“Solo la lotta paga”

Building Migrant Solidarity in the Neapolitan Commons

by

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Submitted to

Central European University

Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Sociology and Social Anthropology

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Vienna, Austria

2024

Abstract

Migration governance in Europe is a controversial topic. In times of growing right-wing populism, civil society initiatives try to counter the state's strategies of migration management, often described by mechanisms of surveillance, racialization and marginalization. This thesis explores how migrant rights are pursued in the context of an urban common in Naples. It is based on ethnographic fieldwork with Movimento Migranti e Rifugiati Napoli (MMRN), a social movement that works from inside one of the eight recognized self-managed squats in the city — Ex-OPG "Je so Pazzo".

This study traces the politics and mechanisms by which solidarity is strived for, the effects it has on the urban fabric and the tensions inherent to such political projects. In the dual space-making and subject-making strategies of the urban common in question, it locates a mutual aid-based approach to "bottom-up" migration governance that highlights the intertwining of migration and capitalism. The argument outlines how MMRN centres migrants in anti-capitalist struggles, framing migrant rights through the language of labour; a labour that is produced as disposable, commodified and illegalized. The space of the commons emerges, then, as a site for contesting the uneven distribution of inequality under neoliberal capitalism and for constructing new political subjectivities enabled by horizontal, continual enactments of mutualism. The objective of solidarity is, however, undercut by unaddressed internal power hierarchies and ambiguous external relations the movement struggles to work through.

This thesis contributes to discussions of the intersection of migration and urban studies by providing an ethnographic account of a (somewhat) successful migrant solidarity movement. By juxtaposing discussions on the construction of the commons with insights on the structuring of race and class, it seeks to imagine new ways of "being together" in the current political moment, in opposition to the extractive EU migration regime.

Acknowledgements

"Chi ha compagni non muore mai"

My deepest gratitude goes to my *compagni* at MMRN whose strategies and experiences completely changed the direction of my research within the first week. To those who welcomed me in Naples, accepted and responded to my untimely questions, who showed me that hope is possible and necessary — the debt is unrepayable.

I am incredibly thankful to my supervisors, Prem Kumar Rajaram and Claudio Sopranzetti, whose intellectual mark is clearly palpable in the way I think, much beyond this work. Thank you for pushing me to ask better questions, to be critical, to think with power in mind.

To my friends, old and new, in Lisbon and Vienna, who listened to my deliriums and provided much-needed support. To Caetano, who showed me so much tenderness. To João, Zé, Caio, Luca and Stuti. To Poppy, it is simply impossible to imagine writing this thesis without sharing insights, texts, experiences, anxieties and glimpses of beauty.

To my family for their unconditional support and encouragement.

This thesis was financially supported by the Student Union Fund for Support of Feminist/Queer/Antiracist Final thesis of the University of Vienna. Statements do not reflect the views of ÖH.

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List of Abbreviations

BPP: Black Panther Party

CAS: Centri di Accoglienza Straordinaria (Centres for Extraordinary Reception)

CPR: Centri di Pemanenza per I Rimpatri (Centres of Permanence for Repatriation)

Ex-OPG: Ex Ospedale Psichiatrico Giudiziario (Ex Psychiatric Judiciary Hospital)

LHD: Legal Help Desk

ILS: Italian Language School

MMRN: Movimento Migranti e Rifugiati Napoli

PdS: Permesso di Soggiorno (Residence Permit)

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Introduction

Within the first two days of being on field, what I set out to research changed. I climbed the stairs towards Ex-OPG "Je so Pazzo", an imposing self-managed squatted social centre that occupies an old criminal asylum. I was about to attend the first meeting of the migrant organization I was hoping to work with, hosted by the squat. Outside was a winding queue of maybe 60 people, slowly moving to present their documents to someone sitting down with an overhead lamp in the dark, writing people's names on an Excel sheet. It was Alessia[1], a legal operator of the Migrant Legal Help Desk (onwards LHD) compiling names for next day's appointments. When a tall, tanned young man came up to me I gestured towards the desk for him to put his name down on the appointment list. He smirked like someone who had been in that position many times over; introduced himself as Aamir and took me inside to start the meeting. He was born in Morocco, yes, but lived in Italy all his life. In short, I had just racially profiled him by assuming he was there for legal advice. The embarrassment didn't help me to present myself (and my research) to the assembly that night. To say I was nervous was an understatement; it's difficult to answer questions about what your research is about when you have barely started. Maybe some people were somewhat suspicious of my presence, but if I was there to help it mattered less: I started volunteering the next day.

This is how I was introduced to the "Ex-OPG way" of conducting assemblies, self-organizing, and relating to one another — in short, of doing politics. After that, most of my casual conversations moved seamlessly back and forth between struggles for migrant rights (which had brought me there in the first place) and questions of autonomy, "the commons" (or community-managed resources), the right to the city, inheritances of

[1] Throughout this thesis all names used were changed to pseudonyms, so as to protect the privacy of my interlocutors

austerity crisis and chronic underfunding. The political charge of migration issues was more powerful than I anticipated, and the constellation of struggles it connected with was much broader. In time, this nexus became the focus of my research and the entry point to an ethnographic exploration of how a migrant social movement goes about building solidarity from within a recognized "urban common" in Naples, southern Italy.

The fact that such a movement exists is hardly surprising; migrants' poor living conditions and labour exploitation are glaring in the urban landscape: from the people who are serving your *aperitivo*; to the homeless migrants whom I learned to recognize and accompany, to street vendors who would pack their stalls by the first sights of a police car, all those who could not get a residence permit because their employer would not formalize their contract. Fieldwork was full of rage. The life stories I heard were of course not casual, but a product of the ongoing intertwining between labour and power, between the global circulation of capital flows and of people as reflected in the (still) colonial European migration regime (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013). Still regarding the contradictions of capital organization that migration spotlights, the highly mediatized "European Migration Crisis" (2015-1016) triggered the surge in populist and xenophobic political discourse that aims at tightening border controls, asylum laws and regularization processes (Gupta & Virdee, 2018). In the Italian case, the political will to criminalize migration is particularly evident, apparent in the 2002 Bossi Fini law that introduced criminal sanctions for illegal migration (Colombo et al, 2002) and impossible to ignore with the proto-fascist Meloni government (Pianigiani, 2023).

The migrant social movement I examine in this thesis was born in 2015 exactly out of the poor living conditions in state-managed migrant reception centres, which galvanized already existing migrant political mobilization by putting it in conversation with the ongoing discussion of the "commons" in the city. Movimento Migranti e Rifugiati Napoli

(onwards MMRN) is a result of the collaborative work between a group of Malian migrants and the political community of ex-OPG "Je so Pazzo" (the aforementioned squatted social centre), engaged in denouncing the state of abjection migrants are relegated to under the care of the state in what was called an initiative of "*Controllo Popolare*"[2]. From there on out, MMRN continued to pursue an anti-racist, anti-capitalist and solidarity-based political agenda grounded in the struggle for migrant rights, from organizing public demonstrations to providing services aimed at strengthening migrant agency.

In a city marked by undeclared work, precarity and stark social inequalities, as well as an effervescent political climate agitated by numerous civil society organizations, my research aimed to understand how the political organization of the "commons" impacted how migrant rights are defended and pursued, as embodied by the relationship between MMRN and Ex-OPG "Je so Pazzo", a recognized common that accommodates a migrant social movement. I set out to investigate through which politics and which mechanisms these migrant "breathing spaces" (Tazzioli, 2021) are built, what kind of impact it has on the city and its population, along with the tensions and challenges that certainly emerge out of any alternative form of political organization. The wider, guiding question was: what could the space of the commons teach us about the connections between migrant struggles and wider strategies of governing, given its far-reaching political project?

This thesis seeks to answer these questions by drawing from data collected during fieldwork in Naples from January to late April 2024. Since I was interested in studying migrant-centred solidarity practices and political participation from "below", qualitative social research was the most adept to "unpack the category of migrants, explore its internal diversity, and problematize existing categories and boundary-making mechanisms" (Zapata-Barrero & Yalaz, 2018: 3). In this sense, I use the term migrant as an umbrella

[2] Translated to "Popular Control"

category for displaced people, making no distinction between refugees, (ir)regular migrants or asylum seekers. This is a deliberate choice following Malkki (1995) and Castles (2003), who defend that differences in categorization have more to do with legal frameworks than sociological differences. Moreover, this was the political practice category reclaimed by my informants to highlight the artificiality of administrative classifications, justifying my wording choice. Nonetheless, I would point out that constructing people as migrants in view of establishing a unified political category can have the unintended effect of reducing people's complex histories to their migration trajectory, in turn placing their definition in relation to Europe: I use this designation because people are produced as migrants or self-narrate as such.

The research design draws from approaches in collaborative and participatory research that aim to conduct research "*with* those people whose life-world and meaningful actions are under study" (Bergold & Thomas, 2012: 1; emphasis my own). To do research transparently, I presented myself and my research on my arrival, discussed my data collection methods and reported on my research throughout. In assembly, the movement would give me feedback and I tried my best to adapt to methods that would best represent the interests of the people that were the focus of my research. This required anonymizing all the interviews, refraining from taking notes in closed assemblies and not taking photographs of people who weren't in public places. Seeing my interlocutors as co-producers of research meant, to the best of my abilities, trying to move away from an extractivist approach and instead be of use to those I was working with. As a result of people's interest in the research, what ended up happening was that I would discuss with my interlocutors what I had read, or something I would find curious, trying to make the literature speak directly to those (and whose practices) it was trying to conceptualize.

I conducted participant observation with MMRN for over 3 months, volunteering in the Italian School for Migrants and the Legal Help Desk (onwards LHD). Part of my responsibilities in the LHD involved accompanying migrants to public institutions (from going to the hospital to the Immigration Office, the embassy or social security); as well as learning the ropes of the legal and bureaucratic procedures for asylum and migrant regularization processes. I participated in the movement's weekly meetings and Ex-OPG's assemblies, attended public demonstrations and helped to organize events and mobilize people for Ex-OPG/MMRN activities. This close participation allowed me to contact directly with migrants and other social actors involved in the movement and the squat, listen to what kinds of political discourses are present, through what mechanisms are decisions made and how or to what degree people participate. The bulk of my notes comes from informal interactions in these settings that I would not describe as full-fledged interviews. In addition, I volunteered at "Scugnizzo Liberato"[3], another squatted social centre with which ex-OPG sporadically collaborates, beneficial for providing me with some perspective on the inner works of another common in the city. There I spent time at the "solidarity wardrobe", which served as a free neighbourhood closet.

Following the participatory approach, I supplemented data collection with 18 in-depth loosely structured, conversational interviews with people with different roles and degrees of involvement within the movement, so as to capture migrant's "lived experience and perspective" (Fedyuk & Zentai, 2018: 174). Opening space for the voices of my interlocutors also allowed me to shift the focus of my research to include issues that mattered to them, namely as it pertained to migrants' experience of labour in Naples. In all, inside MMRN I interviewed 4 migrant cultural mediators, 3 Legal help desk trainees, 2 spokespersons, 2 legal operators, 1 Language School coordinator and 3 volunteers. I have

[3] This name roughly translates to "liberated street boy", making reference to the fact that it is an occupied juvenile prison

also interviewed 1 activist from Ex-OPG who is not part of the social movement and 2 activists from Scugnizzo Liberato who had previously worked in or with Ex-OPG activists. Since the movement is a collaboration between people of different origins, I sought to seek out participants that would reflect the racial and ethnic composition of the movement: out of 18 interviews, 10 are with Italians, 6 with migrants (from Mali, Ivory Coast, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Tunisia) 2 with second-generation "migrants" (from Tunisia and Morocco).

Lastly, claiming collaboration and participation compels a note on reflexivity and my positionality as a researcher, as well as a white woman with European citizenship. In the first weeks, I doubtedlessly felt like being a researcher was a hindrance as I could feel people choosing their words around me. With time and commitment, I felt this gap of trust was bridged. The fact that I was a student gave me some legitimacy while also making me seem non-threatening, since my work is of little outward projection. My status as a white European citizen was perhaps what was most difficult to bear: in Italy, I was also a migrant, but I didn't have to jump through any of the hoops that my interlocutors did due to my Portuguese passport. I tried to make myself useful by translating for migrants, talking to the police and accompanying them whenever they felt they might need company, or support, or simply a white witness.

If my political and personal values heavily guided the kind of research I set out to do, then engagement with my *compagni* only deepened my solidarities for migrants and their rights, as well as my commitment to thinking through something better. My intention to shed light on the work carried out by MMRN, as shaped by the political framework of Ex-OPG, goes in the direction of locating entry points for systemic change with the potential for immediate material consequences. The critiques I point out are meant to wrestle with the power dynamics at play and contribute to the thorough self-critique I appreciated during my fieldwork.

The following chapters grapple with the challenges, potentials and contradictions that present in such a project/place. The first sets out to contextualize the city and the debate around the commons, while the second focuses on migrant rights and how they are understood and fought for through the prism of MMRN. The closing chapter seeks to cross these perspectives to investigate how solidarity is built, with what impact and what faultlines.

Chapter 1. "Solo a Napoli"[4] — Ex-OPG, The City and its Commons

A month into fieldwork, Ex-OPG "Je so Pazzo"5 held a series of open assemblies to collectively discuss the past and future of the squatted social centre, which was about to enter a time of transition. In the previous year, it had earned a 16 million euro grant from PNRR, Italy's National Recovery and Resilience Plan, supported by European funds (European Council of Ministers, 2021) that aimed at urban regeneration and social inclusion. It cemented the role of the structure as a relevant city-making actor — but also raised questions about the relations between occupied squats and public institutions. The social inquiry, planning and application process had already been carried out in a similarly co-produced and bottom-up fashion (Commons Napoli, 2023). Now, with the money in hand, the questions were different: what is the role of squat for the neighborhood and the city that holds it? How does accepting public funds for the (re)construction of a recognized urban common change its internal dynamic? What does it mean "to develop the common good"? Develop for whom, on who's standards, and to what end? What is the path moving forward?

The assembly was already well into the usual half-hour delay. I had come earlier to help in the Italian Language School organized by Movimento Migranti e Rifugiati Napoli (which I will get to later), and I was waiting around with other volunteers. We set up a circle of benches in the courtyard where the walls read "There is always space for everybody". The mural caricatures an assembly with talking heads and speech balloons, almost mirroring the buzz of people settling in. The assembly sketched out a roadmap for the challenges ahead, fleshing out imaginaries, making the squat's political priorities explicit and recounting their collective story from the moment doors were opened. It ended after

[4] "Only in Naples"
[5] Ex-OPG stands for Ex-Ospedale Psichiatrico Giudiziario, or Ex Judicial Psychiatric Hospital — a criminal asylum that was occupied in 2015.

almost 3 hours, clouded in cigarette smoke and February's harsh wind. The last intervention (made already standing up) came from Mario, one of the founders of both Ex-OPG and MMRN, perhaps the person who taught me the most about the organization. Mario is much taller than everyone else in the room, with a shaved head that contributes to his stern look. He is in his early thirties but is aged by the perpetual dark circles under his eyes. He wraps up the meeting in 2 sentences, summing up Ex-OPG's mission: "What we have created in the past years is a space in which we have tried to respond to the needs of the people, of the city's proletariat which is more or less everybody. And you see it here clearly: in the afterschool, the food bank, the clinic. And you see it also in the faces of everyone that comes in and wants to give away their own time to sociality, to the collective, while not being communists, not being socialists, not having a special vocation to be activists. In the end, we all come to meet each other, to think together, to create a new laboratory of experimentation."

The story of Ex-OPG and all of their branches is rooted in the longstanding debate around *commons* in Italian Radical thought, as well as a broader understanding of Napolitan strategies of urban governance. As such, to grasp the work carried out by MMRN further ahead, it is necessary beforehand to survey the squatted social centre from which it operates, along with its role in contentious urban politics in a city so deeply entangled with its own imaginary. This chapter excavates the establishment of Ex-OPG as a recognized urban common in Naples, its practices and political project. It brings into focus its relationship to the city, clarifying the Napolitan contribution to *commoning* in Italy and beyond while accounting for the limitations and challenges that are always present in these spaces. I centre 2008 as a watershed year in my analysis, given it was the year that kickstarted the European sovereign debt crisis and shaped political mobilizing in a way that still resonates strongly today (Mattoni & Vogiatzoglou, 2014). In this section, I intend to

lay the groundwork to comprehend not only the ambiguous relationships that MMRN maintains with local institutions, but also the broad political framework in which it operates.

The Commons

In the past decades, debates on the commons have reached and then gone beyond intellectual circles, challenging the pessimist perspective first set out by Hardin (Borchi, 2018). He was the one to popularize the concept of "the tragedy of the commons", according to which unregulated access to a common good — like pastures held in common — inevitably leads to over-exploitation, destroying the value altogether (Hardin, 1968). It turns out, however, that catastrophe is not certain and privatization, as argued by Hardin, is not the only solution[6].

In Italy, the commons appeared as a political issue in the late 1960s and the "hot autumn" of the 1970s (Hardt & Virno, 2006), when Leftist fervent was particularly high. Fleshed out in Marxist theory and operationalized in urban contexts, several social movements coalesced under this umbrella term, albeit with different understandings. Here, the definition of "beni comuni"[7] expanded from natural resources to productive assets held in common (such as water, or social space, culture, etc), but it gained new traction in combating neoliberal dispossession in the post-2008 crisis. Positioning itself against austerity measures and the privatization of the times, this form of radical politics struggled for collective democratic participation and self-government (Vesco & Kioupkiolis, 2022).

Particularly significant actors in this non-institutional way of "doing" politics are "self-managed social centres" (SCCs), usually squats that weave together underground

[6] In fact, the argument for autonomous, local and collective management of common-pool resources earned Elinor Ostrom the 2009 Economics Nobel Prize, taking examples from communities all over the world (Ostrom, 1990)
[7] "Common Goods"

culture with various strands of left-wing politics, providing alternative and non-commercial services autonomously, frequently in antagonism with local institutions (Van Der Steen & Van Hoogenhuijze, 2014). Although flexible and contingent, the leitmotif in these initiatives is the intention to 'create a model of constituent democracy in which differences are able to interact and together create new institutions: against global capital (...) for access to and self-management of the common' (Hardt & Negri, 2017). Retained from this tradition are 3 key points: the localist bent, an expansive understanding of the exploited/working class beyond the worker-citizen of 20th-century revolutions and, to match, an enlarged view of what counts as resistance (Alcoff & Alcoff, 2015). What Negri is trying to get at with "constituent power" is the construction of autonomy of exploited classes by refashioning new social relations, outside the traditional party-form. In the crisis-ridden context of Southern Europe, SCCs aim toward autonomy by combining political contestation with the construction of non-capitalist forms of (re)production (Della Porta, 2024; Roussos & Malamidis, 2021). In practice, this means generating bottom-up solutions that respond to local problems.

Ex-OPG fits this definition of the "commons as containers of practices, epistemologies and pedagogies that constitute what has been called everyday politics" (Della Porta, 2024: 29). Alessia, one of MMRN's legal operators explains the interactions between practices and political demands: "social service helps you to get into contact with people's problems and to create demands, but it only makes sense when there is a political project that gives it shape"[8]. This echoes the repeated motto of "theory and praxis", making the members' Marxist imprint clear. While SCCs locate their impact differently, Ex-OPG defines their field of action at the level of the city, where claims are developed and realized in conversation with local public institutions: against tourism-driven displacement and gentrification, the organization demands quality public space, affordable housing,

[8] Quote extracted from Interview with Alessia, April 2024

centrality, access to culture, leisure and free time. The use of these spaces both as cultural centres and infrastructures for political mobilization makes them important nodes in experimental forms of urban development, though not necessarily harmoniously.

It is in this combative capacity that Naples has, in the past decade, emerged as a laboratory for social innovation in Southern Europe (Ostanel, 2020). It seems almost counterintuitive that a city often associated with "Camorrismo[9]", haunted by a permanent state of crisis, lagging behind economically developed cities in the North has been able to successfully implement a model for "urban civic use" (Vesco, 2022) that stands as one of the most exciting promises of experimental, participatory urbanism in the country. The "Naples model" relies on a "creative use of the law" set on the public recognition of "declarations of civic and collective urban use" that are written by social centres and then recognized by the municipality, a process heavily mediated by lawyers (informed by a long tradition of legal scholars in the city). This complex relation has been in the making since 2011, when the City Council altered Municipal Statutes to introduce the juridical category of *commons* as one of the "goals and fundamental values" of the municipality (Comune di Napoli, n.d.). [10]

Dual Conceptualization of the Rebel City

Naples has been dubbed a "tuff city" (Dines, 2012), both to live in and to conceptualize. It seems trapped between two images: one, a chronic procession of economic and social problems, the likeness of the woefully underdeveloped South in comparison to Milan, Turin or Bologna; a hindrance to modern Italy (Moe, 2023). Throughout the 20th century, it has been characterized by its dependency on the central

[9] In reference to the "Camorra", the Neapolitan organized crime mafia

[10] This legal category includes water, beaches and all the goods and services that are "assets of collective belonging (…) removed from the logic of exclusive use" (Comune di Napoli, n.d.). Its broadness facilitates the recognition of social centres when they frame the functioning and scope of their activities in this light, through the declarations mentioned above.

state and a clientelist political class, if one isn't directly discussing organized crime, nepotism and filth. On the flip side, the "uniqueness" of Naples was captivating for the likes of Walter Benjamin and Pasolini, who saw in it an alluring "imperfect modernity" (Dines, 2012: 4) that I would argue is still there. Naples is "an overgrown village", with whores and Madonnas on the same alleyway, conversations half-spoken in gesture, the constant hum of reckless *motoroni*[11] and stalls of contraband tobacco. But it breathes a sense of pride in its intellectual tradition, tied to Southern Illuminism and the prestige of its universities. I heard the phrase "only in Naples" multiple times a day, a sense of hammered-in uniqueness that was as easily applied to the city's cuisine as to the general inefficiency of the public offices I was unlucky enough to wait in.

I was reminded constantly that "Naples isn't Italy"; is it something else that was swallowed by the unified Republic but that refuses to be digested. Both politicians and social scientists have been interested in the "Southern question" (Gramsci, 2012) since the unification, working to reverse the stereotypes of Southern Italy but not without underlining the singularity of its cultural traditions and local identity, the unbelievable vitality of its social movements and the transformative potential they hold not only for Naples but for the country itself. Despite this discourse ambivalence being constructive, in the sense that locals' actions are at least partially informed by these images, it fundamentally misses the mark by not seeing Naples as an "ordinary city", following Robinson's conceptualization (Robinson, 2013). Robinson's postcolonial critique holds water for Naples, in which Western developmentalism and modernization do not quite "fit" as well as in other Western cities. Learning to see the urban as historically contingent allows at once to forego Neapolitan exceptionalism and to facilitate the flow of knowledge and power to other cities. Any city's urban development is embedded in its socioeconomic,

[11] scooters

political and cultural trajectory, but that does not reduce its political potential to particularism.

As such, Naples' condition of subalternity allows for the prevalence of the "Southern Question" to be read through a postcolonial lens, connecting Naples to "other Souths of the world" (Sciarelli, 2023; Orizzonti Meridiani, 2014). The point is not to blindly equate Naples with the Global South, as it would flatten huge inequalities and prove contrary to the theoretical direction Robinson is trying to take against binomial North/South divides. Instead, the aim is to see the histories of exploitation and extraction, discourses of racialization, backwardness and developmentalism as instances of the "coloniality of power" (Conelli, 2022). This caveat will have important repercussions concerning migrants' experiences of post/colonial racism and exploitation in the city.

In Naples, the movement for the commons was re-ignited by the austerity measures triggered by the 2008 crisis, interpreted as yet another example of systematic marginalization of the Italian South. When I asked my informants about the mushrooming of SCCs at this time, their answers revolved around this image of the city's population as "subaltern", marginal in the Gramscian sense, rebelling against the central government that never provided as it did in the North. A friend mentioned in passing that "Naples has all mutualist activities not because we are rich but because we are poor… If the State, if the Municipality does not guarantee social services, it's up to us [referring to Ex-OPG] to meet these social needs that you see the city has."[12]

After the anti-globalization movement of the 1990s and in the aftermath of the austerity crisis, bottom-up networks and groups reacted against the ruthless privatization of public goods, environmental degradation and erosion of public spending; instead appealing for new forms of urban sociability and reevaluation without falling into tourist profiteering.

[12] Interview from Cesare, March 2024

The 2010s political landscape saw a wave of student protests and occupations with rippling effects for social movements everywhere. In 2011, Luigi De Magistris, an independent politician who based his campaign around championing the commons, was elected mayor of Naples. In the same year, Italy held a water referendum, in which 95% of voters decided against the privatization of the water supply, successfully introducing the claim for commoning in public debate (Muehlebach, 2016; Muehlebach, 2023). Civil society was quick to take advantage of the political fervor, grounded in the city's heritage of leftist organizing that can still be felt, even if mobilization has since died down. Once, walking home from a night out hosted in an occupied University wing, a fellow activist told me "If there is a city that can get rid of Fascism, it's Naples; it belongs to the people. And we've already done it once [referring to the 4 days of Naples]![13]"

In contrast to other cities that later "betrayed" the referendum, in 2013 Naples re-municipalized and democratized its water with ABC Napoli[14]. Since his election, De Magistris set up the only Department of Commons in the country, whose mission is to identify and promote collective management of commons goods, which the city defines as "the tangible and intangible assets of collective belonging that are managed in a shared, participatory process" (Bauwens, 2016). The symbolic force of this approach has been reinforced by a series of resolutions that recognize some of the city's occupied spaces as "commons", enlarging its definition to include the public use and self-management of public spaces (Vesco, 2022: 127). The Naples network of Commons, formalized in 2015, currently recognizes 8 SCCs (Rete dei Beni Comuni di Napoli, n.d.), of which Ex-OPG "Je so Pazzo" is one of the most visible.

[13] Spontaneous uprising of Neapolitan and Italian against resistance against Nazi forces in September 1943, before the arrival of Allied forces in October.
[14] ABC stands for "Acqua Bene Comune", translated to "Water as a Common Good".

Figure 1: "Il Cavone", the road that leads to Ex-OPG

Figure 2: Buildings in the Materdei Neighbourhood where Ex-OPG is located

Inside Ex-OPG "Je so Pazzo"

Evolving through and with leftist politics, commoning organizations most poignant inspirations take from the heritage of ICP's *Case del Popolo*[15] and *Neighbourhood Committees* heralded by Autonomia Operaia (Worker's Autonomy) (Mudu, 2013). Ex-OPG, our case in point, was born out of an illegal occupation in 2015 by a university collective described to me as "communist orphans of party", and "children of the Brigate Rosse"[16]. They took over a former criminal asylum of over 9.000 m2 that had been abandoned since 2008 and was in the process of being sold off in the private market as part of austery measures (Cooperative City, 2019). This initial act of illegality was meant to obtain "what has been

[15] Houses of the People

[16] The "Red Brigades" were a militant far-left organization that seeked to incite a popular uprising and the collapse of the Italian state through armed struggle, active in 1970s.

denied" (Mudu, 2013: 68) in the face of entrenching commodification of every kind of resource. The structure is still marked by its carceral architecture: cells are open for guided visits where you can see the chains used to lock convicts to their beds. Activists take pride in their anti-psychiatric and anti-carceral stand, in the fact that "where there was suffering, we have made freedom". The name "Je so Pazzo" (I am crazy in Neapolitan) is a nod to this sentiment: "If outside is normal, and normal is the world of dispossession, precarity and discrimination… then you can say we're a bunch of lunatics". Worth noting also that it is an expression borrowed from a famous Pino Daniele song of the same name, again pointing to their Neapolitan identity[17].

The inspirations most often referenced are the Zapatista Army and the Black Panther Party, connected to practices of mutual aid and collective decision-making. The latter is surely the most prominent inspiration, from which the activities are borrowed, as well as its contribution to the analysis of race and class (something MMRN will adopt even with the critiques it carries). Like the "lumpen" emphasis in BPP, Ex-OPG works with migrants, women, and homeless people to form social bonds between all social classes oppressed in capitalist production and reproduction (Hayns, 2018) — it is in this sense that many people describe its political mission as an "alliance of subalterns". The operationalization of Gramsci's understanding of "counter-hegemonic power" rooted in the public sphere and the very use of his terminology makes Gramsci's influence hard to overstate. This is where I would locate the Neapolitan contribution: crossing insights from Italian Marxism on autonomy and commoning with the Black Radical tradition on the conceptualization of race and class, offering new avenues to think antagonism, as well as the "possibility and practicality of tearing shit up and building something new" (Harney & Moten, 2013: 152-153). MMRN, which underscores the role of race in structural violence

[17] The song's protagonist reincarnates Masaniello, the leader of a revolt of the Neapolitan people against the Spanish in the 17th century. He declares himself crazy, and so free to speak up against the status quo, and ends the song by urging everyone else to do the same.

and seeks to build autonomous transcultural solidarity, is perhaps where this cross-contamination is most clear.

Figure 3: Poster for MMRN's 2023 demonstration in Naples, using the black panther symbol

Figure 4: Poster for Upcoming 2024 MMRN's demonstration, using the Black Panther Party Logo

As it stands, Ex-OPG holds 9 "branches" of activity, working under the same banner but somewhat independently of each other. They include an after-school program, food bank, clinic gym, theatre, Chamber of Labour (legal assistance), Anti-carceral Group, MMRN and CAU (university collective). One can describe it as operating "beyond the law" (Mudu, 2013: 70), with little to no official organizational charter and a high turnover of participants that would be hard to manage otherwise, since 500 people traverse the space weekly. While approaches differ, every activity is self-produced, self-managed and completely free. However, the provision of social services is not intended to substitute the welfare state, but push it toward action (Ostanel, 2020: 140)., borrowing again from BPP[18]. Alessia tells me "I'm not here to do anyone's job for free, but *I am* here to show to the government that other solutions are possible. And that we know it because we are constantly testing them on our own, without any funding. So if we can do it autonomously why can't you?"[19].

Principles of self-government and inclusivity are worked through in internal assemblies, the main instrument by which collective action is enacted. It's worth noting that the general sense is not that full-fledged, "face-to-face" democracy has been "achieved", but that it's a moving goalpost that the organization strives for and experiments with. Decisions are made in consensus, meaning that outcomes must make everyone at least comfortable enough to not block the decision. The point is to encourage open dialogue, but I'd say it works less well to embolden dissent and differing opinions. I got hit over the head with the expressions of "socializing our experiences" and "making our reasonings common" anytime assemblies got overly quiet or the same people intervened more than twice. During a discussion on resistance, an older *compagna* reminded

[18] The perspective that the government is responsible to provide for people's material needs is directly taken from the Black Panther Party 10 Point Program, which then found its combative materialization in the BPP's Community Survival Programs.
[19] Quote extracted from an Interview with Alessia, April 2024.

those less inclined to participate that "if we don't socialize our experiences, this becomes a theoretical class and not a debate. If you don't share, it's impossible to think together and to decide our next steps. We need to know how these structures of oppression affect all of us differently so we know what we're fighting for and who we're fighting with". So, how are these principles put into action then?

Common assemblies are usually preceded by the circulation of a document that sums up "the state of the discussion" so that proposals and critiques can be discussed beforehand in each branch and people can feel heard without intervening in the main assembly. In MMRN's weekly meeting, the movement would only decide on a particular standing after having dedicated assemblies to political discussion that would include common readings and debating exercises aimed at involving all the participants, especially those affected by the issues on the table. At the beginning of the year, MMRN took several assemblies to discuss Islamophobia and the veneer of secularism in Europe, making it a point to listen to the assembly's Muslims and make a political stand that would not alienate their spiritual experience and cultural background. Before closing on a decision, the person writing the meeting's minutes would ask if there was something else to ask, a voice we hadn't heard or a perspective we might be forgetting about.

Is this enough to deal with structural hierarchies of class, race gender or simply political experience? What I can say is that it's a recognized tension that participants tried to work against, but that is nevertheless present: those with more political experience and/or who know occupy more space tried to pace themselves, encourage others to speak beyond experiential accounts, to intervene in political reasoning. But what ends up happening is that some people contribute with their experience and others with their politics, resulting in an uneven power distribution. Consequently, some people feel more "commoners" than others. In my interviews, I heard "us in Ex-OPG" from some older

comrades and later "they in Ex-OPG" from more recent participants, so surely not all contributions are valued the same.

Commoning Ambiguously

Tensions are not only internal. To start, the cultural role played by urban commons can counterintuitively produce gentrification, seeing that the experience of "authentic" cultural vitality contributes to the city's branding, encouraged by Naples' development plan. The search for "experiential tourism" triggered the over-tourism boom of the last couple of years, resulting in the expulsion of inhabitants from the city centre and sharpening of social inequalities that were already biting before (Huber, 2011; Esposito, 2023: 5). Then, perhaps the most persisting fear of the alternative left — that expanding (through engagement with state actors or simply due to the sheer number of people traversing the space) will come at the cost of their radical political identity. For the particular case of Ex-OPG, the reverse is also true: in 2018, the squat founded the party "Potere al Popolo!", an electoral alternative meant to aggregate the extra-parliamentary left. Some anti-system critical voices resented that they had "sold out" to electoral politics, while others were displeased by embedding leftist "indoctrination" in mutualist activities that they saw as beyond politics altogether.

The paradigm of the commons is a central aspect of the "New Municipalism" pursued by Naples, a strategy of urban governance that relies on emancipatory political action being carried out by civil society to produce new urban dynamics in a constant tension between collaboration and conflict with state actors (Bianchi, 2022: 2) — what Vesco calls "the poetics of Irony" (Vesco, 2022). This space of tension can be effective in redistributing decision-making powers and even contaminating public institutions with self-government principles (Ostanel, 2022: 139): on one hand, squats benefit from resources

and recognition that can be provided by the municipality to scale up their activities, while the municipality can "cash in" on their connection to civil society and uphold their symbolic capital as "champions of the commons" (Bollier, 2012). On the other, commoning organizations can be enter and be affected by the logics of institutions to ensure funding, effectively killing their contentious, radical character. It is a constant tug-of-war.

Under De Magistris, the municipality moved toward convergence with grassroots organizations through the creation of institutions that combine institutional powers with proximity-based democratic practices learned from *commoning* experiences (Pinto et al., 2022: 12). These municipal institutions, not without mixed feelings from both sides, can be read as a strategy to facilitate urban regeneration, with the benefit of promoting a benevolent view of the administration that "allows" power sharing — particularly relevant in an urban context where top-down developmental strategies are hard to implement due to Naples's chronically underfunded and indebted condition. Moreover, this approach was further marketed as a city brand: De Magistris construed Naples as a "Rebel City" (Magistris & Ricca, 2017), using the model of co-governance to attract funding and visibility from tourism and EU funding. Politics of convergence also fell under criticism for justifying the retreat of the state in areas like cultural production, externalizing the provision of services at no cost to the local government. Since the mayor changed in 2021 to Gaetano Manfredi, power relations have become colder, as the current mayor is not so interested in developing this approach to urban governance.

In short, "disjunctive conjunction", that is, a form of flexible institutionalization in which state and civil society oscillate between selective alliance to varying degrees of mutual criticism, is what describes the Neapolitan model (Hardt & Negri, 2012 as quoted in Vesco & Kioupkiolis, 2022). Its most glaring limitation concerns the shortcomings of the new

institutions meant to bridge these worlds together, since institutions for and with the commons were never fully integrated into the city government and maintain few powers outside consultancy and public representation (Pinto et al., 2022: 14). Due to the purposefully barebones legal and institutional framework, this approach is ultimately at the mercy of the political will of succeeding offices, which can further disentangle and disempower these new institutions from the wider structure of government. Alternatively, incorportating them into the Municipal Institute would set up the city's longlasting commitment to the commons, making the "Neapolitan Model" more stable in the long term.

A Social Movement out of an Urban Common

Movimento Migranti e Rifugiati Napoli was born during the first months of the occupation in May 2015, when activists were sleeping in the asylum to prevent a police eviction. This was the year that irregular migrant arrivals surpassed the one million mark, about four times more than the previous year (European Commission & European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2016). The volume of entries and the scale of the humanitarian crisis made the "migration crisis" dominate public debate and political discourse in Italy and Greece, where the majority of arrivals disembarked.

In May, Mario was attending a manifestation in solidarity with a workers' strike as a representative of Ex-OPG. Through the crowd, he spotted a group of people protesting with suitcases in hand. They got to talking and the group explained that they were Malian migrants who had been expelled from an Extraordinary Migrant Reception Centre (CAS) a few days before, losing their permits. Mario recounts that "From there everything started; they explained to us that other world in another Napoli of which us, comrades, knew next

to nothing about"[20]. They joined the occupation at Ex-OPG, since they had nowhere to stay. From daily cohabitation emerged a "path of struggle", that is, an outline of organized actions and strategies to achieve social and political change focusing on immigration and migrant reception in Naples. Immediate demands concerned access to resident permits and living conditions in reception centres, which were so squalid that rioting against them had triggered the expulsion of this group of people.

This was how the first "Controllo Popolare"[21] was born: migrants and Ex-OPG activists visited about thirty reception centres around Naples to, unfortunately in most cases, denounce the living conditions they witnessed. Overpopulated dormitories, unsafe buildings, irregular meals, no medical, psychological, social or legal services whatsoever. Many people were still wearing the clothes they had arrived in Italy in. Seeing that they were meant to accommodate "extraordinary" migrant arrivals as a support to the main public reception system (European Commission, 2021), CAS were often managed by private companies that would, in short, use public funds fraudulently: they would cash in on money that was supposed to guarantee basic living conditions for migrants, but simply not provide them, or provide them in unsafe or irregular conditions (Ministero Dell'Interno, 2021).

This was what catalyzed both the political and social service activity of what came to be MMRN. On one hand, they were meeting migrants in reception centres, establishing internal assemblies and getting to know their complaints and demands, to organize demonstrations and pressure the municipality to provide the services they are meant to. On the other, the logic of Ex-OPG was never to rely on the goodwill of the State, so they organized the services these centres wouldn't offer. They set up legal assistance, language

[20] Quote extracted from an interview with Mario, March 2024
[21] This form of popular control borrows directly from the Black Panther Party practice of "copwatching", reverting the gaze of surveillance onto the state.

classes, connected migrants to cultural mediation services, medical clinics, social assistance services that would accompany them to public institutions (Movimento Migranti e Rifugiati Napoli, 2021). And this is the heart of MMRN today.

As a "branch" of activity of Ex-OPG, the movement shares many of the same readings of political reality, articulating the struggle for migrant rights under a more-or-less unified political project. Hassan, the movement's spokesperson, declared during the squat's birthday celebration assembly: "We work from the understanding that the rights of immigrated people are rights that pertain to a social class. For us, fighting for the extension or guarantee of certain rights is a form of class struggle, like everything else we do here".

Chapter 2. "Tutto per Tutti[22]" — An Overview of Movimento Migranti e Rifugiati Napoli

What we talk about when we talk about Migrant Rights

In the previous chapter, I offered an account of the context in which MMRN developed, from the compounding crisis of the early 2010s to the participatory approach of Ex-OPG "Je so Pazzo". But concluding on the emergence of MMRN as a "branch" of an urban common still leaves questions unanswered. If we want to be skeptical: why should migrant rights matter for social struggle in the first place? And if we don't: how are they related to other struggles and wider socio-economic regimes? What can we do about it? The present chapter addresses these questions through the prism of this particular social movement: how they define migrant rights, interpret incoming migration and answer the questions that migration poses for state sovereignty and labour, with the aim of political mobilization. To this effect, I detail its internal functioning, social composition and offered social services and political reasonings, to see what is in and out of view.

In policy-making and academic production, politicians and researchers handle migrant issues as a puzzle to solve, something that pertains to a specific group imagined to live among "us", an already integrated society that only grants membership to deserving "outsiders" (Shinkel, 2018). This logic uncritically reproduces methodological nationalism (Çaglar & Schiller, 2018), seeing a "host" society (normally Western) as a unified whole, bounded by and congruent with the nation-state. Besides greatly erasing "internal" inequalities, it perceives the migrant as an inherent "other" to be governed, to be integrated until he can be trusted to participate in the host society described as modern, developed, civil. Even after integration or citizenship, the mark of othering does not completely fade.

[22] "Everything for Everyone"

It is in this sense that Khosravi talks about the persistence of the border, starting with his own experience of being singled out by racializing border controls. Despite holding a Swedish passport, he argues that being systematically held out at the border functions to remind him of "his place in the racial hierarchy" (Khosravi, 2019: 418). In the same text, Khosravi mentions this sort of record-keeping as an instrument of the European state to maximize the visibility of the native "other", thus regulating the mobility of "undesirable groups" (ibid: 413).

Following the call to denaturalize and decolonize how we name and handle migration issues (Amelina, 2022), it is important to discuss migrant rights are something more than merits granted to strangers. Instead, they are entitlements owed to those who are *already* here, part of the European social and economic fabric. Before anything else, migrants are governed by their position in the capitalist system, even when they are outside the space of citizenship. As such, migrants are part of power structures that hierarchize gender, race and class in that the overlap of these structures greatly determines the value of their labour (Rajaram, 2018). Migrants, and especially working-class migrants, correlate to women, racialized folks, disabled and other internal ethnic, religious or sexual minorities through the *common marginalizations* that underpin neoliberal governance (Rajaram, 2015b).

Shining light on the intertwining of oppressions encourages to think about migrant struggles "laterally" (Tazzioli, 2019), that is, in connection to other contestations and potential Gramscian "subaltern alliances": in that they are subjects under capitalism, migrant struggles are undoubtedly linked to the labour market and welfare state, human rights and borders, citizenship and sovereignty, to the right to the city and "becoming common" (Agustín & Jørgensen, 2016: 223-233). Restrictive immigration policies and austerity measures aimed at the poor are two facets of the same political project, one that employs the whole mosaic of differences as a strategy for capital accumulation.

MMRN articulates this connection through the language of labour, thinking of migrants explicitly as a segment of the working class — albeit, admittedly, with specificities. Most notably, the struggle for a legal residence permit is understood as a precondition for accessing labour rights and ultimately, a dignified life. This point was repeatedly emphasized in my months supporting the Legal Help Desk, learning the ropes of legal procedures for asylum and migrant regularization: getting "*the* permit" means leaving the illegal labour market. In my first days, I asked Mario, a seasoned legal operator, why the permit was so important: "The struggle for a residence permit is also a wage struggle, because obtaining it means being able to access better wage conditions through a contract. It's about the labour contract yes, but then it's also about accessing a series of social security services: unemployment, healthcare, holidays, sick leave, collective negotiation conditions and the possibility to unionize". To use Nancy Fraser's terminology, labour is the link that makes visible connections between different forms of oppression, exploitation and dispossession (Fraser, 2022). And it is the key term through which this migrant movement articulates race, gender and class.

Migration Governance in "cracked casings": Subjection as seen from below

In "The Making of Migration", Tazzioli (2019) maintains that migration is a fundamentally dual process in the reconfiguration of Europe that must be read from two simultaneous viewpoints. The first focuses on governmental practices, political discourses, legal procedures and knowledge production that model the flow of migration in a top-down manner, which she names subjection, indicative of the Foucauldian weight of power. The second describes the way migrants appropriate, subvert and surpass the categories and opportunities offered to them to create political subjectivity and possibilities of resistance, in line with the tactics of the bottom-up social transformation (Montagna, 2012). This mirrored phenomenon Tazzioli terms subjectivation and it is how I would describe the

movement's scope of action. To comprehend the rationale behind the work carried out by MMRN, it is crucial first to understand what they are "up against", that is, the web of actors involved in multi-level Migration governance and the effects it produces in migrants' lives.

In keeping with centring the migrant experience while placing migrants and non-migrants in the same analytical field, I disentangle the multiple levels of unequal and uneven power structures through a multiscalar approach (Çağlar & Schiller, 2021). This method highlights the mutual constitution of the macro-forces of globalizing capital accumulation and the micro-scale of daily life, as relational hierarchies that interpenetrate each other to shape interconnected social relations in the same global system. This interconnectedness in space and time, however, does not mean that scales are neatly nested into one another. Beyond the global city, "cracked casings" (Sassen, 2001) of traditional power containers disrupt the fantasy of smooth transnational flows trickling down into the city, neighbourhood or social centre. Instead, friction — as envisioned by Tsing (Tsing, 2005) — is the name of the game: Naples is connected to other "rebel cities" bypassing the Italian state; civil society jumps scales by filing complaints against Italy for deaths at sea, pointing to the prevalence of international law (Gahr, 2023; Tondo, 2022).

In a world of discontinuous connections, mobility of labour is much more cumbersome than circulation of capital. Thinking from the standpoint of the border, Mezzadra and Nielson (2013) encourage us to think of capitalism not as a homogenous social field but as a heterogeneous one described by a proliferation of borders. In their view, the border becomes an instrument of accumulation by dispossession that does the continual work of differentiation. To this degree, they introduce the concept of *multiplication of labour*, which underscores the expansion of methods of monitoring and control that hierarchize labour power in different gradations of differential inclusion. From this lens,

"Fortress Europe" does not express the flexibility of the European migration regime that aims more at filtering, delaying in time and channeling in space migratory flows, rather than simply blocking entry (Mezzadra & Nielson, 2013: 165-166). The objective is a system that creates and captures a mass of cheap, disposable, immobilizable and commodified labour.

Moreover, "who" receives the brunt of this process is not incidental, as a widened conceptualization of the working class attends to questions of race and gender that are constitutive of the heterogenization of the workforce. As Angela Davis put it, capitalism is always racial capitalism (Clemons, 2020). Race is useful to capitalism in that it naturalizes the unequal social relations by which it devalues and dispossesses certain groups and their labour, an integral instrument in differentiation (Melamed, 2015; Bhattacharyya, 2018). In fact, analysis of contemporary migration must start with the cycles of dispossession (Miraftab, 2014) that accompany the uneven development of the capitalist mode of production across the last half millennium, which resulted in compounding inequalities in Global North and South relations (Castles, 2003). In Europe, the exploitable labour of racialized migrants is, in many ways, the worst image of what all labour could be (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013: 243-277); a historically constitutive "other" without which European Modernity cannot be recounted (Rodríguez, 2018: 4).

To take on a very common example of how the logic of capitalist dispossession becomes embedded in the process of migrant illegalization and exploitation: many of the migrants from Bangladesh and Pakistan that came to the LHD were technically in legal standing. They had come with an entry visa for subordinated labour, which must be transformed into a resident permit upon arrival by presenting confirmation of the labour contract by an employer. The issue is that when migrants arrive (after having paid around 10.000€ to migration management companies), the company they were contracted through disappears: the address doesn't exist, no one picks up calls, the job and accommodation

that they were promised isn't there. They are completely unsupported with a family that is counting on their salary. Because the job "they came here for" doesn't exist, the only option for legalization is to file an international protection request (which they can't do until their entry visa has expired). This legal grey area accumulates capital in a number of ways: through the migration infrastructure that overly charges to "bring" migrants to Italy, through "rent-seeking" in "middlemen" services that prey on migrants' precarious legal and housing situations and finally through the exploitation of migrant labour when they arrive, since they are pushed to find a job in the illegal market.

The common EU migration and asylum policy (alongside auxiliary institutions and regulations) is perhaps one of the most sophisticated systems in compounding European histories of colonialism and reproducing the image of the racialized "other" — all under the neutral, non-political veneer of "managing migration" humanely and democratically (Pécoud, 2021). The recently narrowly approved European Migration Pact (European Commission, 2024) signals the political will to channel and manage arrivals through an ever-growing array of migrant surveillance and data collection. The euphemisms of "curbing illegal migration" and "deterring bogus asylum claims" will serve to multiply instances of racial profiling, heighten the chance of detention and human rights violations, as well exacerbate the conditionality (to be read: deportability) of migrants (Genova, 2017a). In addition, accelerated asylum and return procedures combined with the externalization of Europe's borders (Genova, 2017b) and the convenient use of "crisis" regulations severely limit migrants' access to asylum and even human rights — but might not even be very effective in removing migrants out of European territory. In Italy, "fast track asylum" is practically synonymous with the denial of international protection, but in 2022 fewer than 4.000 people were actually deported (Reuters, 2023).

Providing legal assistance was fraught with examples of the cruelties and Kafkaesque inefficacies of the European migration regime, calibrated to make people illegal or, at the very least, produce exasperatingly long waiting times that result in uncertain legal standing for months at a time. For example, we were assisting an Afghani man who escaped his country in 2021 when the Taliban regained control, which would legally qualify him as a refugee. However, he had had his fingerprints taken in Slovenia, so he had to request and wait for Italy to formally accept the responsibility of examining his application, which "on paper" should be no more than 6 months. When I arrived, he had been waiting for a year and a half. By the time I left, we had known that there had been an informatic error with his case and neither Slovenia nor Italy would assume responsibility. In the meantime, Pasha couldn't start his asylum claim process or access a temporary residence permit; he didn't have an ID card, nor a bank card, nor could he go to the hospital or have a job contract. What was he to do in the meantime besides working in the ways he could to survive? Unfortunately, Pasha's case is only one of many in which people are "stuck" in what Khosravi calls "stolen time" that never fully arrives anywhere. This sort of governance through time is a form of subjugating manpower, keeping migrants as unskilled labourers (Khosravi, 2018).

European directives are further complicated by the national state's interplay, which fixes migrant quotas, grants (or not) asylum and supports the costs of managing arrivals and integration. In the last decade, migration in Italy has been a charged political issue, since its geographical position in the Central Mediterranean makes it a receiving state for irregular migrants trying to reach Europe's southern border. In 2015 and now, the Mediterranean is the deadliest border in the world (over 28.000 reported missing at sea since 2014 according to Mentzelopoulou & Members' Research Service, 2023), with the

central route that connects Lybia and Tunisia to Malta and Italy the most dangerous one (Steinhilper & Gruijters, 2018).

Faced with migration pressure from the South and without loadsharing inside the EU, Italy's migrant and asylum policy has significantly hardened, a process that started under centre-left governments but took a populist turn after the austerity crisis, peaking with the rise of the far-right (Bottos et al., 2020). In 2018, Interior Minister Matteo Salvini introduced sweeping changes to asylum, migration and citizenship law: reduced the quota for international protection, expanded the conditions under which protection may be revoked or denied and increased criminal charges for irregular stay in the territory (Lanni, 2018).

Figure 5: MMRN participants hold a banner that reads "Enough Slaughter in the Mediterranean. Killer Europe" in the courtyard of Ex-OPG. Source: @movimentomignapoli on Instagram, posted 15/06/2023

Alessia speaks about the movement's perception of the role of the state in migration governance: "The government's struggle is against all poor people, of which migrants are the first ones. When Salvini makes a racist migrant reform and says it's a 'gift for Italians', what he is trying to do is put working-class Italians against migrants, when all of them are part of the same class." This is an interesting comment that becomes particularly powerful in the wake of the 2008 crisis, when austerity measures against "the poor" affected migrants doubly — on one hand by culminating in migrant repression put down in law and on the other by attempts at bringing some of lower classes under the far-right populist agenda by antagonizing migrants. Meloni's Cutro Decree, approved last year, goes further in criminalizing migration, narrowing the conditions for the right to stay and harshly regulating migrants' mobility inside Italy[23] (Wallis, 2023).

A rigid visa system and overwhelming denial of asylum applicants transform most people on the move into illegal migrants, permanently or not. With De Genova, I would argue that what is at stake here is a *production of illegality* (Genova, 2002) that disproportionately affects racialized populations[24]. It is important to underscore the racialization of migrant lives, since Europe often does "racism without race" (Balibar, 2002): migrants are juxtaposed with the (white) idea of Europe in a way that can only be properly understood as an unresolved racial crisis (Genova, 2018). Italy barely discusses its colonial heritage; continues to imagine its citizenry as homogenous, white and catholic, which furthers the othering of migrants (Portelli, 2005).

Exclusionary logic is more poignant in places where resources are scarce — or perceived to be scarce — as is the case of Naples. The continued inheritances of austerity

[23] Worth pointing out that this Decree "offers" denied asylum seekers the possibility of paying a preemptive bail of almost 5.000€ to avoid being detained in a migrant reception centre while they wait for their appeal to be evaluated.
[24] Contention of mobility and irregularization affects not only non-EU migrants but also racialized internal minorities such as the Roma (Huub Van Baar, 2017).

and underemployment result in a city with a huge problem with undeclared work: it is estimated that almost 60.000 people work illegally (Today, 2022). It is difficult to say how big of a share migrants represent in "Lavoro Nero", but almost every migrant I interviewed mentioned that they ended up in Naples because they heard it would be easier to find a job illegally, compared to other places in Italy. I must admit it was bittersweet to hear migrants describe exploitation rather positively. Sarfraz, a Bangladeshi cultural mediator, explained that he viewed working illegally as a necessary evil, almost like a form of "paying dues" that everyone must go through when arriving in Europe: "When I arrived to Naples, a Bangladeshi man offered me a job working in a clothing factory. Of course, the pay was little but it was what I needed. I will never forget the favour he did for me, even though I know he was taking advantage of me. Either way, it was a win-win situation. At least for some time"[25].

Within a restrictive migration and asylum regime, the illegal job market becomes a lifeline for migrants who are captured by its multiple modes of filtering. "From below", what a migrant tends to experience are the combined forces of state illegalization and capitalist exploitation that reinforce one another. The cheapening of labour is further legitimized by discourses that expose certain bodies below the line of "humanity" to premature death, making them "vulnerable to the fatal coupling of power and difference signified by racism" (Gilmore, 2002: 22).

Structure, composition and activities of Movimento Migranti e Rifugiati Napoli

Towards its goal of building solidarity with and among migrants, MMRN's activities provide a space for sociability and function as instruments for social inquiry from which to build political demands. What claims emerge are brought to light during the multiple

[25] Quote extracted from interview with Sarfraz, March 2024

deliberative moments, helping to maintain a feedback loop between the issues brought up during the day-to-day activities and the ongoing "path of struggle". In this section, I detail the movement's internal organization and daily function to demonstrate how it enacts the principles it espouses; that is to say, how it enables (with limitations) mutual aid and the autonomization of migrants.

The organizational structure is based on 3 assemblies with different competencies and participants. The first is a "technical" weekly assembly composed of about 20 activists of both Italian and migrant origin, most of them with previous political experience. This meeting does the "nuts and bolts" direction and communication of the movement, as well as tries to transform the concerns brought up in the LHD into political demands by presenting them to the second assembly, called militant assembly. That second one gathers around 50 of the movement's participants with leadership roles in previous cycles of mobilization (all migrants and refugees) and a few representatives of the weekly assembly. This meeting decides on specific political demands and establishes a kind of "roadmap" for upcoming mobilizations that combines political discussion and organization. The last assembly gathers all of the movement's supporters, functioning as a consultative organ. What actualizes disables the horizon of solidarity is the crystalization of proposals made by the first, "technical" assembly in a top-down fashion: while deliberative moments do exist for discussion, how democratic is it when demands arrive at the most important assembly already "half-baked" by the only assembly that includes "non-migrants"? And what point does it serve to have different decision-making organs based on the divisions between "migrants" and "non-migrants"?

The LHD is the crux around which other activities revolve. It acts as an instrument of social inquiry that enables the movement to investigate migrants' living conditions in and around the city, as well as providing a moment of aggregation and socialization for

those who are legally assisted. Migrants come by "word of mouth", wait together and have appointments together — in the eyes of the movement, providing a time and a space to recognize that their problems are not personal, but structural. Three voluntary legal operators carry out legal assistance for around 120 people, supported by a cultural-linguistic mediator. The bulk of migrants comes either from West Africa (Nigeria, Senegal, Gambia, Mali and Burkina Faso) or from South Asia (Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Bangladesh) through multiple mobility routes.

Legal assistance goes from asylum claims, to residence permits, taxes, citizenship requests and residency for those without a fixed address, sometimes even job hunting. One of the desks deals exclusively with women and LGBT+, seeking to address the particularities of the condition of migrant women and promote female participation in the movement. This desk offers a safe space and legal support to escape instances of domestic violence and sexual exploitation, access to dedicated healthcare and psychological support. I highlight the function of this desk as I would understand it to answer needs that go beyond the conceptualization of "migrants as workers".

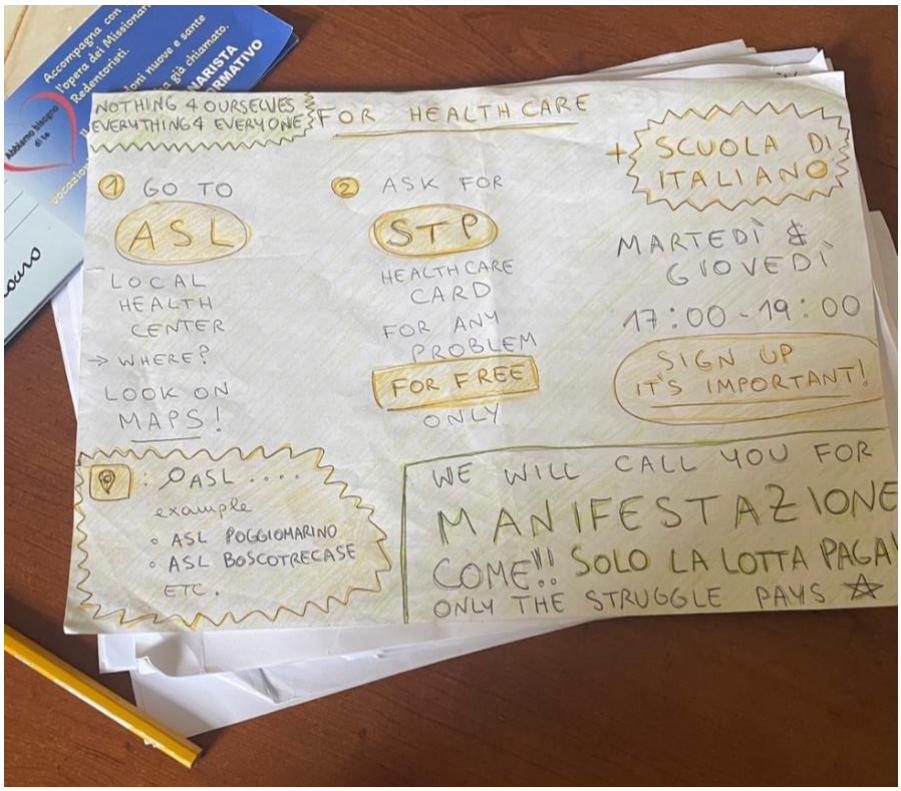

Figure 6: Legal Help Desk "Cheat Sheet" Side 1

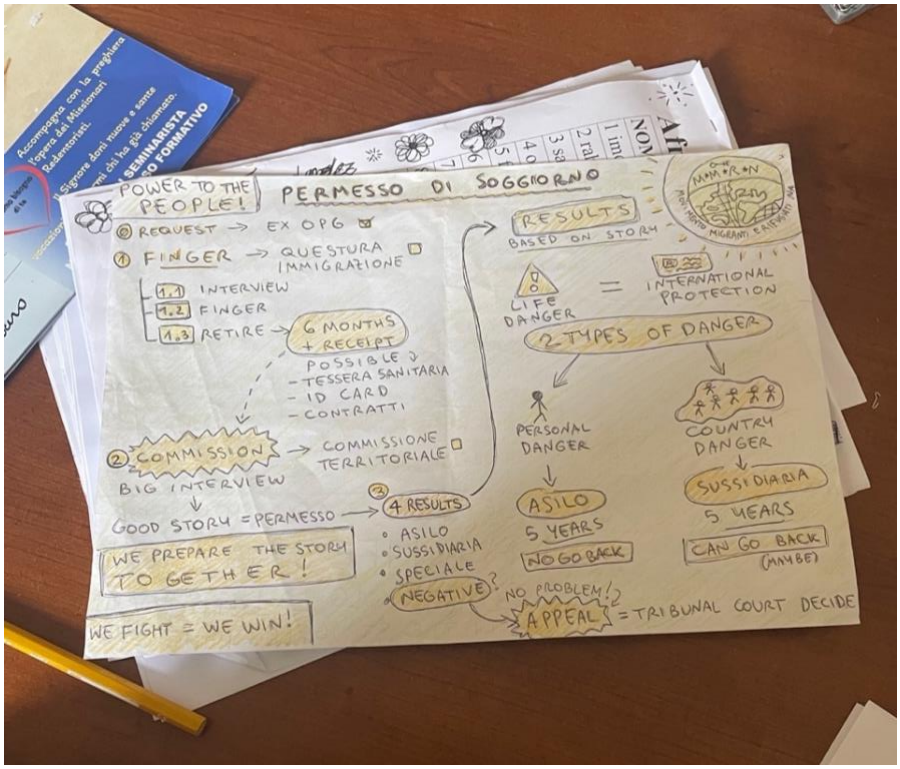

Figure 7: Legal Help Desk "Cheat Sheet" Side 2

To overcome language as the first barrier to migrants' autonomy, MMRN offers an Italian Language School ranging from alphabetization to A2 level. It also provides a "ludic area" where parents can leave their children during class time, aimed specifically at including mothers. Contrary to other schools that demand a valid residence permit to enroll students, the "Ibrahim Manneh"[26] Popular school seeks to universalize access as much as possible by not requiring documentation. In the years MMRN has developed protocols in pursuance of facilitating continuation of studies, recognition of education certificates in migrants' home countries and acquisition of language certificates for long-term permits. Their objective is to provide Italian language knowledge for navigating public institutions or bargaining in the workplace, or simply to communicate more effectively in the territory. The continued relationship among students and between students and teachers fosters social bonds, not least manifested by the explicit intention to consider

[26] The name of the school pays homage to a 24-year-old migrant, legally assisted by MMRN, who was killed in July 2017 by "racism and bad healthcare" (Di Blasio, 2019).

students' cultural backgrounds. I would interpret the organization of a collective Iftar[27] to signal the beginning and end of Ramadan month in this reading.

A note on Race and Internal power dynamics

Working in a movement that defines itself as staunchly anti-racist, perhaps the most visible tension regards the position of white Italians in the movement, as the majority of activists teaching Italian or providing legal assistance are white, while the great majority of those on the receiving end are "extracomunitari" migrants, racialized as others, "less-than-humans" (Fanon, 1961: 26). Gilmore defends that while "race has no essence, racism does" (Gilmore, 2002: 16), meaning that the work of racism is that of a "technology of antirelationality" for essentialization and differentiation. What it means then, is that race itself is not a biological fact attached to skin colour, but a "cultural construction of difference" (Silverstein, 2005: 2) that is no less real because it is produced.

In this setting, the movement takes race as an important factor in producing inequality, trying to navigate the recognition of race as a social reality but without reproducing assistencialist "saviourisms", that is, without reproducing racial hierarchies. In my conversations with activists racialized as white, the question of doing solidarity from the privileged position of a white citizen came up often: "You're a white person who's thinking about inequality that doesn't happen to you, that you're not subject to. So it's finding about your place in the conversation"[28], tells me a social researcher in charge of the Italian School. Nonetheless, positioning oneself as a "white" subject can itself reinforce the essentializing work of racism, as it offers a reduced view of race and the naturalized hierarchies under racial capitalism. Less than focusing on the production of whiteness, to take into consideration in the construction of a non-hierarchical movement are also the

[27]Meal eaten by observing Muslims to break their fast after sunset during Ramadan
[28] Quote extracted from an interview with Francesa, March 2024

often precarious conditions that hinder the political participation of migrants: working 10-12h days, often away from the city centre, with limited knowledge of the local language and law. This was something I found the movement discusses often in its several assemblies and tries to be self-cautious about.

Hassan tells me instead of how MMRN encourages full and active migrant participation in decision-making: holding assemblies on Sundays, when people are off-work, developing community assemblies outside of Naples, and establishing simultaneous translation services[29]. Moreover, all of the spokespersons that represent the movement in press interviews and communication reports are racialized as non-white, with Hassan being one of them. On the part of activists understood as white, the objective is always to be reduced to the "technical" aspect, even though this works more as a discourse direction that anything else, given the prominence of non-migrants in decision-making instances. When it comes to the gradations of race, the master's tools may never dismantle the master's house, but they are a starting point to "learning to use those differences as bridges rather than barriers between us" (Audre Lorde as quoted in Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013: 273).

Political Perspectives: the work of bottom-up Subjectification

Everyone's first appointment at the LHD includes a mandatory going over EU's asylum system: steps, requirements and possible results. By the end of my fieldwork and under Mario's supervision, I would explain it in English to cultural mediators who would translate it for migrants. The final part would be an explanation of MMRN as a social movement (and why they don't charge). The first time I heard Alessia do this bit, the sense of antagonism was palpable: "I don't work for you, I am not your lawyer. We fight

[29] Quote extracted from an interview with Hassan, April 2024

together. If you have a faster appointment to get your fingerprints, it's because brothers and sisters outside this door were out on the streets to fight for it. And this is an invitation for you to do the same". The issue is that this invitation to struggle directed at someone without legal status (who might risk deportation), proposing strategies of mobilization usual for subjects inside the space of citizenship is debatable at best: on one hand, it places the risk of mobilization on someone who has much more to lose than a citizen; on the other, not making the invitation would go against the project of solidarity building by barring migrants to feature in a struggle that is ultimately about them. In this way, it flattens power hierarchies that remain unaddressed, perhaps purposefully.

The services the movement offers anchor their political struggle. They organize protests and city-wide demonstrations, collaborate with other associations for migrant-related events and periodically monitor living situations in reception centres. Through its pressure in the past nine years, MMRN has conquered a "seat at the table" with local institutions with which they maintain direct channels of communication. As captured in the chapter's title, what the movement claims is everything for everybody[30]: the reversal of Meloni's Cutro Decree, the end of the list of "safe countries" for repatriation, the end of Centres of Permanence for Repatriation (CPR) and administrative detention. For easier access to regular residence permits, what the movement calls dignified labour (that is, the one an Italian would have), healthcare and education.

Ousmane, a cultural mediator from Mali, explained to me that he first got involved with the movement because he knew they wouldn't have to pay for legal assistance, although he wasn't necessarily interested in politics. At that point, he had been in Italy for 6 months and no one had explained to him what a resident permit was and why he needed it; he was working illegally as an agricultural worker outside Bari for 4€ an hour — out of

[30] The first half of the Zapatista maxim "everything for everybody, nothing for ourselves"

which he had to pay transportation and accommodation to his employer. He saw participation in mobilizations as a repayment: "okay, you help me to get my documents, I help you to have this strength [on the street][31]. He explains how his view on the political mobilization changed when he moved to Napoli and faced issues at work. After getting his residence permit, he found a job as a kitchen helper. Even though he was legal, his employer made him work beyond the stipulated hours of his contract without paying him extra, did not respect rest days and withheld his first paycheck to make sure "he wouldn't run away", he says quoting his boss. Fueled by his sense of exploitation, he was encouraged by the legal operators of MMRN to sue his employer, which he did through Ex-OPG's legal support. He ended up winning his case and receiving around 5.000€ in compensation.

Ousmane is perhaps a case that MMRN would view as one of its biggest success stories: pursued his education and is currently employed as a full-time cultural mediator for several immigration offices around Naples, speaks perfect Italian and is one of the movement's representatives.

The political reasoning is to equip migrants with political, legal and language skills to navigate Italian society and politics, so that they can fight for their own rights. Centring the figure of the migrant in anti-capitalist and anti-colonial struggles, MMRN aims to call out what Balibar identified as the "question of the colonial heritage and its permanence" (Balibar as quoted in Genova, 2016: 79). In other words, the movement makes a case for including the relevance of the colonial heritage in discussing migration governance in Italy today. In conversation with the movement's most politically minded activists who actively contribute to the fleshing of the movement's ideological positions, what they mentioned often as a political objective was the idea of fostering the creation of a self-determined political subjectivity — what I have described before as the work of subjectivation.

[31] Quote extracted from an interview with Ousmane

Sampath, a proud Sri Lankan communist who escaped to Italy after facing persecution in his own country, frames migrant issues above all else, as an issue of class consciousness. He speaks to me about migrants' need to recognize one another as members of the same class to be able to fight together. For him, the emergence of a political subjectivity is about passing from "a class in itself" to "a class for itself"[32], that is, from a class with shared living conditions to a class aware of their common interests, with a political dimension paradoxically only made possible by the experience of organization (Vester, 2023).

But what is left out of view in seeing "migrants as workers"? I would argue that the articulation of race and class is central to MMRN's goal of subjectification, but also where I would point to some potential problems. First, it centres class in a way that overemphasizes migrants' economic contribution: if the struggle is against a value-extraction regime that devalues migrants also politically and culturally, how useful is it to think of migrants solely in terms of their production? This primacy of class relations ends up reducing the cultural and racial dimensions of migration to economicist class dynamics that do not fully capture the nuances of lived experience, a critique that had already been raised by critical race theorists to the BPP and that resurfaces here (Meister, 2017). Assuming that class takes causal priority over other modes of differentiation that are subordinated to it in the name of building class consciousness risks disregarding those who do unpaid reproductive labour, possibly more vulnerable. While MMRN holds a specific LHD for women and services for children, I would argue the focus on labour seems to be at odds with the maxim of "everything for everyone".

In this chapter, I have argued that the EU migration and asylum regimes filter mobile populations to produce what Mezzadra and Nielson call the *multiplication of labour*. Seen from migrants' disadvantaged perspective, this translates into the production of

[32] Paraphrased from Sampath Interview, March 2024

illegality and cheapening of their labour power. This view of migration governance provides an important setting for the work carried out by MMRN. In describing its internal functioning and activities, I have shown how the movement enacts its conception of migrant rights, as framed in the language of labour. Finally, I have raised some critiques about what is "left out of view" by framing migrant rights as "workers' rights", namely how it foregrounds class over other factors of differentiation. I have also pointed to how racial hierarchies are a source of tension in the movement, as questions of positionality and hierarchy in the movement are brought up but not completely worked through.

Chapter 3. "Solo la lotta paga"[33] — Building Solidarity in the Commons

My aim with this final chapter is to untangle how MMRN "does" migrant solidarity, finally reaching some tentative answers to my research questions. Building off the movement's conceptualization of migrant rights and the activities developed toward achieving migrants' autonomy in navigating life and politics, in this section I detail the political mechanisms through which migrant spaces of sociability are built, reconstruct what concrete impact the movement has had in the 9 years since its inception along with depicting the tensions and future challenges that are intrinsic to such political projects. I investigate how migrant rights are defended in the political context of a recognized urban common, to understand what is novel about this form of political organization and how it impacts modalities of migrant struggle. I intend to use the commons as both a space and a method to think through the nexus between migration and wider governance strategies under neoliberal capitalism, seeing as they frame demands as forms of class struggle. If the strategies are common, why shouldn't struggles be as well?

To this effect, I borrow Augustín and Jørgensen's definition of solidarity in the context of the "refugee crisis" as a benchmark (2019: 23-49). They characterize solidarity as relational, in that it creates bonds between different social actors; a place-based practice, in that it needs spatial proximity to be continually reproduced and lastly, politically creative, as alliances created connect spaces and invent alternative political imaginaries in a "world-making process" (Featherstone, 2012 as referenced in Caciagli, 2020). Even admitting that it is quite an idyllic conception, I would see this theoretical view as useful in that it is very close to the form of solidarity that MMRN frequently invokes (and that I got to witness in empirical practice). Solidarity as a "relational practice" (Augustín & Jørgensen, 2019: 25) is

[33] "Only the struggle pays off"

what the movement strives for, seeing it as a crucial experience for counterhegemonic subject formation.

Between Mutual Aid and Solidarity

LHD appointments normally happen with 5-8 migrants in the same room, grouped by national provenience. In this setting, the legal operator is the only one with expertise, standing in contrast to the horizontal mutualist principle. Even though the "intention" is of care, there is still someone, a "have", without the need to receive these services himself, who *offers* their services to "have-nots". The legal operator has an office, a desk and a row of chairs before him. When I'm helping out I sit beside him on one side of the desk; migrants sit on the other — there is a distance. During the appointment, saying someone is there "to ask" for something is forbidden. Instead, "we" on one side of the desk ask what we can do to "help". The language used is not that of asking and receiving, but always of *helping* one another: it's the verb you use to ask a migrant for help with a translation, or to help someone else fill out a form, or to help with finding an office on maps. The ethos of the movement is that "asking for help" is disempowering and entails an unequal relation between those involved. While I would not say that being on the receiving end is disempowering per se, I would point to a power imbalance that flows from legal operators' expertise, further emphasized by the fact that the LHD acts as a motor for the political demands of the movement.

Because International protection is granted based on the political situation in people's home country, it means that migrants called in together will often have the same kinds of permits, and so the same kinds of issues. Even though hours are long, I would describe the LHD as a vibrant place: someone passing through with a tray of coffee, sharing food with people that have been waiting for an appointment outside. One of the

first times I accompanied migrants to the town hall we decided it in this environment: Adama, Doumbia and Boubacar, three Malian young men, needed someone to accompany them to the city's registry to get an Italian ID card. They were struggling to decide how and when to get where, so Mario offered my help, since I had gone before and could help with translation. Two days later, we went together to an office that is only open to the public twice a week for four hours at a time, armed with highlighted photocopies of the directives that confirm their entitlement. They were all quite nervous, and seemed a bit disheartened that the service workers would address me instead of them directly. After two hours of changing between desks, we left with the papers we had come for and everyone was elated. As we were leaving, Adama, Doumbia and Boubacar were already talking about it worked better then when then went to public offices alone and we should do a sort of working team for these things, so they readily asked me if would go with them to the bank the following week, to which I agreed. Since Boubacar was the only one out of the three that could not attend MMRN's Italian School, Adama and Doumbia offered to share with him their notes. By the time I left, these three men did all of their legal and bureaucratic apppointments together, supporting one another.

More than soidarity per se, I would argue that what MMRN does best is creating a space of mutual aid that simultaneously responds to people's material needs and builds alternative infrastructure through which people can meet such needs, echoing the definition set forth by Spade (2020). Again, the impact of MMRN's understanding of the Black Panther Party philosophy is undeniable, as their mutualist programs were so effective in aggregating people around common concerns that the Federal US government felt compelled to start a children's breakfast program to demobilize the one started by the BPP (Pien, 2010). Six months before being murdered by Chicago Police Department, Fred Hampton said in a speech "you don't fight racism with racism, you fight racism with

solidarity" (Hampton, 1969). With solidarity as an aim I built by the collective coordination and shared experience that defines mutual aid.

Most of the migrant participants of MMRN that I met got involved with the movement first because they needed legal support for migration paperwork and/or to leave exploitative work situations. Then, with time, participation grew, made maniefst in participation in assemblies, speaking to the press, learning to do all the "boring" tasks of coordination and planning. Yannick, one of the spokespersons of the movement that is one of its most vocal participants and a legal operator, first came in contact with MMRN through a "Controllo Popolare" action in 2016, when he was living in a migrant reception centre. But even in the case of less stark cases, the push to autonomize migrants, to offer a space to do and think things together, contributes greatly to political involvement. Contrary to what I initially thought, a lot of the people I interviewed participate not necessarily because they have demarcated political affinities (even if they note MMRN as a place for political reflection), but because they want to give back in some way. When I asked participants what motivated them to join, most gestured towards the respect for humanitarian values, of wanting to contribute to restoring a sense of justice[34].

In "Solidarity not Charity", Spade (2020) asserts that "providing for one another through coordinated collective care is radical and generative". Everyone has something to offer. This view of solidarity is opposed to what Gramsci first criticized as "voluntarism" and that Muehlebach revisits in "The Moral Neoliberal" (2012), with the first being collective and paradigmatically anti-capitalist, while the latter is individualistic and demobilizing. On the same note, Muehlebach tells us how easily the neoliberal logic of "ethical citizenship" can collapse the differences between the two, as both are put to work to justify the rollback of the welfare state.

[34] These motivations were explicitely pointed out by Anna, Marina, Cesare, Sarfraz, Sampath and Ousmane.

People join to work around a shared concern of migrant rights, and surely have a lot of things in common — such as immigration status, experiences of racialization, sexism, labour exploitation, etc — but differ in a lot of other significant ways: age, class, language, religion, race, etc. When organizing events or mobilizations, MMRN sets up teams that mix together people with different backgrounds and expertise, so as to build off their members' strong points. For "Controllo Popolare", for example, each team contained at least one person with previous experience in this kind of intervention, a legal operator, and people knowledgeable in different languages. While mutual aid does bring people together "right now" for specific activities and helps create bonds, it does not automatically produce a shared political analysis. What MMRN members repeat in assemblies or when establishing working teams is that exchanging experiences and building trust is what enables the development of a shared political analysis and common vocabulary that can facilitate decision-making in the future.

The movement is grounded in the idea of struggling *against* harmful systems of value extraction, but the most powerful occasions I've witnessed were moments of celebration that supplement this oppositional form of identity formation. In late March MMRN hosted a fund-raising event for the "Association of Burkinabé Women of Campania" in support of the village of Kantchari in Burkina-Faso. Of course, the event started with an assembly of "hard politics" that discussed colonial heritages in West Africa and geopolitical considerations, but it was a breath of fresh air to have music and food — together. About 300 people gathered in total; aunties taught people how to eat foufou with their hands and dance to Afrobeat. For MMRN, community building also includes occasions to foster cultural expressions and create bonds that are not only based on experiences of marginalization. On another occasion, during Ramadan, the Sri Lankan community used the space to cook a feast for those observing fast and distributed meals

during the Legal Help Desk, since people who were waiting for an appointment could not go home to eat after sundown.

In one of Ex-OPG's public assemblies, Hassan affirmed that "what was once a House of the People become a House of Peoples", signaling the intention of creating a space of solidarity that takes full advantage of its political heritage *while* expanding those included in this ad-hoc community. The point is that the ways in which the space is used constitute both the space and the subject itself, meaning that it is the practice of commoning that makes the common (Kirwan et al., 2016). The issue (and promise) of the commons, evident in discussions of who "belongs" and who doesn't, has to do with the articulation of difference, the one and the many.

The challenge faced by MMRN is assuring equal participation of so many and such different people. What I can say from fieldwork is that it's a contradictory process. For instance, public assemblies are held in Italian, but with several appointed simultaneous translators that make the interventions understandable. At the same time, public assemblies are not open debates but resemble instead a downpour of related speeches made by representatives of migrant communities and the movement itself. Public assemblies are held sporadically to support specific events, to present outwards the movement's priorities and activities, but not necessarily to open discussion, presumably to not fracture the illusion of unity that is meant to be projected outwards. The drive towards including the "many" is there, but a lot of the time it's inclusion to listen and to "be there". It stops short by limiting the instances of discussion to closed assemblies that participants must be invited into. Most of the migrants I interviewed were also part of other assemblies in which discussion is encouraged, so in general they felt themseves heard. Nonetheless these different assemblies make conflict is less likely to fully erupt, because those who participate in discussion are already more or less "inside" the political framework of MMRN.

Impact on Migrant Struggles

Before detailing the internal tensions that I've pointed to along the chapter, I would rather start with the impact this approach has had on migrant struggles. I follow the accomplishments of MMRN, whose work is informed — but not completely contained — by a common, and whose results are note-worthy, to say the least.

On the human scale, the movement has so far legally assisted over 14.000 people, from filing the first international protection claim, to converting permits for work reasons, to helping migrants (and their children) access citizenship. They have built something so visible in the city (and beyond) that associations and charities dedicated to migrant inclusion refer people to their LHD — which happened several times during my fieldwork. Migrants themselves come from well outside Naples to receive legal support and participate in mobilizations: migrants doing agricultural labour in the South use their days off to make a 2 or 3-hour trip to Naples, wait with maybe 100 other people for their turn for hours and then turn back late at night. And over the years, what has been created is a wide support network that goes well beyond the legal, something that didn't exist before in the city to this degree.

On one of the first weeks of fieldwork, a taciturn Pakistani young man named Imran came to the LHD with issues at his job: he had been working at a store for a couple of months, but the pay was below what had been promised and his employer kept avoiding his demand for a proper job contract. Alessia told him not to worry, that if he wanted he could sue his employer for the money he owed him and that she would try to find him another job. The next week when Imran came to Italian class, she let him know she had set up a work interview for him. What is grey here is that finding someone a job is not the same as finding it together — how do you perform mutualism when some of the

participants are dealing with such huge barriers to survival? My sense is that those who offer their services/expertise see mutualism as stretched out in time. Migrants might be on the receiving end now but, hopefully, in the giving end in a couple of months (by being a legal operator/cultural mediator/representative, or simply being able to help newcomers). And although migrants can (and do) become more autonomous in navigating bureaucracy and the labour market with time, a sense of "indebtedness" to those who never got anything in return happens often. During LHD hours, the words that I'd hear the most were "please ma'am" and "thank you ma'am", even if I kept repeating I wasn't doing anyone a favour. The continual engagement in time with the movement is undoubtedly a politicizing process, but one that is likely to reproduce the same points of view, so that when a migrant feels confident enough to intervene, conflict is likely to be minimal.

As mentioned briefly, the movement's political impact is felt most clearly at the scale of the city, as the majority of its specific claims are made to local institutions with which negotiation is possible. Its rationale is that oftentimes the law does not explicitly deny migrants rights, but the bureaucratic machinery itself hinders the number of people who can jump through procedural rules to access them. Considering that changing migration law at the national scale would require a nationally articulated effort and going against increasingly right-wing governments that are not particularly invested in bettering the livelihoods of this social group, the movement's strategy is that of forcing the townhall and/or local immigration office to work differently under the same laws. Policies are "assemblages" flexible enough to be re-interpreted as they move across fields of practice in the context of a public administration that continues to produce racialized marginality and disadvantage (Wilson et al., 2022; Shore & Wright, 2011). In recounting victories, Alessia

tells me that "the law is one thing, but bureaucracy is something else altogether"[35]. The point is to dig where you stand.

In 2018, during the time of the Salvini Government, MMRN allied with Movimento Migranti e Rifugiati di Caserta to organize a joint demonstration that brought 10.000 people to the street. This mobilization initiated talks with the Town Hall and a few months later Naples was one of the first cities to grant a 1-year temporary residence permit for asylum seekers, seeing that the process took much longer than the 6 months established by law and left migrants illegal in-between permits. Entering into a relationship with local institutions brings the analysis away from only "street politics" and into the realms of the personal relations between activists and politicians. For 'high-level' meetings with the Mayor, the head of the immigration office or the Prefecture, those who normally end up representing the movement are legal operators who leverage their expertise and assiduous presence in the local offices to establish their "seat at the table", with the movement being again not represented by migrants themselves but politically-oriented experts. Of course, a first-name basis relationship certainly facilitates claim-making, but the material objective is offset by being predicated on inequalities that distance the bulk of the movement (mostly migrants) to those who represent it, with the added question of facilitating co-option by increased proximity with local institutions.

With (or against) the Prefecture, MMRN's monitoring of migrant reception centres forced it to close down two improper CAS and review its municipal plan for migrant reception. At the time, the city was managing (through inefficient Public-Private Partnerships) several CAS around the city's main railway station that left migrants to their own devices and contributed to the representation of this Piazza as a problematic, socially and economically degraded public space (Dines, 2002). For the centres that did remain

[35] Quote extracted from Interview with Alessia, April 2024

open, MMRN compelled the administration to provide pocket money to migrants, also allowed for by law (Ministero Dell'Interno, 2021). While it certainly does not solve the root issues of migrant reception, "integration" and illegalization, it does mitigate some of its more dire consequences by facilitating access to rights codified in law and breaking with the stigma and isolation imposed by the individualization of migrant governance. Lastly, in forcing the negotiation of bureaucratic procedures at the local level and occupying public space, these practices change the perception of urban space for other social actors, cementing the city as an arena open for contestation[36].

When I asked interviewees about the strong points of the movement, more than emphasizing concrete victories activists prioritized the sheer fact of its existence and its continued ability to aggregate people around a political project. "A battle can be lost, but you have to try either way, that's not the most important thing (…) what is important is that you show up. When you organize with others, you transform yourself through sharing different experiences of struggle, values and ideas about how you think the world can and should change"[37].

A Conflictual Present, an Uncertain Future

While the tone of this argument is certainly meant to be hopeful, I do not wish to depict the movement, and, by extension, the common that hosts it, as devoid of contradictions. In fact, for MMRN to become an effective space of resistance and be able to construct a "plan of action" for the future, it must contend with internal tensions. These were much harder to gauge in conversation with members, who would criticize their limited scope of action or lack of coordination with other associations. And it is not

[36] For an article that reviews how the action of urban social movements "from below" triggers processes of spacial change that define the scale of the city as a domain for political mobilization, see Rossi, 2004.
[37] Quote extracted from Interview with Cesare, March 2024

necessarily because members wouldn't recognize the power imbalances at play, but because they wouldn't trust me to recount what they thought worked "less-than-perfect".

It is always possible to collapse from the inside and the first potential pitfall is to adopt the model of charity, by which support is conditional on pre-established requirements of deservingness. For MMRN in particular, I would say that the risk is using migrants' political participation as currency, placing the weight of mobilization on migrants in a punitive model that strays away from the principles of unqualified mutual help. During the public assembly in the Burkinabé fund-raising event, a few migrants approached me and other volunteers, asking if they could sign their name somewhere that would prove that they attended the event. A few months before, in the plenary assembly of December 2023, volunteers had collected the names of those in attendance to present to the Immigration Office a list of migrants invested in the claims put forth at the time, which meant that the people "on the list" got earlier slots to their needed appointments. Their idea was that this proof of participation would act in the same way: "deserving" migrants who participate get appointments faster than those who don't. This issue was later brought up in assembly, which after some uneasiness highlighted the fact that migrants had come because they believed that it would get them some material reward, which could be re-framed as a net good.

On a second but related note to reproducing the charity model, is the risk of paternalism and saviourism, particularly pressing in a migrant social movement that involves differently positioned people in terms of race, gender, class and religion. Degenerating mutualism in a practice of privilege is what Muehlebach describes as "dispersed acts of "heroism" by individual 'supermen' rather than being part of what Gramsci would call an organic, collective effort" (Muehlebach, 2012: 44). It's less the idea that migrants need saving, but that it is up to a small "vanguard" of activists to organize *the*

migrant struggle on their prerogative and design out of "the kindness of their hearts"[38] or their ideology of proletarian internationalism, thereby diminishing the agency of those claiming to autonomize and serve. When I asked engaged activists why they joined the movement, the answers were almost always a pledge to some version of leftism, understanding their activity as fundamentally different from that of charity. The goal of MMRN is not to produce charismatic star activists or an inner hierarchy that devalues the contributions of some, often the people who have more to lose, and overvalues those of others.

This tendency is furthermore problematized by the way it overlaps with privileges in race, gender and class: that is, people who occupy more space in the movement tend to be men with more political experience and cultural capital; or Italians who would be more easily recognized as legitimate representatives for local institutions, exemplified by the fact that who most often represents the movement in institutional meetings is a legal operator who checks all the aforementioned boxes. This decision merits, nonetheless, a passage in assembly, which can nominate different people to represent the movement according to their expertise. But exactly because it emphasizes expertise (and most of the experts are *not* migrants), it risks speaking for others and cutting off the possibility of emancipation by co-opting the protagonism of someone else's struggle. But the opposite approach is another source of tension: the entrenchment of marginalization as a source of identity in such a way that reinforces the rigidity of positionality and precludes widening the circles of solidarity. Asad Haider argues against this strand of identity politics using the Black Radical tradition as his main inspiration, contending that the liberation of the oppressed cannot rely on the power structures that produced mass racialized oppression in the first place (Haider, 2018).

[38] An expression that I've heard used by people outside of the movement to ironically describe these kinds of dynamics

Internal tensions are compounded by the possibility of neoliberal co-optation, in which the void left by underfunded public services is filled by volunteerism and privatization (Muehlebach, 2012). The challenge is to negotiate with local institutions while maintaining an contentious position that cultivates a sense of antagonism instead of demobilization and depoliticization. It is impossible, however, to discuss the possibilities of a future without taking into account the political moment Europe is currently living through and which shows no signs of ameliorating. The compounding crises of neoliberal capitalism — a protracted financial crisis made worse by the pandemic, war, climate change, racial violence and generalized lack of care — have catalyzed reactionary and populist governments in the last years, well exemplified by the current Meloni government in Italy. Among others, the Meloni government has instrumentalized migrants and other surplus populations by framing the "migrant crisis" as an exceptional condition that justifies the state's policies of management and control of "troublesome populations" as a strategy to reinforce its sovereignty in the territory (Rajaram, 2015a). My intention is not to conceive migration and, by extension, migrant rights as an additional crisis that adds pressure on already frail governments. That would be an artificial cut of more complex social phenomena. Rather, I intend to highlight how governments' management strategies for migrant rights happen in relation to the wider logic of the organization of labour and capital on the domestic and European scales.

If we cannot expect change from the difficult articulation between state and market, then I would invite to think about migration politics from other standpoints, taking the already-existing forms of migrant practices and mobilizations as a departure point (Mezzadra, 2022). The future of the movement, sketched out in the foundation of "Non Sulla Nostra Pelle" (translated to "not on our skin"), aims at producing change at the level of national legislation instead of local bureaucracy, so as to intervene beyond the claims for

permits and legal status. The intent, first proposed by MMRN, is to create a national platform of networked local collectives and social movements that defend migrant rights (Progetto Melting Pot Europa, 2023). The name in itself points, on one hand, to the politics of subjection and exploitation that migrants experience firsthand and, on the other, to the reclamation of political self-representation, because no one can speak better on their condition than those who live it.

Figure 8: MMRN block in an anti-fascist/anti-Meloni manifestation, March 2024

When I asked Alessia about her vision for the future of struggle, she replied "what I want is that, at some point, we no longer talk about a *Permesso di Soggiorno*[39]. I want the government to stop changing the law so that we can go on to talk about labour rights, women's rights, etc. Until you don't have a permit and can't work legally, of course you cannot organize and fight for other things that would connect with the Italian labour market. And the government knows it. But they have to accept that migrants are here to

[39] Residence Permit

stay."[40] This quote echoes both a great potential and a highly problematic one, since it dissolves the specificities of migrant issues into inclusion in labour struggles.

The Promise of the Commons

My sense is that commons are inherently conflictual spaces because are meant to express the demands of the "multitude", to take a Negrian concept (Hardt & Negri, 2005). Aside from this controversial definition, the question still stands, and one that Ex-OPG, and by extension and by virtue of the multicultural character of its members, MMRN wrestles with: if commons are construed as relational and heterogenous, how do they translate into a wider political project? How to act in common while maintaining a multiplicity of perspectives?

Inasmuch as these projects/spaces exist in and alongside capitalist dynamics, they are haunted by its inner workings (even if capital cannot fully explain all their internal tensions). If capital is accumulated by exploiting and producing difference — multiplying labour in a continuum of differential inclusion—, then the political possibility of the commons comes into full view when struggles relate to one another by addressing the multiple effects of capital. This is the promise at stake for Ex-OPG in the collaboration between its different branches; or the sheer fact that mobilizations carried out independently share the same referential anti-capitalist political project, even if it is somewhat open-ended, or different branches adopt different mobilization strategies and discourses. As indicated at the end of the second chapter, what is "out of view" in this promise is the reduction of all issues to a matter of class struggle, erasing in the process cultural and racial differences that are constitutive of exploitation.

[40] Quote extracted from Interview with Alessia, April 2024

As it pertains to migrant struggles, the space of the commons provides a "lateral view" of migration that contributes to its political charge. Migration struggles are concerned with residence permits, the right to mobility and the right to stay as they are in addressing the raced, sexed and uneven dynamics of production of inequality. When the university collective occupied the University in the Neapolitan city centre, MMRN held its language classes in the occupation and contributed to open assemblies to frame Palestinian resistance as legitimate, anti-colonial action; to discuss the rights of stateless people, refugees and diaspora in Europe today. When associations for Roma rights were protesting against the fact that the Naples Registry would not accept Roma settlements as valid residences nor would it grant them residency for people without a fixed address, MMRN was one of the key stakeholders represented in a committee that would regulate this issue. Its presence shone light on the difficulty of stigmatized and racialized communities (such as migrants and Roma) in finding accessible and dignified housing, underlining how it results in residential segregation (Mazza et al., 2017).

Figure 9: MMRN/Ex-OPG activists in a pro-Palestine rally, April 2024

Its space-making capacity makes it a prime site for fostering migrant political subjectivity, a generative "breathing space" for self-determination (Tazzioli, 2021). Engaging in the construction of the commons is politicizing: it offers a space of sociability and discussion to frame personal problems as structural issues, as well as fosters solidarity building through mutual aid in the context of a highly antagonistic environment that treats multiple struggles as different facets of interlocking systems of oppression. The objective that I see embodied in MMRN is that the practice of mutual aid (and striving for solidarity) does not require a pre-established community but produces communities in its everyday enactments of mediating difference (Mezzadra, 2022).

This facilitates, in my view, the emergence of place-based subjectivities that recentre the agency of migrants and the autonomy of migration (Mezzadra, 2010). Facing migration head-on as a political issue rather than an economic or demographic one invokes a rethinking of the political and the polity itself, since the act of migration (even before what would be explicitly political acts such as an organized social movement) demarcates and reconstitutes community, membership and citizenship, spotlighting the contradictions that societies are constituted by. For Europe, this "disarray" of reconstitution cannot be disconnected from histories of colonialism and imperialism that undermine the cosmopolitan, tolerant veneer that Europe has constructed for itself after the Second World War.

Moreover, the process of migrant subjectification opens new avenues to think and "do" political mobilization, or re-consider on what basis rights are granted. As is the case with MMRN, migrants make political claims not by appealing to their deservingness and condition as citizens (since they are normally outside the space of citizenship altogether), but by appealing to the language of human rights with slogans against exploitation and

racism[41]. Nonetheless, this humanitarian Arendtian conception of "the right to have rights" that precedes citizenship is only attainable when a sovereign power can acknowledge and reinforce them, placing migrants in a double bind. A more fruitful perspective on migrants' political agency would be to conceptualize migrant rights in the light of civil rights, as does Isin in his understanding of "acts of citizenship" (Isin, 2017). His approach privileges the performative aspect of claim-making, arguing ultimately that what makes a citizen is to behave like one, that is, to make claims on local institutions and social groups, to take up space as already a constitutive parcel of a political community.

Even though MMRN locates the basis of migrant rights on labour and not on an imaginative "universal citizenship", I would still contend that the reasoning is quite similar: to look at migrant rights as ordinary, be it part of the working class and/or a borderless citizenry. For Francesca, the function of Ex-OPG as an urban common is to "un-border us"; "it's about bringing people together and coming back to why we came together in the first place". What I've seen as an open discussion that the movement struggles with is constructing class-based solidarity while trying to remain open to cultural and racial differences, even though this is not perfectly worked through at all times: the movement signals Ramaddan, develops services for women and LGBT+ people and opens spaces for cultural expression, but ultimately centres migrants' position as easily exploited labour power.

In the course of this chapter, I've explored the space of the commons to rethink what solidarity is and what it can do in defending migrant rights. Given that it is a space that expresses and politicizes other topics, I have argued that it is a worthy site to articulate migrant struggles in connection with other societal issues, positioning them in opposition to capitalist dispossession. As a result, the common appers as site of resistance par

[41] See slogans of figure 3 and 4

excellence. Moreover, I have argued that the construction of the common entails both subject-making and space-making capacities, which simultaneously foster the creation of an autonomous migrant political subjectivity and alter the social fabric of urban space, spilling out from the squatted social centre.

The novelty of this approach relies on a powerful critique of the production of inequality and the construction of solidarity; but one that is rife in with tensions related to the supposed erasure of difference, reproduction of internal hierarchies and the possibility of being co-opted by the logic of charity and/or the market. Nonetheless, if the question is both how different systems of oppression and exploitation work together *and* how can we tackle them by imagining new forms of collective survival, I would consider the "promise of the commons" well suited to work through the power hierarchies that position migrants and non-migrants differently regarding race, citizenship, gender and class. And it is in this bidirectional motion that I would find fruitful the cross-pollination between Black Radical thought and Italian Autonomism, in that they speak to each other in their orientation towards radical social action. While undoubtedly characterized by inner tensions and opportunities for co-option, my fieldwork with MMRN and Ex-OPG has at least made me consider what different worlds are possible, and how to arrive there.

Conclusion

In the course of this thesis, I have shed light on how the political framework of Ex-OPG "Je so Pazzo" as an urban common shapes the way that migrant struggles are conceptualized and carried out by Movimento Migranti e Rifugiati Napoli, arguing that the space of the commons is a useful site of political contestation to reconsider the connection between migration governance and wider dynamics of capitalism. Calling for "Tutto per Tutti", however, is no easy task, nor are the everyday negotiations of political organization as pristine as its political principles of horizontal solidarity frame it to be. This ongoing political project draws on the particular heritage of the debate of the commons (especially lively in Italy) and on a view of the European migration regime "from below", coalescing in the practices and tensions that describe this approach to migrant struggles. In short, this is the logic that undergirds the structure of this thesis.

In the first chapter, I analyzed the political context that Ex-OPG emerges from and the theoretical heritage it tries to work through in its activities. Tracing the development of discussions on the commons, I bring together the main characteristics that Ex-OPG aims to embody: an occupied place based on self-management, collective control and oppositition to the logic of neoliberal privatization that defined the political landscape of the early 2010s. Grounded in the understanding of Naples as an "ordinary city" (Robinson, 2013), I contend that the social upheaval felt at the time correlates to an interpretation of the city as "subaltern" in the Italian context of a long history of systematic marginalization and exploitation still in line with the "Southern Question" described by Gramsci (Gramsci, 2012). In this sense, ex-OPG was founded to respond to the material deprivation present in the city, as well as to serve as a node of experimental urban development — albeit in a partly conflictual relationship with local institutions.

While certainly not unique, Naples's approach to commoning is what makes it an interesting case. The "Neapolitan Model" consists of a flexible legal framework for civic use that relies on autonomous civil society initiatives for city-making. Although oscillating between collaboration and mutual criticism, this recognition gives Ex-OPG leverage when negotiating with local institutions. It is not that models can be blindly exported without close attention to local conditions, but understanding how alternative civil society organizations can reclaim an active role in the co-production of urban governance, especially in "disempowered cities" (Çağlar & Schiller, 2018), can be useful in other contexts.

I close the chapter by outlining the birth of MMRN and its pursuance of migrant rights, demonstrating how the political orientations espoused by Ex-OPG spill onto it. I highlight the marked inspiration of the Black Panther Party both in the movement's articulation of race and class (seeing race as instrumental to class) and in the activities developed, borrowing directly from the rationale of the BPP.

The second chapter specifies how MMRN centres migrants in anti-capitalist struggles, structured around two mirrored concepts of "subjection" and "subjectivation". Seen from "below", that is, from the standpoint of who bears the brunt of the regulatory power of the European migration regime, these mechanisms of control produce and capture a mass of commodified, disposable and racialized labour that is *differentially included* (Mezzadra & Nielson, 2013) in society and the labour market. Operationalizing its Marxist and BPP inspirations that underline the primacy of class, MMRN articulates migrant rights through the language of labour, henceforth understanding migrants as a segment of the working class, albeit with cultural and racial specificities. This conceptualization of "the migrant as a worker" permeates the efforts of "subjectification" carried out by the movement, aimed at fostering the creation of legal, autonomous subjects that can

contribute to political mobilization. In this section already I outline some of the tensions of this approach, namely how it flattens and leaves unaddressed internal power hierarchies that are supposed to be actively countered in a project that self-describes as mutualist. It also risks being "colourblind", that is, reducing cultural and racial nuances to economist views of class struggle by seeking to interpret all problems as related to capitalism.

The third chapter zooms in on the dynamics that enable or hinder migrant solidarity-building within the space of the commons. I expand on some of the limitations of practicing mutual aid when a lot of the participants are up against huge barriers to survival, which hampers the horizontality of the organization. Furthermore, reliance on "experts" such as legal operators feeds into internal power balances and distance between participants, especially taking into consideration the role that the LHD plays in elaborating the movement's political claims. The difficulty that I've seen play out was the articulation between "the one and the many", a drive towards inclusion that stops short by limiting occasions for dissent and focusing on the primacy of class as a category for political action.

Despite its limitations, I would posit that due to its space-making and subject-making abilities, the space of the commons is still advantageous in working through these internal contradictions, as well as for constructing new political subjectivities facilitated by continual enactments of mutual aid and inclusive community building — even if the process is permanently tense and incomplete. For all its failures, the impact of MMRN in making migrants access the rights they're entitled to by pushing the municipality to negotiate bureaucratic protocols is palpable. It has brought over ten thousand people into legality and built a network of migrants, non-migrants, associations, lawyers and political representatives that well surpass the containing walls of Ex-OPG.

I aimed to draw an analysis that would bring together the potentials and contradictions of this space that I observed during fieldwork, of how people "on the

ground" deal with them towards their goal of constructing lasting change. But how effective is it, really, in constructing a migrant political subjectivity? A lot of the questions I was left with regarding the contradictions in the movement could only be answered in time. For example, if barriers to migrant participation are surpassed, how do power dynamics change? What is the longue durèe vision of this process of subjectification? Moreover, regarding the commons ability to connect struggles by relating them to globe-spanning processes of capital accumulation, I would be interested in how these localist political projects of the commons would look like scaling up from Naples to the national arena or towards EU politics, where the directives that define the possibilities of migration are decided.

As it isn't hard to tell by the hopeful tone of the thesis (and my positionality statement), this thesis is undoubtedly a form of engaged research. In general, I sympathize with the sentiment that "freedom is a constant struggle" (Davis, 2016), that every civic and social right was not granted but conquered. In one of my last interviews, I asked an activist why they thought doing this kind of social/political work was worth it. His answer was simple: "The solutions [that the government isn't offering to migrant and/or working class] are possible, and we say that because we have witnessed the change in several procedures in the last years; because we fought for them. Because *only the struggle pays*. And we know they are possible because we are always trying to do it".[42]

If, for the sake of argument, we admit that anthropology as a discipline is founded on the idea that out there, somewhere, is a life worth living, I hope I have contributed with an account of how that life might start to be constructed (Ortner, 2016); by recounting how other shepherds, "guarding other sheep in other valleys" (Geertz, 1973: 30) are

[42] Quote extracted from Interview with Sampath, March 2024

dealing, in a however flawed way, with the questions of "the one and the many", of constructing solidarity with and through difference.

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