes part in the mix and is fashioned and modeled in an "extravagant array" of possibilities, of which *napoletanità* is merely a small subset.

This takes us to the third step of the explanation Dilip's prompt had helped me formulate to myself — and the last one, for now. What of the political horizon of a shared cosmos? Should planners give that up as well? Philosopher Isabelle Stengers has coined an inspiring alternative: *la proposition cosmopolitique*, which centers the "*cosmos*", the shared world, only to take it down and cast it in doubt, letting hesitation shroud it such that, for a moment, judgement and action may be suspended. Stengers shows how the definition of the cosmos, if taken as a given, would preclude the very possibility of being shared. The question she poses shifts from asking to what degree are people (and places) welcoming to difference — how cosmopolitan are they? — to asking, instead: what worlds, what city do their practices generate?

> "The call to unity adressed yesterday to workers of all countries, or, today, to the citizens of a new kantian cosmopolitical regime, puts into a hurried equation the cry "an other world is possible!" with the ready-defined legitimacy of those who would be its reliable

> authors. But we aren't reliable! Especially when we claim to partake in the necessary creation of a “cosmopolitical common sense”. (Stengers 2009, my translation from French)

Suspending the definitive fixation of worlds, letting them remain as unknowns for as long as necessary to expand the outlook, to realize one's unreliability, to open space to listen to who might not have been heard — if this dissertation can trigger one such minute of hesitation, it would perhaps not have been written in vain.

Annex. Fieldwork timelines for a “patchwork ethnography”

This research is based on a cumulative six months of ethnographic fieldwork in Napoli between March 2019 and November 2021. It has been suggested that the time constraints of the PhD in European countries such as Italy (three years) make it challenging to conduct long-term field research, when compared to longer programs, for example those in the United States (Reid-Henry, 2003).

In my case, after the pandemic began, this challenge was amplified by the fact that I could physically be in Naples for short periods only and had initially not planned on using any digital methods. I was pushed to invent own "patchwork ethnography" (Günel, Varma and Watanabe 2020). The following is a notepad- or diary-format recollection of this patching up work.

timelines, sites, and theories	***reflection and comments***
2015-2016 Erasmus student in architecture at DIARC.	
November 2018 : *I was granted funding for a PhD in "Architecture and Planning"* *A further requisite of my program was to spend 6 to 12 months as a visiting-PhD candidate in a university abroad.* ***In January 2019****, I decided to use ethnography to study practices of city-making in Naples, involving people who straddled insider/outsider divides. I chose to focus on Sri Lankan migrants residing in Naples.*	*1. I had to work with a tighter initial timeline than what PhD students using ethnography usually experience. The initial plan was:* *- 7 months definition of the research proposal: 01/19 to 07/19;* *- 12 months studying abroad 08/19 to 07/20;* *- 6 months fieldwork 08/20 to 02/21;* *- 6 months writing up 03/21 to 08/21;* *- 3 months revisions 09/21 to 10/21.* *2. The differences between home and field - and between field and desk - were turning murky, as Naples is:* *- my home and not my home (I often feel quite acutely a stranger to it; but can just as easily pass as, and feel, local)*

	- fieldwork would be happening at the same time as other PhD-related commitments with the university; and in neighboring places. *–* *I would have to invent different temporal and spatial sequencing of fieldwork and analysis periods; possibly come up with higher frequencies of "abductive cycles".*
***From February 2019 to July 2019**, I worked at gaining access to a field that I had conceived (in a kind of Chicago School 'unit of analysis' move) as "Sri Lankans in Naples". Triggered by what the majority of local/Neapolitan commentators I met in and out of the academia terming it "Naples' Sri Lankan community", I aimed at securing some insider's proficiency in what appeared, from outside, as a closed site —the bounded community of foreign nationals.* *After a few false starts, by "chance", I met Sanath, who was part of an activist group (mostly Neapolitan-born young people) "squatting" a building with municipal approval. The (main) reason Sanath. was involved with the activists was that it enabled him to secure a physical meeting space for another group he belonged to: a Sinhalese Buddhist transnational organization. On weekly and monthly bases, the Buddhist members organized meditation, teaching, and discussion sessions in the squatted building's ex-chapel.*	*1.Outsider's guilt. I often felt guilty for not being enough of an insider to work on the questions I had chosen for myself. Based on my belief of my own lack of contextual knowledge:* *- What did I really know about Naples — having no prior interest in, say, neorealist cinema? or no deep understanding of the way Catholicism was practiced there? or no fluency in Neapolitan language?* *- How to overcome the distance with a world (Sri Lankans in Naples), I felt so foreign from, such an outsider to, and quite simply stumbled upon by "chance" so recently?* *How to bridge those shortcomings given the little time on my hands —how to become an insider as fast as possible: that was the question keeping my mind spinning.* *2. I don't speak Sinhala.* *3. No prior training in ethnography.* *Blundering along the way?* *What epistemic community, what peers?* *–* *At that point, I could see no other solution than to acquire "legitimacy"*

I started doing participant-observation with the Buddhist group. Sanath spoke fluent Italian; but my Sinhala was inexistent, as was the Italian of many of the group's members. Most of my chats happened with him (and the English-speaking Sinhala-Milanese monks he introduced me to). I limited myself to observing the rest of the group.	*- as an ethnographer (methods)* *- as a dilletante Italianist and Srilankanist (contextual understanding; learning Sinhala seemed one essential step.)* *I did not see yet that :* *- my own mental/affective setting—here, my "outsider's guilt"— could in itself generate ethnographic data regarding my insider/outsider questions.* *- more importantly still, gaining "insider" fluency as an ethnographer I would come to realize was always limited —or better, with the bounds of the 2 first hermeneutic moments.*
***From August to November 2019**, I spent a semester at the University of Louisville (Kentucky)'s Urban and Political Affairs department, training in anthropology and ethnography. This convinced me that defining my site as a bounded group ("Sri Lankans in Naples") was methodologically and epistemologically limited. Unsurprisingly, I was now asking myself the following: rather than focusing uncritically on an alleged "national community", how could I unpack the constitution of urban subjects as insiders/outsiders and the fabrication of the "community" as default unit of analysis (when I was realizing that many other forms of collective affiliation existed, alongside the national community)?*	*1. Ties to contrasting epistemic communities:* *- ethnographers* *- planners — actively and consciously involved in designing "urban infrastructures", but:* ** used to "bounded group" analysis* ** often lacking reflexivity on their own practices.* *_* *Production of knowledge could locate itself precisely in that gap: between planners' categories (e.g. the "national community" as an urban presence/actor to be reckoned with) and the ethnographers' findings.* *How does the category "hit the ground", with what effects? —becomes the question. (Rather than: is the category true or false).*
*Meanwhile, it also turned out that **in those months away from Naples**, I had been reading a great deal on the anthropology of infrastructures.*	*1. In the ethnographic accounts I read, 'infrastructures' guided the empirical investigation of urban processes:* *- pointing at tangible "assemblages" to focus on in order to track circulations that occurred*

	across scales (rather than focusing on pre-defined "bounded groups"); *- involving planning/design processes and governmental actors.* *- offering the possibility to bridge some gaps between my preferred epistemic community (ethnographers/interepretivists), and my disciplinary epistemic community of reference (planners) : it turned out both held interest in "infrastructures".*
In Naples, I tried to maintain my focus on "Sri Lankans in Naples" —however problematic a category that had become for me. I spent a few weeks in ***December 2019*** *on a sort of pilot fieldwork experiment along a couple of "emblematic" public bus lines —those that scaled up Napoli's scenic Posillipo hill, from the dense, lower-income and middle-class neighborhoods of the city center, to the middle- and upper-class neighborhoods overlooking the sea— carrying migrants (including Sri Lankans) to their Italian employers' homes where they performed care or domestic work.* *It seemed then like the bus lines could work as a possible "infrastructural trick", eluding the pitfalls of the bounded group "unit of analysis", while retaining a focus on the ways in which "Srilankan-ness" affected some experiences of the city.* *I set out to do participant observation, tracking "mobile Sri Lankans" on the bus routes I'd picked.*	*1. The buses were infrequent and late, offering fairly short rides (15min-ish), and noisy. Overall, conversation possibilities were limited, and I was mostly confined to brief chats about bus times, and to observing.* *Moreover lack of language proficiency, was still an issue as I had yet to speak any Sinhala then.* *My rides increasingly felt strenuous and anonymous, and I felt more and more like an external gawker.* *2. Alongside Sri Lankans, people of variegated nationalities circulated along/with the bus lines as well. In addition, people's trajectories from home to work and back were often very much multi-modal, the bus lines themselves amounting to only a small part of their mobility routine. My preemptive choice of some bus lines rather than others was losing methodological salience as it went. If, indeed, what I was tracking were "Sri Lankan" patterns of daily mobility in the city, or "mobile Sri Lankan-ness", it rather seemed like the bus lines were only a very limited element of the picture. I was starting to see the bus as*

	somehow involved into a wider set of infrastructural devices that put (Sri Lankan) bodies in circulation—something that I was beginning to tentatively call "Sri Lankan Naples". *–* *If I wanted to investigate further this site ("Sri Lankans along the bus lines") and how it functioned within larger spatio-temporal and mobile configurations (that I was now calling "Sri Lankan Naples"), I would need to find people who trusted/knew me, spoke Italian or English, and could allow me to shadow them on their trajectories.* *My site would then have to become "mobile (Sri Lankan) people"* *A possibility would then be to step back from the bus lines and build relations in other sites, which I would then be able to follow along on the bus.*
*In **mid-January 2020**, I left for the University of Edinburgh's department of social anthropology, continuing with my training in anthropology. The plan was to spend three months there.*	*1. Feeling guilt: not enough ethnographic material. What were the empirical insights that would guide this period of more theoretical/methodological work? It felt like all I had until then was dim and slim.* *–* *I had to coax myself into reading again my notes, to find elements in them that I could be comfortable with.* *I also started writing from memory descriptions of situations I had experiences in Naples. That helped me spell out other puzzles and ideas I may had, that, despite being linked*

	to empirical settings, were not (yet) addressed through actual fieldwork and fieldnotes.
*In March 2020, the pandemic hit in the UK, while I was there with my partner (UK resident). From **March to July 2020**, I waited out Europe's first wave and lockdown in Edinburgh.* *Naples was a dimmed-out shape in the distance, bearing deeply troubling news as the first wave of the pandemic hit Italy hard.* *Meanwhile, vague hopes of possible extensions (whether paid or not) of the PhD period started emerging.*	*1. I spent a few months submerged and uprooted by the global situation.* *2. How to commit at a distance: a distance from my exploration of "Sri Lankan Naples" that is not only physical, but also emotional and affective?* *_* *Here, I realized that if my PhD program in Italy did not offer me more time, I would have to adapt to that specific political-economy setting and downsize my ambitions for the **thesis** itself. For example, moving it on more theoretical or lit-review ground* *I took a step back and spent the time in Scotland reading on place-making, phenomenology, affect theory, publics, material culture... On the histories of Naples and Sri Lanka.*
*In **August 2020** I returned to Naples, initially hoping to do 6 months of fieldwork.* *It would turn out I only stayed for 3 months, from **August to October 2020**.* *Along with the bus, I was intuiting other 3 other "mobile sites": food (and foodways); (material) religion; schooling (and plans for the future)—which, I hoped, would help me explore my infrastructural hypothesis: "Sri Lankan Napoli" and "mobile Sri Lankan residents".*	*1. Bus rides had become an "unsafe" site: crowded environments, high contagion risk. Following "mobile Sri Lankans" along the bus had become ethically problematic. As people got back to work throughout September, cases rose, confirming the doubts I had with investigating crowded public transport.* *2. It turned out the more mobile body around was mine. I was still struggling at making progress with my plan of shadowing other mobile people. Still not gained access to those possibilities of mobile and embodied sites.*

I moved around and across the city attempting to track the circulatory workings of the three new sites I wanted to test out. *I got the further ahead with food, using take-away Sri Lanka food business and Sri Lankan managed grocery stores as 'fixed' coordinates for a vaster network/metabolism of circulating food and foodways.*	_ *As some sites closed ("mobile Sri Lankans" on commuting routines) I was led to others. But this time, it was clear for me I was setting the trajectories; the mobile body was me, but that was fine! How I perceived myself being perceived by others as insider/outsider, as I circulated in Naples, was becoming itself productive of ethnographic insights.*
*In **October 2020**, I left Naples on the eve of France's new set of restrictions and looming threats of Italian lockdown (which eventually did not materialize fully), while my partner left Edinburgh on the brink of UK's second wave. We met up where we hoped to wait out together Europe's second wave while being comfortable enough to write: at my parents' house, in central rural France from **November 2020 to January 2021**.* *Just before I left Italy, I was lucky to secure an online fieldsite : I would be taking Skype Sinhala classes with Sasanka, an English teacher who worked in a recently legalized Sinhalese-founded and English and Sinhalese-taught school in Napoli.* *In Italy the government crisis (leading to change in PM) further muddles up the schedule of possible announcement for extension of PhD programs and/or funding. How long will I have for fieldwork? For writing up? Hoping to get an extension, but there was no certainty.*	*1. Away physically from the field during a period initially planned out for fieldwork.* *2. Gap guilt* *I had collected too little empirical material ! (I told myself)* *3. Plans are bound to shift, as I can't know for sure when my thesis manuscript will be due.* _ *Online ethnography (my SInhala classes) became a new (surprisingly fertile) site for methodological experiment. I developed ties with Sasanka in ways that were intimately linked to the given historical moment: we were finding ourselves on commonly uncertain ground.* *I also dealt with the "gap guilt" this time by working on existing quantitative and historic data on Sri Lankans in Naples, using that time to amass this other set of "contextual knowledge" I would need for the final writing up.*

*In **February and March 2021** I was back in Naples, on fieldwork again for 2 months.* *Within those 2 months I managed finally to secure mobiles sites embodied in a few key interlocutors I met with frequently:* *- A young woman, Iyanthi, a neighbor of mine, who had just started a cake catering business. She had previously lived in Milano and had interesting comparative reflections on Naples* *- A young man, Dimuth, newly arrived in Naples, ex-cashier and occasional cook in a Sri Lankan take-away place.* *- An older man, my Sinhala teacher Sasanka, 20-years in Italy. A fervent Buddhist, he took me on visits to a new temple he and other people were managing. We continued our language classes as well.* *+ Interviews with new potential interlocutors. But soon, I had to interrupt those because Italy shifted from yellow to orange to red (during March), making meeting new people very tricky.* *So I stuck with people with whom trust had already been established.*	*1. Back and forth, in and out of the field.* *2. Covid-linked restrictions within the field itself: meeting possibilities scarce and 'risky'.* _ *Slowly understanding that my own straddling of insider/outsider positions, exacerbated in strange temporal and spatial ways by the pandemic, was effective in creating intimacy with interlocutors.* *Working on friendship, on reciprocity. That itself becomes a place to be investigated.* *What am I becoming an insider to? How is Naples and 'our' (my interlocutors, my own) relation to it involved in that?*
April 2021**. I visit my partner and his family in India.* *Between buying the tickets for Chennai and reaching there (on April 18th), India suddenly accelerated into its disastrous second COVID-19 wave. Strict lockdown was enforced and my visit was extended into **June.	*This is the most stressful period.*

Last minute notice! A three-month extension is made possible for my cycle. The dissertation draft is now due by December 2021.	
From July *I am back in Europe.* ***In mid-July 2021*** *I return to Naples for a two-week visit.* *August is spent in France writing up for the nearing submission.*	*From now on, fieldwork has become synonymous with spending time with my friends: Dimuth, Sasanka and Iyanthi.* *I record an interview with Sasanka in December.*
September 2021 to October 2021 Another two-week visit to Naples.	
December 2021 Another two-week visit to Naples, I'm back in France for the final race of writing up. After I've already submitted a manuscript draft, in February 2022, a new *proroga* gives me an extra 3 months to work: deadline now moved to May 2022.	
March and April 2022 Two short one-week visits to Naples. The rest of my time is spent between Edinburgh and France, writing up.	

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