



Focus Section

Eternal Waiting. Mobility, solidarity and migration in touristified Naples

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Abstract. The following article is part of a broader ethnography in which I tried to examine how Naples has become an urban battleground for migrant rights, amid rapid touristification. After three years of fieldwork within my doctoral research, which focused on the intertwining of tourism industry and migration, I was engaged with the social enterprise *Senaso* led by former migrants in analysing how solidarity and mobility work, and in observing how *barrier-borders* – from labyrinthine procedures to digital exclusion – enforce a condition of ‘eternal waiting’ (Khosravi 2014) which immobilises migrants in space and time. The fieldwork has exposed the contradictions of a city marketing itself as “beautiful” while its housing crisis, driven by Airbnb expansion and an alleged new governance of tourism affects both locals and migrants. As we will see, in contrast to institutional failures there is the solidarity expressed and the struggles fought by activists and social workers like Pierre Preira and Louise Ndong, whose commitment emerges from lived experience of migration.

Keywords: solidarity, mobility, racialisation, city, Naples, touristification.

When it comes to address social and economic injustices caused by bordering regimes and expressing solidarity towards migrants, urban actors have deployed a number of actions. Fundamentally, these have been divided between practices inspired by the principle of the ‘right to stay’ and of the ‘right to move’ (Della Porta 2019): the former challenge the social, institutional and cultural boundaries that divide citizens from migrants, the latter defy the current geo-political border system. Usually, the ‘right to stay’ is reclaimed by urban solidarity networks, which build intersectional alliances among different urban actors (Frisina 2020); on the other hand, the ‘right to move’ is pursued through actions carried out by activists who reach the

This research has been conducted within the project PRIN2020 *MOBS-Mobilities, solidarities and imaginaries across the borders: the mountain, the sea, the urban and the rural as spaces of transit and encounters* (2022-2025), and was grounded on previous fieldwork I carried out on the topic (Pomella 2025).

borders in order to support migrants' crossings. Although, borders are constantly de-territorialised, urban spaces represent a privileged site to observe everyday bordering processes linked to neoliberal capitalism and, in recent times, to touristification. At the same time, they constitute porous spaces produced not exclusively by the greed for profit, but by mixed urban solidarity networks, migrant communities and grassroots movements as well. Yuval-Davis (2019) argues that bordering must be located in-between the political and the sociocultural, at the intersection of political projects of governance and belonging. Thus, the city becomes a hub of transnational connections that define and fuel its transformative trends: the individuals inhabiting these spaces change, the relations of production within these spaces shift, and new social demands emerge. In these years of European crisis in refugee governance, cities have also taken on the characteristics of *battlefield*, where different categories of actors and authorities collide over the governance of migratory flows and the forms of solidarity. Even as sites of solidarity, cities represent a hostile environment in which migrants may face racialised spatial segregation and labour exploitation – in some cases mediated by digital platforms and increasingly linked to the tourism economy. Therefore, between 2023 and 2024, I tried to explore how solidarity practices and migrant mobilities are affected by a strongly touristified city as Naples. As we shall see, through participant observation in the daily work of the social enterprise *Senaso*, represented by Pierre Preira and Louis Ndong,¹ and through direct engagement in grassroots initiatives questioning the state-of-the-art of the city, it surfaced how migrants' 'right to stay' and 'to move' clash with a system designed to leave people floating in a juridical, spatial and temporal *limbo*, while risking to be exploited in tourism industry.

«CHANGE IS IRREVERSIBLE». VIEWS FROM TOURISTIFIED NAPLES

«Change is irreversible». This was Louis' remark on the sidelines of the interview, as he reflected on recent government shifts in several African countries, shortly before the 2024 elections in his native Senegal. This observation forces us to pause and ask: «And here, in our own context, is something changing irreversibly?». Hence, before digging into the core of this paper, it can be productive outlining the urban context in which solidarity practices and mobilities I observed have unfolded. Historically, Naples has been portrayed in static terms, emphasising the aspects that confine it to an alleged immobility, while the processes – both old and new – that reveal its constant motion have been overlooked (Pomella 2025). Yet it is now common knowledge that the city of urban waste and *Gomorra* has acquired unprecedented international tourist appeal, largely due to its ability to market its image through new digital technologies. Something irreversible appears to have been set in motion, though. When the city is discussed today, the conversation – once dominated by a litany of negative stereotypes – increasingly includes enthusiastic praise: «How beautiful Naples is». However, is Naples truly “beautiful”? Or, more precisely, does the way the city presents itself to the external gaze – the ‘tourist gaze’, to use John Urry’s (1990) term – aligns with the lived experience of its inhabitants? What are the social costs of what scholars have termed the ‘touristification’ process (Cocola-Gant 2016, 2018; Cocola-Gant, Gago, Jover 2020; Jover, Díaz-Parra 2020; Esposito 2023)?

Recent studies on Naples published by Alessandra Esposito (2023) succinctly summarise the material effects of a discursive order that has naturalised the city's supposed destiny – as if Naples were inevitably doomed to become

¹ Louis Ndong and Pierre Preira are the founders of Senegal Naples Society (*Senaso*), a social enterprise that I met during my PhD and with which I had the opportunity to share research spaces, times and thoughts, having been generously hosted at their premises. *Senaso* provides an extensive range of services for migrants and asylum seekers, including: Processing various documents, such as identity cards, residence permits, health insurance cards, and VAT registrations, as well as activating digital identities; Certified translations of legal documents in multiple languages; legal consultancy; Housing suitability certifications. Moreover, it is located in piazza Garibaldi, that is the site of the Central Railway Station, and, quite interestingly, which presents itself as a touristified and racialised space at the same time. Touristified, insofar as it effectively functions as the city's showcase, its *biglietto da visita* (Dines 2012), characterised by a supply of tourist accommodation cheaper than other urban areas. Racialised, because it not only hosts numerous migrant reception centres and the services associated with them, but also constitutes the part of the city with the highest concentration of non-Italian residents (Istat 2024). Thus, sitting in *Senaso*'s offices was a privileged point of observation of the everyday solidarity practices and individual mobilities of migrant people.

a city *of* and *for others*. In this process, digital platforms have played a pivotal role, collapsing the time and space of mediation between supply and demand and laying the groundwork for the internationalisation of the local real estate market. Consider, for instance, the 551% increase in Airbnb listings between 2015 and 2020, overwhelmingly concentrated in central neighbourhoods that – unlike other European historic centres – exhibit the city’s worst socioeconomic conditions (Esposito 2023). As Esposito notes, tourist accommodation primarily targets low-value residential properties, largely tenanted by non-owners, in areas with high rates of school dropout, unemployment, and housing precarity. This not only reduces the availability of affordable housing in already overcrowded districts, but also reshapes the housing stock. ‘Why taking the risk to rent to a family who might fall into arrears, when tourists guarantee higher returns and vacate quickly?’ (Esposito 2023: 93). Unsurprisingly, evictions for “landlord’s needs” have risen steadily since 2013. Touristification, understood as a multifaceted process involving the economic system, labour market, and public/private housing, thus generates significant expulsive effects (ibid.: 24; cf. Jover, Díaz-Parra 2020) – both direct (evictions) and indirect (declining quality of life and loss of local services; ibid.: 25, cf. Cocola-Gant et al. 2020). The growth of short-term rentals and eviction orders appears to have progressed in lockstep. Following the expiration of pandemic-era eviction moratoriums, the Prefecture of Naples reported over 10,000 pending evictions in 2022 – a tragic paradox in a city that, according to the Urban Tourism Observatory, hosted an average of one million overnight stays per month in 2023. In a certain way, the city ceases to serve its population, becoming instead a platform for a virtual urban class (Dines 2012) demanding even more tailored services and infrastructure.

This gradual expropriation of urban spaces has increasingly become the focus of grassroots inquiries and political mobilisation. Particularly significant has been the *Resta Abitante* campaign, spearheaded by historic centre residents, local traders, political collectives and civil society organisations. Through coordinated actions, the movement has sought to expose and institutionally challenge the socio-spatial impacts of extractive tourism models, demanding public policies to counteract their exclusionary and redistributive failures. A participatory research initiative emerged during a June 2023 public assembly in Ventaglieri Park – one of the very contested spaces analysed in Nick Dines’ *Tuff City* (2012). The event featured a collective survey where attendees responded to auto-ethnographic prompts including: 1) What is your residential location and daily spatial practices? 2) What urban transformations have you observed in your neighbourhood? 3) Which changes most significantly impact your local area? 4) Do neighbourhood networks exist for discussing these issues? 5) Are alternative, more sustainable tourism models conceivable here?

The initiative also provided a platform for first-person testimonies through an open microphone session, and it was illuminating to hear residents’ accounts of how they experience the city’s tourist transformation. A resident of Piazza S. Gaetano, in the heart of the historic centre, remarked that the overwhelming presence of tourists had effectively «robbed» locals of their public spaces. Others lamented the loss of even the simple pleasure of taking a leisurely stroll, now impeded by crowds of visitors «doing who knows what», as one man from the *Quartieri spagnoli* put it. A resident of Piazza Miraglia near the Old Polyclinic highlighted how constant noise pollution – morning chatter from tourist crowds and evening noise from bars – had made daily life more stressful, noting its psychological toll: «It makes you constantly on edge». These accounts reveal more than just complaints about deteriorating living conditions or the rise of a ‘tourism monoculture’ (Agostini et al. 2022), described by one local worker as a form of «colonisation driven by rising prices». They also critique the manufactured imagery surrounding the city’s identity: «What does to be Neapolitan even mean now? Selling €1.50 Spritz?» asked a former resident. Yet, despite the richness of these testimonies, no one questioned how this transformation affects migrant families. The word “immigrant” was uttered only once, in a single intervention, lumped into a list of vulnerable groups bearing the brunt of tourism’s externalities: «the disabled, chronically ill, and *immigrants*». This statement unconsciously equated structural precarity – shaped by racialisation processes – with embodied vulnerability. The many migrant communities inhabiting the historic centre’s neighbourhoods were conspicuously absent from the discussion. Yet their absence itself speaks volumes.

The exponential growth of platform-mediated tourist services and evictions coincides with a critical phase in European migration and refugee governance. Istat data reveals an 18% increase in Naples’ non-Italian residents

between 2015-2020. Crucially, the neighbourhoods with the highest concentration of short-term rentals – San Lorenzo, Avvocata, Pendino, Montecalvario, and San Giuseppe – overlap significantly with what Esposito identifies as areas of high tenant occupancy and socio-housing precarity. Municipal mapping data (2024) further confirms these as precisely the districts with Naples' densest non-Italian populations. A shift from cartographic representation to social reality exposes how these neighbourhoods' urban fabric differs radically from other city zones – a spatial organisation that, as I have showed elsewhere, is fundamentally *racialised* (Pomella 2024; 2025). This racialisation becomes particularly salient when considering Pierre's and *Senaso*' customers testimonies: the absence of migrant voices in anti-touristification campaigns grows deafening when their primary employment derives from the very 'tourism monoculture' under critique. During the interview² on November the 15th 2023, Pierre recounted how Senegalese migrants initially carved an economic niche through street vending – a practice bridging Naples and Dakar that aligned with cultural preferences for autonomous work. «Senegalese dislike having bosses», he stated. However, tourism's expansion over the past decade has generated escalating demand for precarious, exploitable low-skilled labour in connected sectors: hospitality, cleaning services, and catering. Between 2019 and 2024, the ethnographic work I have carried out in Piazza Garibaldi' street markets, which employ hundreds of Black workers, has shown that street vending has become a supplement income rather than constituting primary employment. All individuals I was acquainted with concurrently were employed in restaurants or bar, as dishwashers or waiters. Moreover, as I witnessed, asylum centres have effectively become reservoirs of racialised labour, funnelling workers into these sectors through vocational training internships – a system that institutionalises their position as disposable service labour while erasing their actual expertise and skills.

RACIAL SPACES IN POSTCOLONIAL NAPLES. THE BATTLEGROUND FOR SURVIVAL

The touristification of Naples has travelled in parallel to another urban phenomenon, that is the settlement of migrant communities and the establishment of the recent asylum system. Therefore, beside the so-called regeneration of certain public spaces driven by tourism industry, there is, as we shall see, the power of migrant people to shape and change the urban spaces they inhabit. Nevertheless, our European cities could represent hostile environments for migrants and people on the move, not only socially but also spatially. As urban anthropology, geography and sociology have demonstrated, the *city* has become a key signifier of capitalism's developmental processes (Barberi 2010; Agier 2020). This makes it particularly critical to examine its articulations in a borderland territory between the Global North and South like Naples. Deploying the conceptual tools of race, structural racism, and racialisation has clarified how migrant communities' presence and mobility both shape and are shaped by the socio-economic processes transforming urban space. In Italy, we still struggle to fully confront the correlation between urban space and racism.³ Our colonial history is no longer repressed, yet we hesitate to face it directly. However, if we recognise colonialism as constitutive of European identity and modernity – including our very conception of urban space – then framing all European cities as postcolonial ceases to seem forced. These cities are united by what Blanchard and Lemaire term 'colonial culture' (2003): a logic sedimented in space, time, and the European unconscious that implicates even territories only peripherally involved in colonial projects. The cultural naturalisation of a Self-Other binary, inherited from the colonial system, continues to legitimise discourses govern-

² From a methodological standpoint, over the course of this year of research I sought to put into practice a form of observant participation (Fanelli 2021). In other words, rather than positioning myself as an external and neutral observer, as is in some respects implied by participant observation, I aimed to contribute by working alongside Pierre and Louis in their activities, while simultaneously adopting a reflexive stance toward what we were doing. Throughout this period, I kept a field diary in which I recorded, through ethnographic notes, the impressions and events associated with each occasion I was present in the field. Proceeding in this way, I subsequently sought to collect Pierre's and Louis's testimonies through interviews which, rather than taking the form of a structured battery of questions, emerged as occasions for dialogue and joint analysis concerning the labour market for non-Italian citizens, regularisation processes, emotional dimensions, and the current state of the city.

³ There are some exceptions, see among others Carpini 2022; Midulla 2024a, 2024b; Pomella 2024.

ing the migrant-Other – their prescribed urban functions and spatial allocations. This completes what Blanchard and Bancel (1998) identify as the transition from the figure of the colonised native to that of the immigrant.

In contrast with Italian urban studies tradition, Anglophone scholarship has extensively demonstrated how racism is central to the material constitution of urban space (Cross, Keith 1993; Yeoh 1996, 2001; Roy 2009, 2011; King 2016; Picker 2017). These scholars argue that the postmodern European city can only be understood in relation to its urban Others: migrant men and women, Black populations, and Indigenous communities. Yet their substantial contributions to urban formation remain systematically erased or silenced (Cross, Keith 1993: 8). For Cross and Keith, race operates as a ‘privileged metaphor’ through which the city’s chaotic fabric becomes legible. Much as Edward Said (2008) exposed Orientalism’s imaginary geography – a distorted narrative justifying colonial enterprises – these authors reveal how portrayals of the postmodern city contain “tacit” social orders that naturalise a racialised Other, relegating them to second-class citizenship marked as socially deviant. Anthony King’s work (2016) further demonstrates that urban restructuring was itself a core colonial technology: cities were not merely tools of territorial conquest but spatial incarnations of colonial ideology. Thus, the logics driving contemporary urban transformations are deeply rooted in colonial pasts. This is particularly evident in architecture and built environments, which materialise colonial epistemologies. Buildings are not just reflections of society but active agents in shaping social attitudes. As Abidin Kusno (2000) argues, urban spaces forge collective subjectivities that propagate singular visions of history. Naples itself offers striking examples of this colonial legacy embedded in urban space. The *Mostra d’Oltremare*, originally conceived as a colonial exposition, now hosts international concerts and cultural events. Similarly, the National Library, with its colonial archives, face plans for tourist-oriented redevelopment that would limit access for researchers. The Museum of the African Society of Italy occupies buildings at ‘L’Orientale’ University, while throughout the city, commemorative plaques like the one on Via Santa Lucia – just meters from the Campania Regional Government headquarters – memorialise fallen soldiers from Italy’s early 20th century African campaigns under Giolitti’s government, predating the better-known fascist colonial ventures. These sites show how colonial histories persist materially within the contemporary city, even as their original meanings become obscured or repurposed.

The dual function of urban space as both vehicle and producer of identity assumes particular characteristics when we examine postcolonial cities within former colonial metropolises. These cities spatially articulate the markers of that relationship and the construction of the Other – a conceptual category that crystallised in its current form during the colonial period (Kusno 2000). The migration patterns of formerly colonised peoples, which now dramatically and indelibly reshape Europe’s borders, challenge the efficacy of restricting the ‘postcolonial city’ framework to former imperial capitals like London or Paris, or colonial administrative centres like Dakar or Casablanca. The spatial homogenisation associated with urban manifestations of a new international division of labour has produced a progressive convergence between “First” and “Third World” urban characteristics: the colonial city increasingly resembles the metropolis, while the metropolis adopts features of the colonial city. As Brenda Yeoh argues in her article *Postcolonial Cities* (2001), the colonial city should not be understood merely as the product of colonising forces, but rather as the outcome of resistances, conflicts, and interactions between colonised and coloniser. By extension, we might conceptualise contemporary European cities as shaped by the counter-power exercised by migrant communities and postcolonial citizens within them. Consider, for instance, the *taking* and *making place* of Muslim communities during *Eid* celebrations (Pomella 2025 cf. Knott 2005; Knott, Vasquez 2014; Saint-Blancat C., Cancellieri A. 2014), when they converge on Piazza Garibaldi from across Campania; the establishment of cultural and religious institutions; the proliferation of migrant-run businesses; their physical occupation of urban spaces. These phenomena inevitably drive grassroots urban transformation. Through this lens, observing Naples’ central station districts – home to long-term migrant residents and asylum centres, while simultaneously serving as hubs for the city’s touristification – offers new critical perspectives.

In the 1990s, ahead of the G7 summit, Piazza Garibaldi by the central station was conceived as a ‘visiting card’ (Dines 2012) for tourists and professionals – a city that, as we’ve noted, was already destined to become capital for somebody else. Yet this visiting card immediately confronts you with the contradictions of Naples’ new trajectory. The square is literally split in two in terms of identity, commercial activities, and its regular users. On one side lies

the Garibaldi of Senegalese market stalls, migrant-run businesses, local bars, kebab and African restaurants, Pakistani and Chinese mini-markets, and hotels partially converted into emergency reception centres. On the other stands the Garibaldi of shopping malls, the art metro station, Feltrinelli bookshops, pizzerias, and tourist hotels. In certain areas like the station district, we can observe genuine segregation effects at work, resulting from multiple factors: the polarized real estate market dividing tourist accommodations from housing for non-Italian residents; relatively lower living costs compared to other city areas; transport centrality; the presence of asylum reception centres and related organizations; greater job opportunities for foreigners; and crucially, a surrounding urban environment more hostile than the city's official rhetoric suggests (Pomella 2024; 2025). These spaces thus constitute one of the arenas where the city manifests as a *battleground* – a site where different categories of actors and authorities clash over migration governance and solidarity practices.

«SERVER ERROR». INTERESTED SOLIDARITY AND BARRIERS- BORDERS WITHIN THE COLONIAL ASYLUM SYSTEM

Having, in broad sense, outlined the theoretical and contextual framework within which this research has been conducted, I will now turn my analysis on two fundamental axes: mobility and solidarity. Examining these concepts – typically applied to migration studies at broader scales – generated further critical questions. My fieldwork revealed instead a series of *barrier-borders* and the consequent efforts to overcome them, undertaken both by non-Italian citizens and by those who view social entrepreneurship as an effective compromise for practicing concrete solidarity. However, when it comes to analyse solidarity, we need some crucial qualification. Refugee and migrants support, as well as academic and journalistic accounts, risk reproducing what Fiorenza Picozza calls 'the border spectacle' and 'the spectacle of solidarity' (2021: xx-xxi). What she refers to is the inherent coloniality of migration and asylum policies in Europe, embodied by those very actors, mostly whites, who carry out solidarity and support. Her proposal consists in rendering solidarity simultaneously an object and a method of research, conceiving it 'as a critical tool capable of interconnecting the border regime's oppressive practices to the colonial relations inherent to autonomous practices of solidarity' (ibid.: 26). Furthermore, focusing on migrants' "side", the contribution on the topic made by Ivan Bonnin, Enrico Fravega and Luca Queirolo Palmas (2024) from two ethnographic cases, on land and sea, in Italy and Tunisia, tried to show how the 'migration industry from below' is constituted by a multiplicity of act of "spurious solidarity". In particular represented by migrants' informal economies. From their standpoint the principle of solidarity informs a number of material practices through which migrants' daily routine and acts of self-organization are shaped in many racialised contexts (ibid.: 183). Nonetheless, the idea of solidarity should be 'deseccated'; it should be kept in mind that the boundaries between forms of mutual aid and the informal economy are uncertain and evanescent. The concept of interested solidarity they developed aims to broaden the scope of such coincidence to the realm of economics. Social relations which take the form of economic transactions do not necessarily exclude the presence of solidarity. On the contrary, as they point out, there is often a convergence between the two logics, which merge into a more complex rationality. There is not necessarily a contradiction between solidarity and material interest but rather a deep overlapping. The contradiction occurs when one of the two terms prevails: if and when the logic of the exchange becomes completely hegemonized by the accumulation of profit, then solidarity is no longer there (Bonnin, Fravega, Queirolo Palmas 2024: 163). Solidarity can be a material concept that is not in direct opposition to the market idea. Thus, they wonder, and I wonder with them, where interested solidarity ends, and exploitation start.

In my case, rather than the interested solidarity practised by migrants, I observed this overlap between solidarity and the market from the perspective of individuals who provide "solidarity-based" services as part of their work. Speaking the truth, the experiences of Pierre and Louis disrupt any clear-cut rationality, given that they themselves were once people on the move. Having participated for an entire year in the work carried out by *Senaso*, allowed me to witness those everyday 'micro-practices' of racism (Staudigl 2012: 34) at play in the process of creating barrier-borders that trap migratory projects – whether to stay or to keep moving – within a suspended

space and time where agency is paralysed. Here, the ‘right to stay’ and the ‘right to move’ risk becoming unattainable chimeras. One moves yet remains stuck, making no progress from the initial idea that set them on their path. This “migrant condition”, however, brings with it a constellation of minor and major struggles, which white Italian social enterprises engaged in solidarity work often fail to grasp. As Pierre explained to me, *Senaso* emerged from the recognition that, despite the pre-existence – indeed, the ubiquity – of the very services they offered, something was palpably missing. «Walking in the other’s shoes. If you have not lived the same experience, it’s neither obvious nor easy. I say this because we⁴ underwent a relatively smooth migration, yet we are uniquely placed to understand certain dynamics. The rationale is: as migrants, we grasp specific mechanisms and problems that someone without this experience might struggle to comprehend». And I believe this is precisely why *Senaso*’ experience is significant: it emerges from within migrant subjectivities embedded in the territory, for other migrant subjectivities. As in the words of Pierre, the meaning of solidarity and the roots of his job are clear:

The first thing is to feel the person. My priority is trying to help those who come here. Unfortunately, there are always problems. Everyone who comes here has an issue, big or small – but there’s always something, and my first thought is whether I can solve it. I try to solve it without charging, if it’s serious and I know the person is truly struggling. Profit isn’t my concern. I try to take on extra jobs. So, I can share my experience; it helps me better understand those in irregular situations. When I arrived, this kind of service was missing – one that actually cared about the person, because what we felt was that those already doing this work were only after profit: “Pay me, and I’ll fix your problem”. This was obvious even in asylum reception system, where not everyone was truly an operator in the strict sense. They weren’t prepared to that; they saw a business opportunity, exploiting the asylum system. Some hotels even improvised as asylum centres, and it created only chaos. Socially, too, it became a problem – like in the area, with all these migrants grouped together, doing nothing from morning to night. It’s easy to lose yourself in despair when you’ve no purpose all day. Many are very young, with no life experience or real-world skills, so they arrive and face disillusionment, trauma... If you don’t grasp this, you can’t do asylum work. I’m not saying we understand everything, but we see part of the problem at its root because we bring our personal experience into it. That’s why *Senaso* was born – because something was missing, something only us could really provide. Unpretentiously (Interview excerpt, 11/15/2023).

What I have thus far termed *barrier-borders* – demarcating the symbolic and urban boundaries within which the life stories of the migrants I encountered unfolded – manifest themselves through seemingly insignificant factors: the excessive technicality of terminology in procedures to request, renewal, or update residence permits; the growing necessity of digital literacy; significant distances to travel, with their attendant financial and temporal costs; and exogenous variables, independent of applicants or their helpers, which render certain essential operations de facto impossible. These factors intertwine, collectively shaping the lived experience of migrants navigating constrained mobility within often hostile urban spaces, left with pressing questions about their status and rights that are frequently met with the injunction *to wait*. Take, for instance, the residence permit – whether for renewal or first-time application. The procedure requires completing a *kit*, comprising two multi-page forms, to be submitted at a post office for dispatch to the relevant police headquarters (*Questura*). Concurrently, applicants must book an appointment via the State Police portal using a digital identity to proceed. The kit includes general instructions and supplementary tables to guide form-filling – yet comprehension is far from straightforward, irrespective of linguistic competence. For non-native Italian speakers, the difficulty is exponentially greater. I myself struggled to complete it on behalf of a young man while assisting Pierre and Louis at their office. The process is fraught with tension: a minor error, a misplaced letter or code, may trigger rejection, forcing the applicant to restart the entire process – more waiting, further costs,⁵ renewed anxieties over legal status. Moreover, the kit demands a labyrinth of documents: ID cards, passports, previous permits, tax codes, employment contracts, rental agreements with proof of residence and housing suitability, income statements, and additional paperwork for those with dependents. Dozens of pages that could be lost, damaged, or forgotten, compelling a return to square

⁴ He means his generation of migrants, came in Naples around the Nineties.

⁵ These costs range between €126 and €176, plus any additional fees charged by TAOs (Tax Assistance Office, *CAF* in Italian) or other agencies.

one. Depending on the case, this ordeal repeats every six months, one to two years, or, for those with longer-term permits, every five to ten years.⁶

Beyond the technical difficulties outlined above – which in the vast majority of cases require trained operators to navigate, undermining migrants’ autonomy as result – lies the necessity of digital literacy in a foreign language: the ability to use internet platforms, navigate various smartphone applications, and manage the security verifications typically required when handling sensitive documents. These *nano-borders*, which constrain both quality of stay and mobility, create what appears to be a deliberately restrictive environment designed to limit individual autonomy (Picozza 2021). Yet at times, no level of competence proves sufficient against independent variables – those exogenous factors where neither individual effort nor even interested solidarity can prevail. Consider the case of a Senegalese woman attempting to renew her residence permit. For days, the police portal failed to recognise the file format containing copies of her existing permit. Despite following official guidelines, the system generated persistent errors: first rejecting the attachment as unrecognisable, then flagging the document number as unreadable, before finally delivering a «*Server error – try again later*»-message after an unusually prolonged loading time. As we waited, Pierre remarked wryly: «It’s thinking about how to reject us». We persisted for two further days without success.

«NO AVAILABILITY». NANO-MOBILITY IN SUSPENDED TIMES

This vignette reveals how such elements intertwine with urban space, mobility and solidarity to shape migrant lived experience. Foremost is the temporal dimension – perhaps the most precious resource. Time is lost: in queues at tax assistance offices, post offices, police headquarters and immigration bureaus; in resolving technical and procedural issues; in traversing cities, often to distant locations. It’s an *eternal suspended urban time*, as Shahram Khosravi (2014) would put it – months for fingerprinting appointments, years for territorial commission hearings and appeals following rejections. Even compliant applicants wait interminably, effectively reducing their permit’s validity period as bureaucratic inertia risks expiration – a phenomenon Pierre experienced firsthand when his documents languished in immigration office archives. Without valid permits, however, irregular status brings expulsion risks.

This frustrating context clashes with solidarity’s inherent limitations in adequately addressing the challenges at hand. These constraints extend beyond residence permits to the most mundane administrative processes that Italian citizens take for granted – healthcare registration, municipal residency records, or even correcting a gender marker in official documents, which can trigger protracted bureaucratic procedures. Solidarity finds itself constrained by scarce resources, restrictive immigration laws, and the operational inefficiencies of designated institutions (police headquarters, prefectures, immigration offices). These same factors simultaneously condition migrant mobility patterns. The mobility I observed operates across multiple scales – national, regional, provincial – yet remains predominantly urban, confined within those invisible boundaries that spring to mind when we conventionally imagine borders. Migration toward Europe is inherently a *spatial struggle*, indeed, involving multiple movements and, often, period of settling in different locations than the one where the first application for residence permit or asylum was submitted (Picozza 2021: xxii). Yet, within this mobile and bordered spatiality, migration is also a *temporal struggle* (Khosravi 2014), a long and processual experience of existing. Pierre’s account of an unaccompanied minor’s arrival, lays bare this (im)mobile condition of wasted time and waiting spaces.

When an unaccompanied minor arrives, there is a designated unit and established protocol requiring exhaustive documentation – including identifying who first “found” the child. This creates considerable confusion. In this instance, I had been called to accompany the boy. So, who “found” him first? Me, who escorted him, or the person who alerted me? The emergency unit for unaccompanied foreign minors, aware of the protocol’s excessive length, can’t be bothered to initiate proceedings. It’s not incompetence – they simply resent activating a process that first requires locating an available social worker. Nothing can proceed until one arrives. When they

⁶ Prior to the current far-right government, there was an unlimited residence permit which required no renewal. Under current regulations, it must be renewed every ten years.

finally do, the official record begins, meaning you're trapped there until completion. That day, I lost a full workday – from 3pm until 9pm – waiting for a social worker coming from Casoria⁷. Then begins the farce: futile questions culminating in «We have no availability». But sourcing accommodation isn't my responsibility. «Try the police station». There: «Not our jurisdiction – municipal police handle this». The municipal police: «No dedicated unit or available patrols». Back to *Questura* at Via Medina: «Go to the municipal police». The Forcella station officer received us with visible disgust. At breaking point, I contacted a council member, who reached a commander she knew at Stella district. Even then, the officer – unaware of my “connections” – tried redirecting us to Via Medina. I refused to move. After confiscating my ID for thirty minutes under dubious pretences, they finally made calls. The absent commander had supposedly briefed another officer, who equally resisted initiating proceedings. More waiting. The constant refrain: «No places available». For foreign minors, it's worse – emergency shelters don't apply. They require specific facilities. Latecomers get nothing. Alternative solutions must be found (Interview excerpt, 11/15/2023).

As I noted, what I observed was a form of forced, directed mobility shaped by *barrier-borders* – spatialized in locations where either strategic solidarity practices occur or where legal status verification takes place. This mobility consists of micro-movements that fundamentally condition *urbanscapes* (Appadurai 2011) and reorganize the space. Leisure mobility becomes a rarity; movement occurs mostly for work, document processing, legal consultations, or securing secondary employment. Looking at Piazza Garibaldi and its surrounding districts, we see these phenomena – an urban space acquiring new characteristics, sites of strategic solidarity, crucial nodes of forced mobility and the city's asylum system – compressed, concentrated, and crammed into just a few square kilometres. The entire infrastructure of migrant survival collapses into this hyper-dense zone.

SOME CONCLUSIVE NOTES

In conclusion, during my engagement in a sector of the ‘migration industry from below’ (Bonnin, Fravega, Queirolo Palmas 2024), what I have observed was the systematic occurrence of what I termed *barrier-borders*. In other words, it seems that the hurdles in acquiring a legal status in Naples particularly, and in Italy generally, are not bureaucratic accidents but a technology of control, a device deliberately thought to keep migrants *waiting*. Exposing them, indeed, to economic, housing and social fragility. Trapping them in a position where they can't decline poor wages, can't afford a decent accommodation, can't go back to their countries and send some money home. From my fieldwork in *Senaso*' facility emerged that the spatial compression of migrant survival into areas like Piazza Garibaldi, is linked to how racial capitalism (Robinson 2000) operates through urban planning and labour market. Furthermore, the temporal violence of waiting becomes another form of racialised bordering, where delays in paperwork directly reduce permit validity periods, and, consequently, restrict migrants' social rights. Moreover, the neoliberal turn of Naples, represents a new phase in the city's commodification in which migrants' voices and social instances are often unheard. Although, the *Resta Abitante* campaign's initiatives have exposed the flaws of the local tourism industry, they have revealed troubling silences around migration as well, exposing how even grassroots, leftist urban movements often fail to address racialised housing displacement and labour market. As Louis observed, change is irreversible, but fortunately the direction remains contested. Wandering about a day in which time and space would be freely enjoyed by everyone and cease to be devices of social control, the challenge ahead could be ensuring that urban and public spaces belong not to algorithms, or to what Yanis Varoufakis (2025) has recently termed *cloud-capitalism*, nor to tourists, but to those who daily inhabit its streets and overcome its borders through acts of survival and solidarity.

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⁷ A city in the metropolitan area of Naples.

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