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"WHAT ARE WE SUPPOSED TO DO WHILE WE ARE WAITING?" VERNACULAR GEOGRAPHIES OF THE "BALKAN ROUTE" IN TRIESTE

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of figures

List of abbreviations

BVMN: Border Violence Monitoring Network

CAS: Centri di Accoglienza Straordinaria – Centres for Extraordinary Reception

CBS: Critical Border Studies

CMS: Critical Migration Studies

CPR: Centro di Permanenza per Rimpatrio – Detention Centre for Repatriation

CSS: Critical Security Studies

EU: European Union

ICS: Consorzio Italiano di Solidarietà – Ufficio Rifugiati Onlus – a not for profit, secular organisation officially established in 1998. ICS has been active since 1993 in support of migrants, starting with refugees from the Yugoslav Republics in the 1990s, and supporting people on the move from the "Balkan Route" today

LdO: Linea d'Ombra – voluntary association / political collective born in 2019 in support of people on the move in Trieste

SAI: Sistema di Accoglienza e Integrazione – Reception and Integration System

SPRAR: Sistema di protezione per richiedenti asilo e rifugiati – System for the Protection of Asylum Seekers and Refugees

Acknowledgements

This thesis bears witness to something that happened in specific circumstances in Trieste in 2022-2023. It is a testament to the struggles of people in wait, those who were stuck, abandoned, kept in inhumane conditions while in plain sight, and of the struggles of those who put their lives and freedom on the line every day to fight the fight. While I was shaken by the indifference to such human suffering even when so blatantly in everyone's face, I now see it replicated every day. As I was writing this thesis, the Silos was evicted. Meanwhile, the Italian government is trying, with little success, to deport migrants to Albania, while at the same time criminalising protests and dissent. The state of Israel is committing genocide in Palestine, and invading Lebanon. This is not a world I want to live in. As we witness this dystopic picture unfold in front of our eyes, we must keep fighting. Even though it is hard, even though it is depressing. I forever stand in solidarity with people on the move. And Free Palestine.

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Thesis abstract

Since 2018, the Italian border city of Trieste has become an integral part of the informal migration corridor of the so-called "Balkan Route." Amidst the spread of anti-migration discourse sponsored by local and national authorities, the city witnessed the creation of a solidarity network comprised of both formal and informal actors that has been active since 2019. In 2022-2023, the conjunction of the intensification of migrant arrivals, a lack of transfers to other Italian cities, and the unwillingness of local authorities to provide for suitable and sufficient accommodation created a situation where filing an asylum application in Trieste turned "people on the move" into "people in wait," forced into long periods of *stuckness*, left without shelter and healthcare. This situation segregated migrants to specific sites of the city, where everyday life was informally organised, social and political practices unfolded, and languages intersected and clashed with each other.

This project applies an original approach to migrants' everyday life at the border by starting the analysis from the specific sites that compose Trieste migrants' geographies. To do so, I adopt a "vernacular" approach, which allows to look at practices of co-construction and negotiation of knowledge that emerge in the context of intersecting marginalities and spatial segregation, as well as the political relationship that people build with space. Going back to the original meaning of the word as 1) *of the slave*; 2) *of arts* and 3) *of a country*, I propose a reading of the 'vernacular' as a methodological and epistemological approach that opens to on-the-ground negotiation of space and struggle over theories, grammars, and terminologies of the border.

The thesis is based on recurring periods of ethnographic fieldwork carried out in Trieste in 2022-2023, and about 50 formal and informal interviews conducted with a diverse range of actors involved in everyday life practices. With an empirical focus on 1) grammars; 2) material traces and 3) theories of time, this project aims to show that "vernacular act-ors" participate, albeit differentially and from different subject positions, in the "vernacular domain," understood as the political relationship that a group of people forms with space, both in terms of political organisation, and in practices of place-making. I argue that "vernacular spaces" are spaces in translation, which make it possible, albeit in a limited and fragmented way, for marginalised subjects to crystallise their "experience of the experience," to reclaim space and time, to negotiate collective political subjectivities through the construction of a "bordered" space and referent for their struggles, which turns tactics into strategies of resistance.

1. Wait (wait!?): the experience of being stuck upon arrival

i. People on the move, people in wait

I get to Trieste on a Friday afternoon, there's a national train strike and I must take a Flixbus to get there. It's always a strange experience to get a Flixbus to Trieste as it stops you right in front of the Silos, in the parking lot of this big, decaying building squatted by people on the move. It's strange to think how these lives can proceed in parallel. How can everything be so silent, still, hidden, while the lives of others are segregated for "us" not to be bothered, annoyed, aware? When I get off the bus, I decide to stop by the Daily Centre on my way home, to say hi to my friends whom I haven't seen in a while. The last time I was here was in January. When I enter the Centre, I feel like I am not able to see anything. The Centre is not so big, but I think there must be hundreds of people inside. I see a familiar face. I ask them: What's going on? They tell me that the situation changed drastically since I was here last. After a couple of transfers to Cagliari, in Sardinia, there was a blockage. Nobody knows when the next transfer is going to happen. Everything was full. There is no place. In the evening, I go to the Square and I feel like something is off. I mean, everything is off, but when you get used to this situation, to this everyday life, you come to appreciate it and hold it dear. But something has changed. People are tired, stressed out, depressed. It's Ramadan but people don't feel like celebrating. Every Iftar feels like there might not be enough for everyone (Fieldnotes diary, 13th of April 2023).

Since 2018, the border between Italy and Slovenia, and the city of Trieste with it, have become an integral part of the informal in-land migration corridor of the so-called "Balkan Route," virtually connecting Turkey to Italy (Minca and Collins 2021). While at first Trieste was mainly used as a transit area for 'informal' migrants, mostly from Afghanistan and Pakistan, aiming to continue their journeys towards other Italian or European destinations, since 2022 there has been a significant increase in migrants' asylum applications in the city (*Abandoned Lives* 2022). With reception centres and camps becoming saturated, and in the context of prolonged delays in transfers of people on the move to other areas of Italy, migrants have been forced to squat in an abandoned and decaying building called the "Silos." The Silos is located next to the city's train station, a building that is marked by the stratification of migratory processes that have impacted this area in the past century (Altin 2019; Altin and Natka 2018; Altin 2024). This situation was exacerbated in 2023, when transfers of migrants to other parts of Italy were delayed or blocked for extended periods of time, which put the first-level reception system of the Friuli Venezia-Giulia region in crisis. During the summer of 2023, Trieste's solidarity actors recorded about 450 asylum seekers left to wait without shelter and food, with no access to healthcare, and legal aid due to the saturation of camps that that form the first-level reception system (Pretto 2023).

Since 2019, Piazza della Libertà, the Square located in front of the city's railway station, has become a transit hub, as well as a solidarity and social space for people on the move transiting by or applying for asylum in Trieste. The group of activists and volunteers Linea d'Ombra has been active in the Square, together with a network of formal and informal solidarity actors, to provide first assistance to migrants arriving in Trieste after their convoluted, often-violent journeys through the Balkans. Piazza della Libertà has become part of the "Balkan Route" geographies, with migrants' informal communication and smuggling networks directing people on the move towards this site.

In the years 2022-2023, which is the timeframe of this thesis, the story went generally like this: a "single male" migrant would arrive in Trieste from the "Balkan Route," mostly on foot. Once arrived in Piazza della Libertà, they would get food, some fresh clothes if there were enough for everyone. Here, they would either wait for a night before continuing their

journeys, or they would receive information addressing them towards the "Questura"[1] where they would express the desire to file an asylum application. Once at the Questura, they would apply for asylum and receive a letter in return: an invitation letter, with a date falling after two or three months. The date indicated the moment where their application would be processed. However, they would be told, "we have no space in the camps for you now." "What do we in the meantime?" migrants would ask. "You wait" would be the answer.

This thesis starts from this situation of forced wait in which migrants were forced in the years 2022-2023 and aims to discuss and analyse what happened "in the meantime," namely "while they were waiting." In this timeframe, the situation resulted in the cramming of the few spaces that were carved out the urban fabric of the city by the struggle of people on the move, or by Trieste's Solidarity Network. In time, in fact, the network of solidarity actors active in Trieste consolidated though the unlikely and sometimes uneasy alliances between institutional and informal actors involved in monitoring, supporting, reception, and advocacy activities for migrants in Trieste. Solidarity actors can be roughly divided under three groups: 1) International/national NGOs and associations present in Trieste, such as the International and Rescue Committee (IRC), Diaconia Valdese Servizi Inclusione; DONK Humanitarian Medicine; 2) local institutionalised actors, such as the Consorzio Italiano di Solidarietà (ICS), Comunità di San Martino al Campo ODV, and 3) the local collectives, such as Linea d'Ombra.[2]

As degli Uberti and Altin (2024, 1148) have argued for the case of Trieste, "the migrant's state of waiting is […] not passive, and in the meantime, they often create their own 'parallel societies,' relying on informal jobs and connections […]". This situation, however, did not only unfold in makeshift or institutional camps, as has been the case with other sites along the "Balkan Route," but within the urban space. In fact, everyday life would unfold in the context of the encounter and the intersection between people in transit and people *waiting* for some *space* to become available, for access to first-level reception facilities, and for their asylum application to be processed. This realisation,

[1] The Questura is the building where the police headquarters are hosted and where asylum applications are filed.
[2] Linea d'Ombra originated as a collective and it became an Association (ODV) in order to be able to gather donations and funds in support of people on the move. However, the group remains anchored in their informal, non-insititionalised project.

together with the encounters that I had in the city, left me wondering about what kind of everyday practices could be carried out in this situation of forced wait, *stuckness*, and stasis that turned "people on the move" into "people in wait".

Walters and Lüthi's conceptualisation of "cramped spaces" is helpful in explaining the role of these three sites within Trieste's migrant geographies. In fact, the concept of "cramped spaces" aims to transcend the typical angle used by social sciences to think about space. Cramped spaces can operate across scales, and they register "degrees of deprivation, constriction, and obstruction, but always and simultaneously a concern for the ways in which such limits operate to stimulate and incite movements of becoming and remaking" (Walters and Lüthi 2016, 361). Migrants' everyday lives in Trieste would primarily unfold within three main sites: 1) Piazza della Libertà; 2) the Silos and 3) the *Centro Diurno*, a daytime reception centre. These sites highlighted a situation of spatial segregation and exclusion from the city's consumer practices. However, as this thesis shows, cramped spaces were far from being isolated from the rest of the city. Rather, they were interconnected through a web of social, informal, economic, and solidarity practices that spilled over to the rest of the city, while at the same time connecting these three sites with the administrative border, and with the rest of the "Balkan Route."

Within this context of racialisation and segregation, the cramming of these sites also allowed for the creation of temporary communities that inhabited these places day-in and day-out and provided with opportunities for encounter and conversations. Though the creation of social networks, solidarity activities such as Italian schools, healthcare assistance, monitoring, and legal information, migrants fought in order to be able to partially structure their everyday lives following routines, while being subject to intimate violence, debilitated, and deprived of the means to tend to their most basic, material needs, and in the context of the deterioration of their mental health. At the same time, the overcrowding and the difficult hygienic conditions of these places were instrumentalised by local authorities, who described the situation as harmful for the city's "decorum" and "cleanliness," as well as the safety of its "citizens."

Starting from this situation, and adopting an inductive approach, this thesis aims to analyse the intersection of migrants' struggles with the activities of Trieste's solidarity Network in their attempts to reclaim *space* as well as *time* in in the years 2022-2023. In other words, it aims to look at the everyday life of "people in wait" with a special focus

on the space in which this life unfolded, and the material conditions that made this life unliveable. To do this, the thesis follows a main research question that functions as a guiding device:

> *How is the situation of "people in wait" experiences by different actors who inhabit Trieste's cramped spaces?*

To answer this question, I carried out recurring periods of ethnographic fieldwork, immersing myself within this everyday life, and becoming a participant in it, as well as conducting formal and informal interviews with different actors. To make sense of the empirical data that I collected, I broke down the main research question into three sub-questions, which served as guiding devices for the empirical analysis that forms the backbone of the second part of this thesis:

> *1a. What kind of language and terminology do actors mobilise? How do these interact the spaces in which migrants wait?*

> *1b. To what extent do migrants leave material traces in the spaces they traverse and in which they wait? How do these traces impact Trieste's urban space?*

> *1c. How is the experience of "time" negotiated and explained by these actors? How does this impact practices of resistance?*

ii. Once at the border, always at the border

The border between Italy and Slovenia has undergone many reconfigurations throughout the centuries while maintaining a key role in the construction and negotiation of the collective heritage of the Italian city of Trieste (Altin 2024). The historical re-configurations of the border followed, among other things, two world wars, the processes of Italianisation enforced by the Fascist regime, and the arrival of hundreds of thousands of Italian refugees from Istria in the aftermath of the Second World War, as well as from war-torn Yugoslavia in the 1990s. The stratification of these events contributed to the

history of migration, displacement and relations of borderland populations and communities in the region (see, among others: Ballinger 2020; Cattaruzza 2011). Historical mobilities in the region have intersected with recent migratory journeys, creating entanglements of passages, material traces, and stories that contribute to the convoluted temporalities of mobilities in the region (degli Uberti and Altin 2024; Altin and degli Uberti 2022). At the same time, the border is still very present in the lives of Trieste's residents, remaining key to their commercial and social activities, which often involve cross-bordering practices.

On a daily basis, several migrants travelling along the "Balkan Route" succeed in crossing this border, despite the intermittent adoption of repressive practices of border control, and the presence of the Italian military patrolling the villages located in the area. Scholarship focused on the "Balkan Route" has been undertaking a thorough study of informal migrant mobilities through the lens of the camp, both makeshift camps (Jordan and Minca 2023a; Jordan and Minca 2023b); as well as institutional camps (Collins, Minca, and Carter-White 2024; Weima and Minca 2022; Bird et al. 2021). Scholars have also been active in denouncing and analysing violent practices of border control to which people on the move are subjected along their journeys, and in different sections of the "Route." Practices of pushbacks have become infamous, most notably at the border between Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina (Davies, Isakjee, and Obradovic-Wochnik 2023; Davies, Isakjee, and Dhesi 2017), as well as the Islamophobia that is entrenched in the racialised spatial dynamics of the "Route" (Rexhepi 2019; 2022). Scholars have also focussed on practices of solidarity organised along the corridor, where the presence of informal organisations, collectives, and trans-Balkan monitoring projects have allowed for the creation of support networks against the in/action of the EU border regime (Milan and Pirro 2018; Milan and Martini 2024).

Within this context, scholars have been analysing the tactics of movement and resistance of people on the move, while working on the conceptualisation of the "Game." This term has become integral to migrant English and vernaculars spoken along the "Balkan Route" and is used by people on the move to indicate their attempts at crossing borders in the Balkan region, in the context of violent pushbacks (Minca and Collins 2021). The "Game," however, is more than a metaphor that graphically describes the experiences of circularity and unpredictability of the "Route" (Stojić Mitrović and Vilenica 2019). As Minca and Collins (2021, 2) write, the "Game" can be conceptualised as the "spatial

tactics implemented by the refugees as a way of engaging with the impossibility of legally travelling to their desired destinations," as well as a "grey area" in the governance of informal migrant mobilities" (Minca and Collins 2021, 9). As Zocchi (2023, 877) has argued, the Balkan corridor is situated at the intersections and the "ambivalent articulation of the tension between exhaustion and subversion". Throughout this thesis, I rely and build on this literature that bears in mind both the governmental technologies enacted upon migrants, the resistance and creativity of their spatial tactics, as well as digital and physical infrastructures that are deployed by people on the move during their journeys (see: Khamsi 2022).

To look at the specific case of Trieste, I draw upon scholarship that has focussed on the role of border cities along the "Balkan Route" (see, among others, Lafazani 2021; Bird et al. 2021; Katz 2023). This interest has intersected with an increasing adoption of everyday approaches to the study of borders, both within urban spaces and in makeshift encampments along informal migration corridors (Lafazani 2021; Obradovic-Wochnik and Bird 2020; Tyerman 2021; Jordan and Minca 2023). In the context of Greek cities, Lafazani has argued that borders come to be re-negotiated through "*microbe-like, clandestine,* and *insignificant* encounters in everyday life" (Lafazani 2021, 1144), as well as through performative and more or less visible acts of resistance, neglect, or control. This is particularly true for border cities, or, as Katz (2023, 1612) calls them "borderzone Departure Cities," namely, "urban jumping-off points where migrants are suspended as they attempt to move on".

Although research on the role of Trieste along the "Balkan Route" has thus far been quite limited, there has been a rise in scholarly interest in the area. In their article, Minca and Collins (2021) interrogate themselves about whether Trieste can be considered as the "Endgame" of the "Balkan Route," namely, the end of the specific tactics of informal mobilities employed by migrants in the Balkan region (see also: Umek and Minca 2024). Roberta Altin has carried out important anthropological research on the stratification of migratory processes in Trieste (Altin 2021; Altin 2024), as well as on the temporal aspect of the experience of migrants in the city (degli Uberti and Altin 2024). Moreover, Altin has analysed border crossing rituality across the Italy-Slovenian border, conceptualising it as a "rite of passage" for people moving on to a new chapter of their migratory journey along the "Balkan Route" (Altin 2021). While the passage of migrants importantly contributes to the stratification of the border, as well as key sites within the city, recent

scholarship has looked at the interplay between the anti-migration stance of the local authorities and the adamant reaction of solidarity actors. Fortarezza (2023; 2024) has been looking at the voids left open by national and local institutions, claiming that, by filling these voids, solidarity actors in Trieste shed light on institutional misconducts, ultimately questioning the authorities' lack of accountability for their illicit in/actions. Connected to this point, Nicole-Berva (2024) has looked at Trieste in the context of solidarity movements across the Alpine arc, drawing connections between the experiences and the practises of solidarity with people on the move from different migratory routes.

This thesis is positioned within the empirically rich, grounded literature on the "Balkan Route," contribution to emphasise the role of Trieste as both the juncture of stratified and intersectional migratory experiences, as well as the interplay between institutional neglect and chaotic in/action, and the resistance of people on the move and solidarity actors. To do so, I adopt a theoretical perspective positioned at the intersection between Critical Border Studies and Critical Migration Studies, which allows to look at the scale of everyday life as a crucial domain where the borders materialises and is enforced on the bodies of marginalised people, while at the same time being reclaimed in the construction of alternative forms of communal living, solidarity, and struggle.

This thesis aims to make theoretical, empirical, and political contributions to the materialisation, effects, and violence that the EU border regime enacts on the bodies of racialised migrants. With this in mind, this work starts with an in-depth literature review of border studies (Chapter 2), which has served as the theoretical underpinning of this piece of work. The diverse and interdisciplinary body of scholarship that has taken interest in borders has long worked towards what has been termed a "processual shift" (Brambilla 2015), namely, a change of perspective from a territorial understanding of borders to the study of border(ing) processes, practices and discourses (Brambilla 2015; Rajaram and Grundy-Warr 2007; Rumford 2008; 2012; Parker, Vaughan-Williams et al. 2009). Important contributions have conceptualised borders as epistemic devices that are constitutive to the articulation of global flows, the commodification of labour power, and the constitution of political subjectivities (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013). This work has encouraged research analysing how borders have become important devices for the extraction, elaboration, and management of biometric and biographical data of those who are labelled as 'illegal' migrants (Chouliaraki and Georgiou 2022; Tazzioli 2020; Glouftsios and Casaglia 2023), while at the same time shedding light onto the

instrumentalisation of time into the enforcement of technologies of mobility and border control (Khosravi 2018; Tazzioli 2020; Robertson 2021).

At the same time, researchers have argued for the need to include different forms of actorness in the study of borders, pointing to the urge to include citizens in the analysis of who is involved in practices of borderwork and its enforcement (Rumford 2008; Perkins and Rumford 2013; Vaughan-Williams 2021), as well as shift the lens to the scale of everyday life (Rajaram and Grundy- Warr 2007, xvii-xxix; see also: Rumford 2008; 2012; Jones and Johnson 2016; Cassidy et al. 2018; Tyerman 2022).

However, as this thesis argues, border studies cannot be looked at in isolation but rather, they are positioned at the intersection with critical migration and critical security scholarship. While it outside the scope of this thesis and the timeframe of my PhD programme to provide a detail review of these intersections, I argue for the need for a stronger intersection between Critical Border Studies (CBS), Critical Security Studies (CSS), and Critical Migration Studies (CMS), as interconnected and complementary approaches to tackle the complex, stratified, and further deteriorating conditions of people on the move in Europe. In fact, CBS allows to maintain a focus on technologies of control, situating the research and everyday life experiences within the context of racialised spatial practices, and the instrumentalisation of time as a technology of mobility control. CMS prevents from losing sight of the materiality of migrants' everyday life, and of border-crossing practices, while at the same time shedding light onto migrants' tactics of resistance. CSS sheds light onto the importance of language, conversations, and "ordinary actors" in opening space for policy action, expanding and negotiating the boundary of what "security" means within its discursive frame.

I analyse Trieste through the lens of the spaces in which people in wait are forced to start a life, albeit temporarily, because of their impossibility to continue their migratory journeys. Understanding how this everyday life unfolds in relation to the urban space is crucial in order to shed light onto the situation of spatial segregation, intimate violence, and racialisation within public discourse that create the very conditions for this life to unfold and that abruptly put an end to it when people are eventually transferred. This thesis is ultimately an attempt to bear witness to the situation of people in wait, and to shed light on how the EU border control regime plays out onto their bodies.

iii. Trieste's vernacular geographies

Vernacular spaces

Border scholars interested in the scale of the everyday have adopted the lens of the 'vernacular' to look at the implication of non-elite actors in the negotiation of borders. Vernacular approaches developed in the social sciences as part of the field of Critical Security Studies, starting from Bubandt's call for the application of a "bottom-up, actor-oriented and comparative analysis of the political creation of security" (Bubandt 2005, 291). Bubandt's contribution paved the way for the development of vernacular security studies, which has produced theoretical, methodological and empirical contributions which insert the key element of language into the discussion, allowing for an analysis of signification practices and the construction of "in/security" that allow for border control practices to be enacted or contested (see, among others: Jarvis and Lister 2013; Vaughan-Williams and Stevens 2016; Löfflmann and Vaughan-Williams 2018; Jarvis 2019; Oyawale 2022).

While an attempt at a vernacular turn in Critical Border Studies was made by Perkins and Rumford as early as 2013, the adoption of this approach has been quite limited in border scholarship. Vaughan-Williams' latest book *Vernacular Border Security* was fundamental in creating a bridge between Vernacular Security Studies and Critical Border Studies, to shift the focus from elite narratives around "border security" to the role of citizens (Vaughan-Williams 2021). It is at this intersection that this work is positioned. While drawing from different traditions of vernacular scholarship, I argue for the need to push the boundaries of the "vernacular" to include marginalised subjects in the analysis of the materialisation, negotiation, and struggle against the border.

As previously highlighted by Vaughan-Williams (2021), vernacular approaches have been previously mobilised by critical literary scholars such as McLaughlin (1996) and Baker (1984). This thesis argues for the need to incorporate these fundamental contributions and make them central to vernacular studies. McLaughlin's "vernacular" is based on the concept of "street smarts," conceived of as systems of thought and explanation that are embedded within the local and cultural context which allow for their origins and negotiation. "Vernacular theory," McLaughlin writes, "can be a tactic for

cultural and personal survival, a recognition and rejection of strategies of cultural containment" and dominant, mainstream narratives that are presented as "self-evident truths" (McLaughlin 1996, 21). Baker's contribution relies on Foucauldian theory and adopts the lens of translation to look at the ephemerality and the essentialisation of the vernacular (Baker 1984). Blues singers, according to Baker (1984), become the translators of the "experience of the experience" of the segregation of Black communities in the United States, fixating it into the "juncture", namely, the blues song. As he evocatively writes,

> To suggest a trope for the blues as a forceful matrix in cultural understanding is to summon an image of the black blues singer at the railway junction lustily transforming experiences of a durative (unceasingly oppressive) landscape into the energies of rhythmic song. The railway juncture is marked by transience. Its inhabitants are always travellers – a multifarious assembly in transit […]. Polymorphous and multidirectional, scene of arrivals and departures, place betwixt and between (ever *entre les deux*), the juncture is the way-station of the blues (Baker 1984, 7).

If we start from this conceptualisation of the "vernacular" as always in transit, as fleeting, able to capture the "experience of the experience," and as produced by populations in transit, it is possible to transpose this analysis to the situation of people in wait in Trieste. Following from Baker (1984), I see the "vernacular" in its etymological sense as the "language of the slaves," understood in this thesis as the language of migrants from post-colonial or colonised countries. Migrants are forced to interrupt their transience but attempt to create a new life away from home, from the former colonies that they leave in order to get to the anguished "country of the master," of former colonial powers, of Europe.

While there has been limited communication among "vernacular" traditions in the Anglo-Saxon world, there has been no communication between these latter and French cultural geographers. While Anglo-American security scholarship has mainly adopted the "vernacular" to understand the everyday and bottom-up construction of the concepts of "in/security", French geographer Béatrice Collignon has conceptualised "vernacular knowledge(s)" as the geographies and epistemologies elaborated by a group of people in relation to the territories they inhabit – knowledge(s) that are necessarily situated, subjective and plural (Collignon 2005). This thesis aims to create a bridge between these

two fundamental contributions, which allow to focus on linguistic practices, while at the same time not losing sight of the materiality and spatiality of everyday life at the border.

Combining these different strands of scholarship, I develop the concept of "vernacular spaces" as those sites that allow for the translation between intersecting marginalities, and political actors subjected to differential degrees of racialisation. With this in mind, it is important to be mindful of the fact that "vernacular spaces" are "cramped spaces." Here, sociality and solidarity intersect with racialised spatial segregation, exclusion from accessing basic services, as well as the broader framework of temporal governmental tactics, and the precarious situation at the intersection between wait and forced mobility that is characteristic of migrants' lives in Trieste.

The concept of "translation" becomes therefore key to defining "vernacular spaces." Following from Giordano (2014), I see translation as growing from discomfort and estrangement, as well as its traditional entrenchment within the nation-state paradigm (Sakai 2014). At the same time, I see it in its potential to become a creative move, capturing the ephemerality of creative expressions from marginal communities, and fixating, albeit temporarily and fragmentarily, the experience of collective racialised bodies while also keeping into consideration its potential to channel new political imaginaries of the border, transcending the territory-nation-state paradigm. As Kimari (2021) argued in the context of Nairobi, "vernacular" practices and struggle for urban space powerfully emerge through actions, narratives, oral histories, and strategies of resistance.

Vernacular actors

I call those who inhabit vernacular spaces and contribute to the everyday practices and experiences of people in wait "vernacular actors." The term "actors" is inspired by Huysmans' contribution to Critical Security Studies. As Huysmans (2011, 373) argues, when "security becomes an act, it is not a routine practice, an acting out of given procedures and institutionalised conditions of felicity, a habitual practice, but creates a scene in which actors and things are brought into a relation that challenges a given way of doing thigs." These acts become political inasmuch as they create a "rupturing scene […] irrespective of its acceptance or institutionalisation" (Huysmans 2011, 373). Much like security speech-acts, I argue, when the vernacular becomes an act, it becomes political. This thesis shows that "vernacular acts" are acts of translation of a temporal experience onto

space, they are acts of place-making and on-the-ground knowledge construction, through which the relationship of the groups of people who inhabit "vernacular spaces" daily is negotiated. I call those who perform these political acts "vernacular act-ors." It is for these reasons that "vernacular actors" become translators of the experience of wait in Trieste. Including temporary residents in the picture calls for more nuanced and a wider conceptualisation of vernacular theories able to include mobile subjectivities that inhabit a place and a territory in a (forcibly or voluntarily) temporary way.

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, philosopher Michel De Certeau, whose work was pivotal in the development of "everyday approaches," looked at how "users" of space – "ordinary people" in their everyday lives – can manipulate places with their daily tactics (De Certeau 1984). By connecting this argument with vernacular theorists, this thesis posits that the users of the urban space in Trieste *produce* knowledge, which *impacts* and leaves *material traces* onto the urban space.

The conceptualisation of "vernacular actors" in the specific case of Trieste stems from periods of ethnographic fieldwork conducted in the city in 2022-2023. I conceive "vernacular actors" as those people who were present in cramped spaces with (more or less) frequency, who became part of the constellations that inhabited these sites, who contributed to the vernacular domain through presence, repetition, routines, and exchanges. "Vernacular actors" do not have the same legitimacy, their voices resound more or less loudly, underrepresented or overpowering according to their political subjectivities as non-racialised/racialised subjects constructed as legal/illegal residents of the city, as well as on the intersection between racial, gender and class dynamics. This shows that the concept of "vernacular actors" encompasses different socio-political subjectivities, with a differential privilege to occupy the Italian territory, partake in everyday consumer practices, as well as to move freely.

Moreover, "vernacular actors" do not share the same political position. They disagree and diverge, sometimes fundamentally. Disagreements arose within Trieste's Solidarity Network, and with and among people in wait. Likewise, conflicts stemmed from different practices and cultures of protest. Vernacular actors may very well reinstate practices of spatial exclusion, based on political beliefs, ethnic differences, gender, and class dynamics.

At the same time, the "vernacular actors" that I included in this thesis are those who were accessible for my research and that contributed to the theories and grammars constructed

and that were expressed in a language that I could understand, and that became part of the narratives and practices of resistance of Solidarity Networks in Trieste. Through the vernacular, the experiences of people in wait became visible in their complexity, albeit partially, through different degrees of translation through those who have the privilege to speak.

I, too, have the privilege to speak and write about these vernacular acts. I mobilise this privilege to be in solidarity and to bear witness. At the same time, this thesis is my translation and fixation of the experiences that were negotiated in the limited time in which I was involved in Trieste's vernacular spaces. This kind of academic work is useful in order to show connections and patterns on how everyday acts of solidarity, which on a day-to-day basis can induce to frustration and burnout, lead to the construction of traces, ways of communicating, and friendships that have the potential to disrupt racialised and violent practices of mobility control, and their capability to disrupt border and mobility control in the long haul.

Theoretically, this project shows that while going back to the border might mean to fall back into what Agnew famously called a "territorial trap" (Agnew, 1994), this is the very trap that people on the move try to escape from during their violent journeys, where the edges of European territories have become progressively more securitised and racialised. It is this move back to the border that this thesis aims to address, looking at how this intersects with practices through which people in wait attempt to reclaim their mobility and their time. Through the thesis, I argue that adopting everyday approaches allows to bear in mind the materialisation and dispersion of the border within the urban space – border that re-materialises as segregation boundaries that confine migrants to in/visible sites in the city. At the same time, this project aims to argue for the need to further vernacularise border studies, namely, to engage in the practices of knowledge-construction and signification from below, while being wary of including racialised and marginalised communities in the analysis – as well as remaining ingrained in the material experiences as a lens to unveil how violence permeates into people's everyday, intimate sphere.

iv. Methodology

As introduced above, creating a bridge within different understandings of the vernacular can shed light on the potential of this approach, not only as a theoretical lens, but as a methodological tool. Vernacular approaches, in fact, can inform how we do research with people on the move while looking at the construction of new political imaginaries in the interactions between different languages, practices, and cultures of resistance. This is crucial in order to understand an often-neglected aspect of migration, namely, that of the need to structure everyday life, comprised of material needs as well as social aspects, while at the same time being mindful of the context of spatial segregation, mobility control, and intimate violence to which people on the move are subjected.

This thesis starts from the *experiences of the experience* of people in wait in Trieste, by looking at life unfolding at the border, and the theories, terminology, and systems of knowledge that are created from below, namely, vernacular acts that shape space. A vernacular approach requires to accept that work will not show coherence. It allows for the inclusion of narratives, practices, and actions that are not politically coherent, leaving spaces for discrepancies and contradictions. It also leaves space for some discomfort in not being able to understand – discomfort that people on the move experience day in and day out and that I felt every day during my fieldwork and still experience while writing this thesis.

Furthermore, the vernacular is a domain where the construction of political imaginaries and ways of communicating can be conducive to creating new terminology, practices of 'translation' that transcend their entrenchment within nationalistic paradigms but are rather the result of tensions between vehicular and vernacular languages, forming new "grammars of the urban ground," to borrow from Amin and Lancione (2022). As much as it is situated and embedded within the historical and cultural context, the vernacular is embodied in those who inhabit it day in and day out, and who may not be traditionally associated with the vernacular sphere as it is traditionally understood, since they are not part of the national "imagined community". Adopting an intersectional and embodied gaze, and focusing on the everyday sharing of space, allowed me to include a different range of actors in my research.

Adopting a vernacular methodology, therefore, means giving space to everyday

storytelling and narratives, and the "potential they [bring] together to speak of ruin but also of possibility – however tragic [… which] constitute one of the plethora of situated tools that help [people] survive being forgotten" (Kimari 2021, 142). It also means leaving space for the researcher's autoethnography, to weave in the situated and embodied nature of this piece of research. It follows that engaging with vernacular spaces implies an immersion, and embeddedness, of the researcher, with all the risks and ethical considerations that the impact of their presence within the "field" implies.

My data collection was based on ethnographic fieldwork that I carried out over the course of the year 2022 and 2023 for a total of four cumulative months. During my time away from Trieste, I stayed connected with the research participants, and with the Solidarity Network active in the region. The decision to move back and forth from Bologna, where I live, and Trieste was due to: 1) the wish to partake in different everyday activities and to see how they were impacted by changing weather conditions, and religious festivities such as Ramadan; 2) the need to spread my fieldwork over a longer period of time to be able to appreciate the impact of changes along previous segments of the "Balkan Route," political shifts in the local and national governments, and other factors that impacted the everyday life; 3) my privileged position to be able to move freely and travel frequently to Trieste, to be funded by my university to do so – a privilege that positioned me within the "field," both *vis-à-vis* migrants, but also in relation to activists and volunteers; 4) my preference to conduct a "slow" ethnography where possible, to be able to establish trust relationships with the research participants.

The data collection was conducted through the combination of periods of embedded participation and formal and informal interviews. I participated in the everyday activities of Trieste's vernacular spaces, in the solidarity and social practices carried out with people in wait in the city, together with walks and hikes in the mountainous areas surrounding Trieste, where people on the move cross into Italian territory and where it is possible to encounter the objects that they leave behind. During this time, I carried out 33 formal interviews. I then conducted dozens of conversational interviews, of which twenty have been used for this thesis.

Formal interviews were mainly carried out with members of the Solidarity Network of Trieste, including activists, volunteers, operators, as well as local authorities. Conversations were carried out with people in wait and people on the move (see Annex

1). I contacted or approached the interviewees in light of their presence and role within vernacular spaces. Some people volunteered to be part of my research, because of their connection to the sites discussed above. I have used reports created by Trieste's Solidarity Network to look at quantitative data, which the Network has collected through monitoring activities.

I decided not to use a mediator in my research for several reasons. First, for a lack of resources and funding. Second, for the conscious and political choice not to ask overworked mediators in the Square to carry out unpaid labour. Third, the difficulties in understanding each other and the necessity to negotiate and find new ways of communicating, either through Google Translate, or through spontaneous little focus groups, allowed me to experience firsthand the tensions between languages, and to inhabit spaces of untranslatability. One of the main problems that emerged from this choice was that of making sure that participants in the research were fully aware of the nature of my work. For this reason, I have included in this thesis only interviews conducted with people who could speak English or that were carried out in a context where I could rely on informal mediation networks to ensure the fulfilment of informed consent procedures.

v. Chapters outline

The thesis starts with an in-depth review of the literature in Critical Border Studies (Chapter 2), which is the point of departure for the development of the theoretical framework underpinning this thesis. As discussed above, this literature is important as it follows the scholarly debate that brought to the implementation of material, everyday approaches to the study of borders, which are theoretically apt and politically relevant to discuss the situation of forced wait of migrants in Trieste. This chapter addresses the main debates that have impacted this field over the last three decades, to show the increasing connections with Critical Migration Studies and Critical Security Studies, and the growing interest in the scale of the "everyday" and on the temporality of border processes. This discussion opens the possibility to push the boundaries of vernacular approaches in the field of border studies.

Chapter 3 is devoted to a discussion on the methodology underpinning this work, with a

focus on the interconnectedness between the "vernacular approach" and the epistemological and methodological foundations of this thesis. The chapter further elaborates on the conceptualisations of "vernacular spaces" and "vernacular actors" presented above. The chapter first discusses the difference and continuities between everyday and vernacular approaches. It then further delves into the concept of "translation," which is key to the analysis of the experience of time and space by vernacular actors. The chapter also offers a discussion on the role and positionality of the researcher within the "field," and during the analysis and writing process, as well as an engagement in the ethical considerations of doing research with marginalised and racialised subjects.

After this theoretical and methodological bloc, Chapter 4 familiarises the reader with the context of Trieste. The chapter briefly touches upon the city's contested and stratified history, to give an overview of the complexity of the spaces in which migrants' everyday life unfolds. The chapter then focusses on the role of Trieste within the "Balkan Route," as well as providing information on the Italian reception system, its operalisation in the Friuli Venezia-Giulia region, and the latest developments caused by the election of Meloni's coalition government. Finally, the chapter offers a mapping of Trieste's migrant geographies. This virtual "walk" in the city serves to spatially position the empirical part of this thesis, as well as to facilitate the reading of this work to those who are not familiar with this city. This section is particularly relevant in that it shows the interconnectedness and the web that circle back to Trieste's vernacular spaces, showing their entrenchment in wider social, economic, and informal networks.

The third part of the thesis is structured around three empirical chapters. Chapter 5 looks at the construction of new grammars and terminologies through the interactions between languages, place-naming, and teaching activities. The chapter aims to show that through everyday life, new forms of communication are constructed. These allow for people to understand each other in the moment, while at the same time leaving traces through the urban space of Trieste. *Language rumbles* delve into the interaction between "dominant" and "minor" languages, and their hierarchisation (or the deconstruction thereof). It further delves into practices of learning and teaching a language as both solidarity and social vernacular actions. This leads to a discussion on the discomfort that stems from not having access to Italian language, which makes it difficult to follow the bureaucratically convoluted process of asylum application and further contributes to spatial segregation.

Finally, the chapter touches upon practices of "renaming" cramped spaces, which contribute to shaping urban space, while at the same time further highlighting the dynamics of power and privilege that are inherent to the vernacular domain.

While grammars of everyday life serve the purpose of articulating the experience of deprivation, neglect, and immobility of people in wait, Chapter 6 engages with the materiality of life at the border, touching upon objects left behind by migrants, distribution practices, and the intersection of different marginalities within vernacular spaces. In this section of the thesis, material traces are seen as vernacular acts that reclaim space, redrawing the border away from its administrative location. *Intimate Traces* discusses the complexities and the intimate violence of "vernacular spaces," as well as the instrumental use of concepts of "cleanliness" and "decorum" by local authorities to disguise their inability to provide adequate sanitary facilities and accommodation for people in wait.

Building on the previous empirical chapters, Chapter 7 engages with four vernacular theories, offering a political discussion on "time" carried out by different vernacular actors. These theories touch upon: 1) the constructed temporality of Piazza Libertà; 2) the debilitating effect of temporal tactics of migration management of migrants, namely, their being made insane; 3) the relationship between the stretched time of fighting a losing battle and the entitlement and difficulty of physically inhabiting cramped spaces; 4) the intersectionality of temporal experiences of migration, which is fundamentally different for migrant women. These theories are seen as political, performative vernacular acts. In other words, *Transversal Humanities* engages with the concept of "time," crucial to the transition from "people on the move" into "people in wait." In this chapter, I argue that theories on the intersection between the temporalities and specialities of Trieste's vernacular spaces allow for the translation of tactics into strategies of resistance, constructing a referent for the struggle and a delimited, "bordered" space from which the struggle develops.

Finally, Chapter 8 functions as a wrap up and a discussion on the main findings of this thesis. *Reclaiming the Border* shows how grammars, material traces, and theories of time contribute to the translation of "the experience of the experiences" into collective political subjectivities and resistance, which allow for the construction of a precise "referent" for the struggle, thus constructing and negotiating new ways of living "at the border."

2. Through scales, time, and frontiers: A literature review of Critical Border Studies

The interdisciplinary field of Critical Border Studies (CBS) consists of continuous reflections, discussions and conceptual shifts that have animated the scholarly debate on borders since the 1990s. Recently, CBS has benefited from its intersection with other fields of enquiry, such as Critical Migration Studies (CMS) and Critical Security Studies (CSS), to name a few. Numerous contributions from scholars with diverse positionalities and disciplinary backgrounds continue to challenge the terminology and methods used to discuss 'borders,' sparking debates on the very epistemological and ontological foundations of border studies. In this chapter, I engage in a discussion on the main turning points in the Critical Border Studies debate and the epistemological and methodological approaches that have been used to carry out research *on* and *at* the border, primarily focusing on the changes of scale that have characterised the shifts marking the history of this academic field. This discussion is relevant to map out the progressive interaction and intersection between this field and other strands of scholarship – intersections that allow to engage with the complexities of migratory experiences, operating on different scales and taking into consideration technologies of border control, the materiality of migrants' experiences, the importance of language, and practices of resistance. Ultimately, this thesis aims to contribute to this literature by bearing witness to practices of reclaiming the "border" in order to organise the struggle against it.

i. A "processual shift" towards Critical Border Studies

The 1990s were characterised by a renewed interest in the study of borders – an interest that must be understood against the backdrop of broader geopolitical changes that were importantly rewriting the borders of Europe and of the entire world, such as the end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the USSR and Yugoslavia, and the subsequent formation of new political entities. The "world order" as it was once known had disappeared, along with the dichotomous geopolitical categories of West/East that had

been used up until that point to discuss global affairs and international relations. At the same time, processes of globalisation and European Integration were seemingly leading to an increasingly borderless world, while simultaneously fostering new demands for security and certainty – which often translated into protectionist economic policies and anti-immigration sentiments (Brambilla 2015). This process was famously described by French philosopher Étienne Balibar with the much-cited quote "borders are no longer at the border" (Balibar 2009, 217).

It is in this context that we must position the renewed interest in and proliferation of scholarly contributions to the study of borders, which eventually informed what Chiara Brambilla (2015) named a "processual shift" in border studies. This shift represents a move from a strictly territorial understanding of borders to the analysis of border(ing) processes. According to Agnew (1994), until the 1990s, what he defines as "boundary studies" had been excluded from theories and debates about the spatialisation of power. Others reviewed contributions to this field prior to the 1990s, arguing for the failure by the field of border studies to adopt critical perspectives (for an in- depth literature review on the contributions to border studies up until the 1990s see: Newman and Paasi 1998; Kolossov 2005; Agnew 2008; Vaughan-Williams 2009). It was also during the second half of the 1990s that the field of border studies became more institutionalised, with the creation of academic associations, such as the Association of Borderland Studies, aimed at fostering dialogue among scholars and overcoming the sharp disciplinary division within academia regarding the study of borders (Newman and Paasi 1998, 187).

This discussion originated from the need to escape what John Agnew (1994) famously called the "territorial trap", that is, the entrenchment of the study of borders within the nexus "border- sovereignty-territoriality". This was contributing to the fixation of a representation of the world order focusing on the political entity of the nation-state, considered the only interlocutor in global affairs. In a critique of International Relations theory and scholarship, at the time mainly dominated by realist and neo-realist perspectives, Agnew (1994) defies the Weberian conceptualisation of state sovereignty and borders that contributed to creating a cartographic representation of a world structured around "fixed territorial division […] into mutually exclusive territorial states" (Agnew 1994, 53) – with the border serving as an "ontological, but also epistemological, framework within which some of the most familiar understandings of core terms, such as territory, sovereignty, power and authority, make sense" (Vaughan- Williams 2009).

Tracing the genealogy of the "territorial trap," Agnew (1994, 54) argues that scholars have been led into this positivist, abstract framing of the world due to three main geographical assumptions. First, the tendency to de-historicise and de-contextualise the "state," which was conceived as a fixed unity and often used as a synonym for "nation". Second, the proclivity to describe the world by making use of dichotomous and simplifying categories, such as national/international, domestic/foreign, inside/outside, thus obscuring the interconnections of processes originating and unfolding across different geographical scales. And third, the conceptualisation of the territorial state as "prior to and as a container of" society at large. These assumptions created a trap that was "circular and cumulative" and that contributed to the crystallisation of a de-historicised world, in which "the space occupied by states [was] timeless" (Agnew 1994, 72).

Escaping the territorial trap meant, above all, to introduce a "historical-geographical consciousness" into the study of borders, key to mapping the historical nexus between state territories and "the broader social and economic structures and geopolitical order (or form of spatial practice) in which these states must operate" (Agnew 1994, 77; see also: Paasi 1991, 242; Newman and Paasi 1998.) A call for the reconciliation of geography and history can be traced back to Anssi Paasi (1991, 242), who encouraged geographers to focus on the "simultaneous interaction between different levels of social processes, operating on varying *geographical* and *historical* scales" (see also: Newman and Paasi 1998). Adopting a historical lens and a multi-scalar approach to the study of borders allowed to spotlight that territorial state units are far from fixed but, rather, are the result of historical processes, such as the imperial projects both within Europe and outside, the fall of empires after WW1, and decolonisation struggles in the former colonies, which coincided with "the spread of a model of territorial statehood and state-centred political economy from Western Europe into the rest of the world" (Agnew 2007, 398).

Although there was general agreement among scholars about the need to escape the "territorial trap" through the adoption of historical and multi-scalar perspectives, during the 1990s and early 2000s, the study of borders remained quite interlocked into disciplinary divides, as the dialogue among the different disciplines was made difficult by a lack of common terminology. This intersected with a post-structuralist shift in border studies, which entailed the adoption of the work of philosophers such as Michel Foucault, Giorgio Agamben, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. To solve this impasse, scholars attempted to set some common grounds for the study of borders, which

could be conducive to the creation of common concepts and theories of borders (Newman and Paasi 1998; Kolossov 2005). This debate centred around three axes of reflection, as summed up by Brambilla (2015): the ontological, the epistemological, and the methodological axis. Scholarship at the time was divided between the tendency to look at borders as something to be overcome, and the conviction that borders were to be analysed as crucial phenomena that could not be disentangled from power relations within society (Paasi 2008).

One of the first attempts to set an agenda for border studies came from Newman and Paasi (1998, 201-202), who mainly addressed geographers and the work that they needed to undertake in their contributions to the debate. Specifically, they identified six main points around which the work of geographers should pivot: 1) the re-introduction of the "spatial dimension" into the study of borders; 2) the adoption of trans-scalar and multidimensional approaches; 3) of a multicultural perspective to analyse discursive practices leading to the creation or disappearance of borders; 4) the conduction of a historiographical analysis of the processes that led to the formation of borders and states; 5) a focus on the role of nature in border processes and; 6) the adoption of the lens of narratives and the methodology of discourse analysis. On a methodological level, theoretically grounded approaches proposed by Newman and Paasi (1998) as well as Kolossov (2005) were poles apart from inductive analyses undertaken "on the ground" (Brunet-Jailly 2004). Starting the discussion *at* the border, in fact, would allow for the analysis of the variables of market forces, culture, popular control, and "multiple and integrated government action" (Brunet-Jailly 2004, 6), while at the same time acknowledging the importance of the "structural environment [which] would set the broad characteristics of borderlands" (Brunet-Jailly 2004, 7).

The debate around drafting a common programme for the study of borders was later picked up by a group of scholars participating in a series of meetings organised as part of the research programme "Lines in the Sand? Non-Territorial Bordering Practices in Global Politics," funded by the British Academy. After the end of the project, the participants published an agenda, which they defined as a "political memorandum" (Parker and Vaughan-Williams 2009, 582). This can be seen as an attempt to formalise this field into "Critical Border Studies," structured along some key questions meant to foster interdisciplinary dialogue. Mainly, the memorandum stressed the need to integrate new theoretical perspectives as well as new terminology, meant "to develop tools for

identifying what and where borders are and how they function in different settings, with what consequences and for whose benefit" (Parker and Vaughan-Williams 2009, 729). The double move proposed by the authors was, therefore, conducive to concentrating on "bordering practices" as well as adopting "the lens of performance" to look at the re/production of these practices (Parker and Vaughan-Williams 2009, 729), thus turning the border into a site of enquiry in its own right (Parker and Vaughan-Williams 2012).

ii. Multiplying borders

In this context, scholarly contributions in the early 2000s worked towards the conceptualisation of bordering practices and processes, strongly influenced by the theories of de- and re- territorialisation proposed by Deleuze and Guattari. In the work of Balibar (Balibar 2009, 192), for instance, "territorialisation" indicates the processes through which "*power structures* shape spaces, languages, moralities, symbols, labour distribution and productive activities." In the words of van Houtum and van Naerssen (2002), borders should be seen as "social practices of spatial differentiation" and of "othering" - practices that are "intrinsically territorial" in that they work towards the (re)production of territoriality through the establishment and the hierarchisation of categories of mobile subjects along the lines of a 'us *versus* them' division (van Houtum and van Naerssen 2002; see also: Newman and Paasi 1998; Paasi 2009; Brambilla 2015.) Along similar lines, Balibar argues that processes of de-territorialisation always presuppose specular processes of territorialisation (Balibar 2009). Agreeing with Agnew's argument on the ambiguity of borders, Balibar (2010, 315-316) argues that these "institutionally represent both *closeness and aperture."*

Reflecting on processes of European integration, Balibar takes stock of how borders have gone under scrutiny and how the administrative function conferred upon them by the nation-state paradigm seems to have become obsolete. Far from triggering a process of dissolution of European borders, European Integration resulted in the blurring in the distinction between EU internal and external borders (Balibar 2009). The EU is, in fact, as much "permeated or 'invaded' by the world through its borders as it is 'protected' or 'isolated' by them from the rest of the world" (Balibar 2009, 194). It is this paradox, as well as the idea that borders are "constitutive of the transindividual *relationship to the*

world, or 'being in the world' when it is predicated on a plurality of subjects" that Balibar sums up with the formula "a non-democratic condition of democracy" (Balibar 2010).

A focus on the complex, processual and ever-changing nature of borders called for the adoption of new terminology. It was in this context that the term *borderscape* was first used, under the influence of Arjun Appadurai's (1996) influential work on globalisation. Following Appadurai's work, the suffix *–scape* helped uncover the historical and cultural situatedness and the perspectival aspect of the constellation of relations and practices taking place at different scales, as well as between different forms of actorness, which are constitutive of border landscapes. The framework of the *borderscape* aimed to foster the "study of the border as mobile, perspectival, and relational," with a specific focus on practices, performances, and discourses that "invade and permeate everyday sites" (Rajaram and Grundy-Warr 2007, x). This concept became the centre of a series of conferences organised by dell'Agnese from 2006 to 2012 (see: dell'Agnese and Amilhat Szary 2015), as well as the EU-funded project "EUBORDERSCAPES", which ran from 2012 to 2016.[3]

Following from Balibar's claim (2010) that borders are constitutive to the ways in which people relate to the world and to each other, it is through the *borderscape* that bodies are constructed and positioned within society, while at the same time being governable thanks to their codification through categories of gender and race (Rajaram and Grundy-Warr 2007, xvi). The concept of *borderscape* aims to escape the "territorial trap" without losing sight of the fact that border practices are strongly interlaced with the logic of state governmentality through the enforcement of categories of 'belonging' and 'non-belonging' and are crucial to the administration of justice. In fact, the abstract category of citizen and community and their relation to a territory is inextricably linked to the exclusion of another group of people (Rajaram and Grundy-Warr 2007).

At the same time, the *borderscape* is complex, vital and allows scholars to account for practices of sociality, resistance, and unruliness. Dell'Agnese and Amilhat Szary (2015, 6) proposed to replace the focus on the "performative nature of borders" to avoid falling into the tendency to think in terms of binary oppositions of inside/outside, belonging/non-belonging, thus joining Rumford (2008) in its call for a multi-perspectival approach to

[3] The website of this EU-funded project, together with its outputs, are available at: http://www.euborderscapes.eu/ .

border studies, and recalling the "Lines in the Sand" memorandum (Parker and Vaughan-Williams 2009a). As a consequence, it is possible to conceive of the border as a "geo-political-cultural margin that is never marginal but rather the engine of social organisation and change" (Brambilla 2015, 26). To be able to empirically translate the abstract discussion on *borderscapes*, Brambilla (2015, 30) looked at "actual *borderscaping* as practices through which the fluctuating borders are imagined, materially established, experienced, lived as well as reinforced and blocked but also crossed, traversed and inhabited". A focus on border representation and aesthetics was, according to these scholars, a way to consider the historical and cultural situatedness of borders, as well as their everyday experiences (Brambilla et al. 2016; dell'Agnese and Amilhat Szary 2015; Brambilla 2015).

This move towards a multi-perspectival study of borders is firmly grounded in Rumford's work (Rumford 2008; 2012), who urged scholars to move from Scott's perspective of "seeing like a state" (Scott 1998) to "seeing like a border" (Rumford 2014). It is these everyday experiences of the border that Rumford (2008) aimed to capture through the conceptualisation of the term *borderwork*, useful in order to include in the analysis a set of often overlooked actors, namely, borderland citizens. The concept of *borderwork* encompasses a "wide variety of bordering activit[ies], the diversity of interests at work in this bordering, and the varied spaces within which this activity occurs" (Rumford 2012, 899). A discussion on the involvement of citizens in borderwork is grounded in the debate on the seemingly paradoxical increase in border anxieties among EU citizens. Balibar (2010) looked at how anti-immigrant sentiments among EU citizens can be seen, on the one hand, as an expression of the "repressed mutual xenophobia" that European nations feel towards each other, while on the other serving as a way to divert the attention from the most pressing internal social and political problems (Balibar 2010). In this context, the increasing speed of the movement of investment, goods, and capital, as well as the consequences of 9/11, were the catalyst for an increase in border anxieties, which entailed an elaborated process of selection of people who attempt to cross the border (van Houtum and van Naerssen 2002; van Houtum, Kramsch, and Zierhofer 2005).

In the post 9/11 world, scholars became interested in the mobilisation of citizens in the enforcement and the replication of borders onto intersecting geographical scales (Rumford 2008), as well as in practices of surveillance translating into a "generalised borderwork whereby 'good' subjects are constantly on the lookout for 'suspicious' or

'risky' subjects" (Vaughan-Williams 2008, 64). This debate has been recently picked up by Cassidy, Yuval- Davis and Wemyss (2018) to look at citizens' reactions and everyday engagement in the process of the de-materialisation of borders in what they call *post-borderland borderscapes* – as dematerialised, often digital borders do not reflect citizen's understanding of the borderland in which they live (Cassidy, Yuval-Davis, and Wemyss 2018, 171).

iii. Intersections between Critical Border Studies and Critical Migration Studies

The post-structuralist turn in border studies was also marked by the adoption of the Foucauldian concept of *biopolitics* apt to understand the control exercised by borders on migrant bodies and populations. This has translated into the conceptualisation of the "biopolitical border" (Walters 2002). Walters looked at how the border has become the "privileged institutional site" where authorities are able to extract and acquire biological and biographical data about individuals, especially informal migrants, which are then reduced to the production of a governable population (Walters 2002, 573). This ties into Louise Amoore's analysis of the adoption of digital technologies and the involvement of private companies and experts in data mining in border management (Amoore 2006). Amoore talks about the *biometric border* as a portable border that is inscribed onto the very bodies of mobile subjects, who at the same time carry it and are governed by it, which is "symptomatic of both decentred and outsourced forms of state and the contradictions of contemporary capitalism" (Amoore 2006, 388). Biometric data extraction, in fact, involves all mobile subjects, whilst at the same time re-inscribing inequalities and hierarchies upon bodies through "continual crossing[s] of multiple encoded borders – social, legal, gendered, racialised and so on" (Amoore 2006). At the same time, these data allow for practices of division and control of the population into 'risky groups,' as well as their policing at a distance and at "dis-time," namely, based on anticipation of future behaviour (Bigo 2007, 20-31).

The biopolitical lens led scholars to read the tension between the de-materialisation of borders and the surge in border anxieties by analysing the EU border regime. William Walters argued that biopolitical and biometric borders have become part and parcel of the

EU border regime (Walters 2002). Following from Stierl (2018, 8-9), the "EU border regime" is understood as playing out through interlocking scales and levels of governance, which has translated into the "enforcing practices of mobility control through governance techniques". In this sense, Stierl argues, "EUrope becomes nameable precisely in the process of drawing up and governing borders." It follows that a "crisis" of border control entails a crisis of European legitimacy (Stierl 2018, 8). In fact, these governmental technologies are aimed to respond to the uncertainties and bordering anxieties generated by the de-materialisation of the EU internal frontiers brought about by the implementation of the Schengen area (Walters 2002, 573) – a process that has been complemented by the securitisation and militarisation of the EU external frontiers and practices of "offshoring" and "outsourcing" of EU border control to Northern African countries (Bialasiewicz 2012, 843).

Biopolitical approaches to border studies were criticised for failing to account for the direct violence perpetrated by border authorities on the bodies of individual migrants, and the institutionalised and normalised violence inherent to border regimes. Within this debate, the work of Italian geographer Giorgio Agamben was adopted to look at the exposure of migrants to acts of violence and to biopolitical extraction, which is needed to produce the bare life that sovereign power needs in order to define and legitimise itself, which Vaughan-Williams (2009) conceptualised as the *generalised biopolitical border*. This concept aims to unveil how borders become entrenched with the bodies of migrant subjects, turning into "generalised throughout a global biopolitical terrain" (Vaughan-Williams 2009, 166). Drawing from the work of Mbembe, Derrida and Esposito, borders were further analysed in their "thanatopolitical," "zoopolitical," and "immunitary" nature (Vaughan-Williams 2015), in that they can expose mobile subjects to acts of violence, or be reconfigured as biopolitical immune systems that allow for the gradual and controlled inoculation of threats within the body politic to trigger an immunisation process (Vaughan-Williams 2015).

Connected to the discussion on the "territorial trap," the biopolitical control exercised through and by borders should not be conflated with the exercise of territorial, state sovereignty. Biopolitical control is, in fact, not only exercised by the state. A burgeoning body of scholarship has delved into what Walters (2011) named the "humanitarian border," which aims to describe the ways in which the implementation of humanitarian discourses in the EU border regime implies processes of re-territorialisation, with

humanitarian government conceived as the governance of "precarious lives" through the deployment of moral sentiments, such as compassion (Fassin 2012). As Pallister-Wilkins writes, "humanitarianism and, by extension, humanitarian borderwork play a role in restoring and securing a particular type of liberal order, expanding neoliberal market logics, and therefore maintaining liberal politics more broadly" (Pallister-Wilkins 2022a, 122). Humanitarian borders also contribute to the registration of migrants and their movements, thus "opening certain routes and pre-emptively foreclose others" (Pallister-Wilkins 2022a, 124). Scholars have argued that the adoption of humanitarian discursive frames and the workings of the humanitarian border have gone hand-in-hand with the securitisation of EU external borders, thus creating an intersection between practices of care and control that have become part and parcel of the EU border regime (Little and Vaughan-Williams 2017; Pallister-Wilkins 2020; 2022a; İşleyen 2018; Novak 2022).

Starting from this discussion, a strand of literature drawing from autonomist political thought has criticised biopolitical perspectives for their inability to account for the potential for border struggles as ways of challenging the construction of space as dictated by the working of capital and to "remake the political subjectivity of labour in ways that provide contested grounds for building a politics of the common" (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013, 23). The adoption of the notion of the sovereign ban derived from Giorgio Agamben was also criticised for the emphasis that is puts on control and on sovereign power, thus preventing taking into consideration migrants' agency. This led to another impasse in the literature, which divided it into two strands: one privileging a focus on border control and another taking the perspective of migrants' agency.

It is at this juncture that critical border studies and the body of scholarship in Critical Migration Studies have intersected in a heated debated concerning, primarily, issues of ontological primacy in the interaction between border control and resistance. The literature broadly defined as Autonomy of Migration, influenced by autonomist thinkers such as Toni Negri, Michael Hardt and Sandro Mezzadra, has advocated for the ontological primacy of migration resistance, using it as a lens to understand the proliferation of borders as a result of and a response to migrant autonomous forces (see, among others: Papadopoulos and Tsianos 2013a; 2013b; Casas-Cortes, Cobarrubias, and Pickles 2015).

Critical Migration Scholars have then criticised early Autonomy of Migration contributions for failing to capture the co-constitutive relationship between power and resistance (Stierl

2018, 27).[4] However, this literature has contributed to sparking a debate on resistance and borders as sites of struggle. Not only is the border a potential space of struggle that involves activists and civil society, but it is also a space of spatial disobedience and dissent for migrants who adopt "unruly" tactics to circumvent the restrictions imposed upon their mobility by the EU border regime. These tactics that they adopt "selectively" in order to deal with the nuanced degree of (in)visibility in which they live and move, through the intersection of "visible and more opaque modes of struggling to cross borders" (Tazzioli 2020, 145; see also Mezzadra and Neilson, 2013; Garelli and Tazzioli 2018; Squire 2015; De Genova 2017).

iv. Border temporalities

The debate on the multiplication of borders was brought on a different scale of analysis by the publication of *Borders as Method, or the Multiplication of Labour.* In this book, Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson (2013, 3-20) conceptualised borders as epistemic devices that play a constitutive role in the articulation of global flows and the commodification of labour power, which goes hand in hand with the creation of political subjectivities, thus leading to the "production of a heterogeneous time and space of contemporary global and postcolonial capitalism" (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013). Pushing the concept of "extraction" beyond its literal sense, Mezzadra and Neilson (2017, 194) write about the fact that "extraction involves not only the appropriation and expropriation of natural resources but also, and in ever more pronounced ways, processes that cut through patterns of human cooperation and social activity." The temporal dimension of borders and their processes of confining migrants in a condition of deportability contributes to the maintenance of an "army of reserve labour" which can be exploited precisely because of the precarity of their conditions (Khosravi and Yimer 2020; Andersson 2014).

The threat of deportation affects both the temporalities and the spatiality of the lives of those who are subjected to it. Borders are therefore a physical experience that translates

[4] The body of scholarship associated to, and involved in the debate around the Autonomy of Migration is quite vast. Due to time constraints, I could not offer a thorough overview of this debate. A comprehensive review can be found in Nyers (2015). Further insight can be acquired through Scheel (2019), who has worked from within the Autonomy of Migration to draw a critique to this approach from the lens of biometric borders.

onto the bodies of migrants during the "border ritual" (Khosravi 2010) which re-inscribes people into intersecting categories of class, race, gender, and sexuality. This experience has been conceptualised by De Genova through the "border spectacle," violent performances through which the category of "illegality" and of foreignness is (re)produced. Through this spectacle, migrants are not excluded from society but are rather included as "disposable (deportable), ultimately 'temporary' labour power" (De Genova 2002, 438).

This performance is reaffirmed through "quotidian forms of intimidation and harassment" which take place well beyond the border, with the border spectacle being "always accompanied by its shadowy, publicly unacknowledged or disavowed, obscene supplement: the large-scale recruitment of illegalised migrants as legally, vulnerable, precarious, and thus tractable labour" (De Genova 2013, 1181). These "technologies of temporal management" are part and parcel of border regimes, which not only employ them in order to manage migrants as living labour, but also enforce the inequalities of mobility, which become visible through the adoption of technologies such as chipped passports and technological border control, which can either speed up or obstruct and block the passage of different mobile subjects (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013, 133; see also: De Genova 2002; Khosravi 2018; Tazzioli 2020), as well as store biometric data in large databases.

The work of Martina Tazzioli, among others, has been key in drawing connections between biopolitical approaches and scholarly work that looks at border extraction through the lens of the commodification of living labour (Tazzioli 2020; Stierl 2018). In functioning to serve the social workings of capital in the production of subjectivity, borders are implicated in what Tazzioli (2020, 4) defines as "the making of migration," which encompasses both processes of subjectivation and objectivization of migrant lives, and sheds light onto the "racialising mechanisms through which some subjects are labelled and governed as 'migrants'" as well as the "production of inequalities" among their lives. Migrants are therefore reduced to their "biopolitical value," in that they are capitalised on and become a source of value both as individuals and as populations to be governed (Tazzioli 2020).

The governance of migration works through strategies of "debilitation," which "fall somewhere between the biopolitical 'making live' or necropolitical 'making die' reworking," as well as practices of biopolitical control through mobility (Tazzioli 2020).

As Stierl argues, it is fundamental to examine the interactions and co-constitution of migration and border control mechanisms, which allows for an analysis of "what forms of human creativity, diversity, and excess are expressed and violated in the process of migration" (Stierl 2018, 90). These border control mechanisms are enforced through a plethora of technologies that intermittently force migrants into "convoluted" mobility or "forced waitinghood" (Tazzioli 2020, 64-102) – technologies that are enacted through the intersection between practices of policing and of humanitarian care and that are more and more ingrained within the process of the digitalisation of the border regime (Tazzioli 2020, 108).

Rethinking the nexus between biopolitics and mobility, Tazzioli (2020, 104-105) denounces how mechanisms that play out at the legal, political, and economic levels contribute to the enforcement of racialised and differential access to mobility – which often entails border (digital) infrastructures. A burgeoning body of scholarship has delved into the role played by infrastructures in the racialisation of migrants, mainly focussing on infrastructures of mobility (Walters 2015; Walters, Heller, and Pezzani 2021), socio-material entanglements (see among others: Raeymaekers 2024), and digital infrastructures (see among others: Tazzioli 2021).

Following the discussion, scholarship identified a threefold logic according to which border infrastructures engage in extractive practices: 1) stealing time from migrants, contributing to the maintenance of reserve labour power and a wage gap (Khosravi and Yimer 2020; Mezzadra and Neilson 2013); 2) extracting biometric and biographical data from migrants, data that are then anonymised, stored in databases, and assembled in order to create "generalisable singularities" (Tazzioli 2020, 30) and; 3) the extraction of migrants' stories in order to map their journeys and predict the future behaviour of "governable multiplicities" (Tazzioli 2020, 30; see also Glouftsios 2018). The implementation of digital border infrastructures has further contributed to blurring the division between EU internal and external borders, which become devices of data extraction and the biopolitical control of migrant bodies.

Digital infrastructures of borders have been at the centre of the public debate concerning border regimes for years – from the border anxieties that originated in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks (Amoore 2006; Vaughan-Williams 2008) to the more recent 2015 "long summer of migration" and the COVID-19 pandemic. The deployment of digital

technologies as well as the involvement of private actors specialised in data mining, transmission, and storage become part and parcel of what Chouliaraki and Georgiou (2022, 6) called the "digital rationality" of the border regime. What makes the implementation of technology into border regime so diffused and efficient is its ability to hide behind technicality thus allowing for the framing of the identification of people through the assemblage of biometric and biographic data as scientifically reliable, and beyond contestation (Bigo 2007; Amoore 2006).

The EU, as well as national actors, heavily rely on digital platforms to control and manage migrants travelling across the Mediterranean or along the informal migration corridor of the "Balkan Route" (Amoore 2006; Bellanova and Glouftsios 2022; Chouliaraki and Georgiou 2022; Glouftsios and Casaglia 2023). These platforms and databases serve different purposes. Specifically, the EU relies on the EURODAC, which stores migrants' fingerprints, and the Schengen Information System (SIS), to name a few, all comprised under the umbrella of EU Agency eu-LISA.

Digital infrastructures of the border have the twofold task of, on the one hand, administering the "digital governmentality of the territorial border," while, on the other hand, divulging media narratives reinforcing "biopolitical power relations of human mobility" and informing the usage of discursive binaries (Chouliaraki and Georgiou 2022, 3-6; 596; see also Heller and Pezzani 2017). Digital technologies and private actors specialised in the extraction, storage, and analysis of data, have become ever more entrenched in practices of border control. Digital borders turn into tools for knowledge production that inform "infrastructural politics" and that serve as the basis for decision-making processes concerning the lives and future of migrants (Bellanova and Glouftsios 2022, 160). This process was made visible and further accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic when the rise of border anxieties allowed for the temporary reintroduction of Schengen internal borders. This further exacerbated inequalities of mobility, with migrants and vulnerable populations being excluded from protection mechanisms aimed at preventing the spread and dangers of COVID-19, while at the same time suffering from an increase in the control and curtailment of their freedom of movement, which worsened with the introduction of digital vaccination certificates (Casaglia 2021).

Circling back to previous discussions of migrants' agency and practices of dissent, recent scholarship has worked towards analysing the border and (digital) infrastructures as sites

of dissent and contestation (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013; Amoore 2006; Chouliaraki and Georgiou 2022). As Amoore (2006) shows, civil society has long been active in trying to politicise the use of technology and the extraction of biometric data, thus deconstructing the narratives that inscribe them into the realm of neutrality and objectivity. Therefore, the digital border has also been conceptualised as a "hybrid terrain of techno-symbolic contestations where security, care, solidarity, and activism co-exist in different combinations across space and time (Chouliaraki and Georgiou 2022).

Scholars and activists have been active in using digital platforms to denounce the violence systematically perpetrated by the EU border regime. An example of these practices is the Border Violence Monitoring Network (hereinafter "BVMN"), an umbrella network of solidarity organisation active in reporting, mapping, and denouncing violence along the "Balkan Route" borders. Davies, Isakjee, and Obradovic-Wochnik (2023) have argued that the work of the BVMN serves as a practice of "epistemic disobedience" against the practices of "epistemic borderwork" carried out by both national and EU authorities, namely, the tendency to silence and/appropriate migrants' experiences and stories. Charles Heller and Lorenzo Pezzani (n.d.) have created the project "Forensic Oceanography," in which they have "mobilised surveillance technology 'against the grain,' to contest the violence of borders and the regimes of (in)visibility on which that violence is founded." Heller and Pezzani's methodology consists of combining testimonies gathered from migrants that have undergone journeys across the Mediterranean and the "traces left across the digital sensorium of the sea – constituted by radars, satellite imagery and vessel tracking systems," in order to serve as both a denunciation and as evidence in legal cases against the abuse of violence perpetrated by the EU Member States and border authorities.

v. Changing the scale: everyday and vernacular approaches in border studies.

Border scholars have recently become increasingly interested in how these technologies of border control play out on the scale of everyday life. This focus further contributes to the involvement of different actors in the discussion on borders – actors that may take part in borderwork or be subject to it, as well as engage in practices of struggle and

resistance (Jones and Johnson 2014; Cassidy, Yuval-Davis, and Wemyss 2018). An interest in how individual actors engage in borderwork derives from work trying to bridge the national and the local scales of analysis (Rumford 2008, 7; see also Perkins and Rumford 2013). Post 9/11 border studies, for instance, concentrated on the engagement of citizens in practices of surveillance and control, whereby 'good' subjects are constantly on the lookout for 'suspicious' or 'risky' subjects" (Vaughan-Williams 2008, 64; see also: Amoore 2006). Scholars have agreed on the fact that the tension between the dissolution and the proliferation (and reconfiguration) of borders due to processes of globalisation and European integration was met by "renewed demand for certainty, identity, and security followed by the spread of protectionist policies on the economic level and feelings of anti-immigration" (Brambilla 2015, 15; Bigo 2007; Agnew 2008; Parker and Vaughan-Williams 2009; 2012).

The everyday turn in International Relations and political geography in the cohort of critical border scholars was formalised in 2014, through the edited work of Reece Jones and Corey Johnson, *Placing the Border in Everyday Life*. Following the question: "how does the concept [of border] maintain any sense of coherence once it is decentred?" (Jones and Johnson 2014, 3), this group of scholars works towards the involvement of a multiplicity of local actors in the discussion, focussing on the "contradictory relationship between the narratives and practices of bordering the nation-state, the creation of inside and outside – on the one hand, and the real- life physical encounters with bordering practices on the other" (Jones and Johnson 2014, 7). With this, they do not argue that the state is fading away, rather, that sovereignty is rearticulated at different scales and that borders become "key sites where sovereignty and territory, on the one hand, and networks and flows, on the other, intersect" (Jones and Johnson 2014, 7).

Another strand of scholarship was developing in parallel – work that was conducted under different theoretical and epistemological premises but that was equally directed at analysing the role of "ordinary actors." In 2013, Perkins and Rumford engaged in a discussion on the "vernacularisation" of borders, a concept that they used in order to describe "the shift of responsibility for border control both to supra-national institutions and to the "'bottom-up' dimension" of borders," whereby "bordering can exist as a political resource for citizens who are able to both contest nation state bordering practices and institute their own bordering practices" (Perkins and Rumford 2013, 270). Private, individual citizens, therefore, may be involved in practices of contestation, as well as of

'legitimisation' of borders – being that of "citizens" a category that the authors used to encompass both those with legal and non-legal statuses. Since the border "cannot 'speak," it is necessary for somebody "to do the speaking for it in order to declare what it is" (Perkins and Rumford 2013, 269). Thus, borders become "coordinating mechanisms" that allow those who inhabit them to navigate a "web of institutionally instigated realities across a cosmopolitan plain" – thereby temporarily 'fixing' the border or opening for new possibilities (Perkins and Rumford 2013, 274-275).

Along a similar line of reasoning, Vaughan-Williams (2021) has argued for the need to complement top-down approaches focussed on policymaking in the context of the EU border regime with a bottom-up analysis of citizens' vernacular narratives of migration and border management. In this sense, he set out to analyse why demands for tougher border security do not decrease after the enforcement of policy actions aimed to strengthen the borders. Vaughan- Williams builds a bridge with Critical Security scholars, adopting a vernacular lens which Jarvis (2019) had described as apt to investigate "the meaning and consequences of security discourses, practices, and technologies as specific to particular configurations of time and space." The vernacular allows to focus on the "everyday constructions" of the migration 'crisis' discourses from the "grounded" perspectives of EU citizens," as well as their perception of (in)security (Löfflmann and Vaughan-Williams 2018, 383).

EU citizens' desire for more security does not refer to physical deterrence but, rather, to the desire for more information which, in turn, refers both to the demands for more transparency from EU institutions and policy-making mechanisms, but also to citizens' desire to have access to the biographical and biometric information extracted from migrants entering the EU (Löfflmann and Vaughan-Williams 2018; Vaughan-Williams 2021). In this sense, the vernacular domain can be seen as neither a "fully securitised domain," nor a space of resistance, rather as "fundamentally ambivalent," in that it holds the potential for the mobilisation of different actors, who engage in forms of dissent and of construction of counter-narratives against macro-level narratives of "crisis" promoted by EU authorities (Vaughan-Williams 2021, 5).[5]

While the work presented above looks at how the extraction of data from migrants' bodies is used and instrumentalised to produce temporary multiplicities to be governed

[5] For a discussion on the construction of the narrative of "refugee crisis," see: Casaglia et al. 2020.

while storing information that can be used to control individuals' mobilities, feminist approaches look at the embodied, intimate, and material aspects of border regimes. The fundamental contribution of these scholars brings the "body" to the forefront, understood as an "analytical tool, scale, site, space of representation, commodity and physical organism with its own dimensions and that is subjected to other processes," such as racialisation and discrimination (Mountz 2018). Feminist scholars have looked at borders with a focus on the embodied and differential effects that they have on those who traverse them, working towards the (re)inscription of categories of class, race, gender, and sexuality (Anzaldúa 1987; Mountz 2015), effects that may play out at the most intimate level, from quotidian self-care practices to the sexual sphere (Anzaldúa 1987; Sundberg 2011; Mountz and Hyndman 2006; Casaglia 2022). A focus on the everyday aspect of borders also ties in what Squire (2015b) has named a "materialist turn" in critical geopolitics, fostering the adoption of more-than-human approaches which could take into consideration the socio-material entanglements that involve different forms of actorness, namely, human, non-human and more-than-human, in practices of borderwork (Sundberg 2011; Squire 2014; De Léon; Jason 2015; Pallister-Wilkins 2022b; Ozguc and Burridge 2023).

The development of this debate, which unfolded over the course of more than thirty years, testifies to the complexities of conducting research at the border, and the process of deconstruction of the instrumentalisation of border scholarship to re-enforcing nation-state paradigm, as well as the influence of philosophical approaches adopted throughout the social sciences. The last ten years have been characterised by further connections between Critical Border Studies and Critical Migration Studies, as well as the relevance of decolonial and feminist approaches. This thesis aims to contribute to this intersection, focussing on the temporal aspects of border, as well as on how they play out and are renegotiated or struggles against in the everyday, intimate sphere. The following chapter (Chapter 3) offers a theoretical and methodological discussion on the "vernacular approaches" adopted in this thesis, which I see as an apt and valuable lens to look at the experiences of time and space of vernacular actors in Trieste.

3. Knowledge of/through resistance: the "vernacular" as a contentious domain

i. The "everyday" and the "vernacular"

Unlocking the potential of the "everyday"

Trieste's migrant geographies are quite straightforward – or so it might seem at first sight. People on the move cross the border between Slovenia and Italy somewhere in the mountains surrounding the city. The specific crossing point changes constantly, as do the paths that migrants use to travel or walk to the city and to the central railway station. However, the everyday life of migrants in Trieste unfolds in public and private places, in specific sites within the urban tissue, which are host to informal commercial practices, information networks, solidarity activities, protests, conflicts, relations, encounters and overall everyday bodily (sleeping, eating or taking a shower) or social activities. These practices allow for encounters between different actors, while at the same time unveiling the spatial segregation of migrants' lives *at* the border.

The border is, in fact, part and parcel of migrants' everyday life, be it because of daily new arrivals, the fight against the "informal readmissions", namely, pushbacks carried out from Italy into Slovenia in 2020-2021, the episodic but performative presence of the army and/or the police in Piazza della Libertà, or the recent reintroduction of Schengen border control. It is also part of the daily lives of activists, operators, and volunteers, both because of their solidarity work, and their private lives spent across borders, going to the beach in Croatia and rock- climbing in Slovenia, visiting Slovenian restaurants on a Sunday afternoon, or going to buy cheaper fuel just across the border.

Initially, my PhD project was meant to examine the occurrence of informal readmissions at the Italy-Slovenia border. The struggle against the readmissions was key to the work of Trieste's Solidarity Network in the years 2021-2022. The consequences of the struggle, and the ruling issued by the Tribunal in Rome declaring these practices illegal, greatly impacted the organisation of the Solidarity Network, and the practices of monitoring that

were performed daily by operators and volunteers daily (see Chapter 4, section iv). However, when I arrived in Trieste, I realised that violence on this border was also occurring in a more widespread, diffused way. In fact, the struggles for the rights of people on the move were not primarily situated at the administrative border but were instead deeply embedded in the city's everyday urban life. Trieste, in fact, covers an ambiguous role within the "Route," with the majority of the people on the move arriving in Trieste being "transit migrants," trying to proceed on their journey towards other EU destinations. Those who wish to remain, on the other end, struggle to "*move on,*" or better "*move up*," the saturated regional reception system.

To look at this situation, I draw upon literature who has underlined the everyday and intimate aspects of border regimes. Since the early 2000s, geographers have taken interest in the work of French philosopher Michel De Certeau, especially in the context of urban studies. In *Thinking Space*, Mike Crang and Nigel Thrift (2000) retrace De Certeau's life and early work in order to understand the 'hidden geographies,' that is, alternative ways of using this theorist outside of the mainstream debate. As they write, De Certeau's philosophy "sink[s] into the world rather than trying to dominate it so that, as in Wittgenstein, knowledge is of a kind with ordinary speech acts and language games rather than standing over them (Crang and Thrift 2000, 140).[6]

Everyday life is, in De Certeau's thought, deeply spatialised and embedded within the historical context in which it is positioned. In *The Practice of Everyday Life,* Michel De Certeau (1984) divides everyday practices into strategies and tactics. According to De Certeau, "strategies" correspond to the ways in which place is characterised as "proper." They are reliant on power relations, theoretical places, and "physical places in which forces are distributed." Strategies are, therefore, *embedded* in space. On the other hand, tactics are related to time, and they correspond to a "calculus which cannot count on a 'proper' (spatial or institutional) localisation, nor thus on a borderline distinguishing the other as a visible totality" (De Certeau 1984, 36-37). Thus, tactics can unfold within the discourse and lexicon established by strategies, and are characterised by immediacy, rapidity, and the cunning use and manipulation of space and opportunities.

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[6] Though acting on a different scale, it is important to acknowledge the important, and complementary work that sociologists have been conducting interested in the political power of elite conversations and how they become a channel for the exchange of information as well as a platform for decision-making and the production of social change (see, among others: Hall 1972; Collins 1981; Gibson 2005; Zhang and Shi 2024).

Following from these important bodies of thought, "theory" becomes the ensemble of the tools that allow for the understanding and unveiling of the workings of a "cultural aggregate" – tools that are far from neutral but are rather culpable of "interpretative violence" that can "either create or destroy" (De Certeau 1986; 135). As Crang and Thrift point out, however, there is a tension in De Certeau's thought between "a knowledge that wishes to make things legible by placing them and illegible practices that move over those places with a relationship of absolute difference between them" (Crang and Thrift 2000, 148). In fact, De Certeau keeps in mind practices that are plural, and cannot be comprised within a system of thought and knowledge, and which are the remnants of non-hegemonic systems of thought (De Certeau 1984; Crang and Thrift 2000, 148).[7]

At the same time, everyday life has been the focus of feminist standpoint theory since the 1970s-1980s. This body of scholarship starts from the scale of everyday life in order to deconstruct patriarchal epistemologies and, instead, look at marginalised subjects (in this case, women), as producers of knowledge (See among others: Hartsock 1998; Haraway 1988; Smith 1990; (Collins 1995; Harding 2004). Starting from the epistemological claim that knowledge is situated, Donna Haraway argues that science and knowledge are "the view from a body, always a complex, contradictory, structuring and structured body" which is valuable when counterposed to a "view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity" (Haraway 1988, 195). Dorothy Smith (1987) proposed the method of "institutional ethnography" to maintain the experiences of people as subjects of the research, instead of turning them into the "objects" of the study (Kearney et al. 2018, 4). In other words, Smith says, institutional ethnography has a "grounding in being able to learn about how people actually go about putting things together" (Kearney at al. 2018; 5).

The connection between these bodies of thought allows to bear in mind the epistemological assumptions that underpin the "everyday scale" as an entry point. At the same time, while De Certeau's thought allows to remain grounded in space while discussing practices of knowledge-construction that are negotiated by space users, feminist thought introduces and advocates for the importance of embodies, material approaches, able to put into discussion academic knowledge-production and its tensions

[7] De Certeau has been an influential thinker in geographical thought. It is outside the scope of this thesis to review this broad literature. Notable examples of scholars who have engaged with De Certeau's work are David Harvey, Ed Soja, Doreen Massey, Gillian Rose, and Tim Cresswell.

and discrepancies with bottom-up experiences.

This thesis is positioned within these epistemological grounds, whereby focussing on everyday life means to accept the ephemerality of encounters, and the temporalities and spatialities of resistance tactics and strategies. I follow the conceptualisations of Alexandria Innes and Thom Tyerman in understanding everyday life in its apparent ephemerality and unintentionality which, however, has the potential for radical change. As Innes (2020) writes, "life does not reside in the decisions but in the *things that happen*, the banalities that flow through the everyday and that lead a person from one time of life to another, usually without conscious recognition in the moment". Similarly, Tyerman (2017, 39) writes that everyday life is "alive with intensities, electrified by the infinite ordinary encounters between people, sparks go flying, desire, lust, hatred, dread, boredom."

In his work, Tyerman (2021) describes everyday and intimate violence in the context of the *Jungles* in Calais as the "disparities of how borders are encountered differently by different people in intimate ways, and the uneven material effects that establish global inequalities as locally lived realities" (Tyerman 2021, 6). Intimate violence intersects with and replicates structural violence, whereby the "structural racism of European borders gets intimately embodied in the routine racism of everyday segregation […], marking out boundaries of who does/not belong, who can/not move freely, in the differential lived experiences of spatial location and social relations" (Tyerman 2021, 14).

This situation of "everyday segregation" resonates with the spatial distribution of people in wait in Trieste. With this in mind, I adopt the conceptualisation of "cramped spaces" offered by Walters and Lüthi (2016), which captures the complexities of spaces that operate on various, intersecting scales and that are produced by systemic and racial violence but at the same time have the potential for the imagination of "becoming and remaking" (Walters and Lüthi 2016, 361). Looking through the lens of "cramped spaces" allows to take into consideration both the everyday violence described by Tyerman (2021; 2022), as well as the overarching governmental tactics that constrain people on the move into periods of waithood and what Tazzioli has described as a situation whereby migrants are choked, made out of breath by being forced to inhabit overcrowded spaces (Tazzioli 2021). When we understand intimate, everyday violence as the collapse and embodiment of geopolitical borders through everyday life (Tyerman 2021), "cramped spaces" allow us

to observe the intersection of the different scales.

Vernacularising the "everyday"

When I started my fieldwork, I was taken by surprise by the fact that by experiencing and becoming part of migrants' everyday lives, I was witnessing the construction of new ways of speaking, of communicating, but also of negotiating and constructing knowledge. Mediators were key figures in Trieste's cramped spaces, but when not available or overworked, people would make do with the language skills that were available to them. English mixed with Urdu, Pashto, and some Italian words mixed with the Triestino dialect, they became enmeshed in this idiom that was comprehensible because it was based on and connected with everyday practices and shared lived experiences. In this context, relations and friendships were formed, re-shaped, continuously negotiated, and they in turn had an impact on the places in which the encounter between different people occurred. During everyday conversations, people on the move, passers-by, activists, researchers, journalists, volunteers, operators, and many others, engaged in negotiations of where and what the "border" was, they imagined new systems, they theorised on what migration laws should be based on, they deconstructed or reinscribed Eurocentric ideas of human rights, time, and resistance, filtering through their experiences, in the context of the differential and intersectional effects that the "border" had on their bodies.

As discussed in chapter 2, the interdisciplinary field of Critical Border Studies has long been interested in the everyday aspects of borders (Rajaram and Grundy-Warr 2007; Rumford 2008; 2012; Jones and Johnson 2014; Cassidy et al. 2018). A strand of the scholarship has, moreover, worked towards the inclusion of different forms of actors in researching practices of borderwork (Perkins and Rumford 2013; Vaughan-Williams 2021). This way, the concept of the "vernacular" entered the field of CBS. Perkins and Rumford advocated for the need for scholars to dedicate greater attention to the "vernacularisation of borders," namely, to the to the shifting of the responsibility for and enactment of border control to non-state institutions and individuals – what they referred to as "ordinary people." The attention to non-elite narratives, and interactions, aims to shift the attention from the role of the elite, as it was in conversation network theories, and to place it on everyday interactions, and to "citizens."

As reported in the introduction to this work, the move towards the "vernacular" in CBS

intersected the so-called “vernacular turn” in Critical Security Studies, which was introduced by Bubandt’s seminal work (Bubandt 2005). However, the use of vernacular approaches has not been a prerogative of CSS and CBS. In fact, a strand of French cultural geography has adopted these approaches to look at the construction of the relationships between communities and territory (Béatrice Collignon 1996; 2005; Blais 2007). In Collignon’s work, we see the return of the epistemological point made by standpoint feminist theory. Through the analysis of vernacular knowledges, Collignon (1996, 325) argues for the need of better comprehending the indigenous geographies elaborated by a group of people in their daily lives and practices. She then continues by arguing that these forms of knowledge are always necessarily contextual, subjective, and, therefore, plural (Collignon 1996, 325).

Vernacular approaches have been adopted in critical literary theories by scholars such as Houston A. Baker and Thomas McLaughlin. In his seminal work on the blues, Baker starts from the etymological meaning of “vernacular” as the “language of the slaves,” serving as a matrix to capture, albeit temporarily and in their ephemerality, the experiences of marginalised subjectivities (Baker 1984). According to Baker, singers and songs alike can never arrest the transience of the experience, rather, they “provide expressive equivalence for the juncture’s ceaseless flux” (Baker 1984, 7).

According to Thomas McLaughlin’s (1996) perspective on vernacular theories, people engage in theorising about the world and their own experiences as part of their everyday lives. This theorising, which McLaughlin refers to as "street smarts," is deeply embedded in the local and cultural contexts that shape and allow for its negotiation. The epistemological contribution of vernacular approaches comes back with the concept of “vernacular theory,” namely, a tool that can serve as a survival “tactic” to unveil, deconstruct, and ultimately, fight mainstream, dominant narratives (McLaughlin 1996, 21).

The innovative approach of this thesis lies in an attempt to bridge these different bodies of scholarship to single out one of the most important contributions of vernacular approaches, that is, the epistemological grounds that allow to look at bottom-up and situated construction of knowledge through everyday practices. Space serves as the starting point for analysis, guiding the selection of specific sites included in this thesis. As reported in Chapter 1, “vernacular spaces” are places that allow for the encounter between

racialised and non-racialised political subjectivities, in the context of urban spatial segregation. This approach can help address, although not to overcome, classification challenges and the difficulties in defining "vernacular actors," which often risk reinforcing distinctions between citizens and non-citizens, and between those legally allowed to reside within a state and those who are not. The status of (il)legality does not prevent people on the move from contributing to the negotiation of the border in the city of Trieste. They actively participate in the unfolding and co-creation of new idioms and vernaculars, the establishment of relationships and routines, place-naming, and the mediation between different cultural understandings of gender paradigms, practices of political resistance, and the dynamics between ethnic and linguistic minorities.

However, as this thesis shows, while all vernacular actors are translators, not all of them are mediators. With this, I mean that some people are more legitimised to speak rather than others – both because of their privileged legal status as Italian or European citizens, because of their (often gendered) attitudes not to shy away from making their voices heard, as well as because of their experiences and political statuses. What is more, as Vaughan- Williams (2021) argues, the vernacular domain is "fundamentally ambivalent" as it has the potential to both challenge and reinforce official narratives. Intersectional power dynamics are therefore integral to vernacular theories and knowledge, given how they are observed to originate within Trieste's cramped spaces and therefore become the expression of the collapse of different scales – that of the everyday and of governmental tactics of border and migration control. The lens of the vernacular, therefore, allows for grasping the ephemerality of the everyday whilst maintaining a clear connection with the historical context of the space and the wider geopolitical implications of migration along the "Balkan Route."

In this context, it is useful to draw from critical urban scholarship to look at the role of language in place-making practices. While advocating for the adoption of multi perspectival approaches, Amin and Lancione argue that they are useful to capture,

> The twists and turns of urban life as it unfolds and accumulates, attempting to acknowledge and examine the entanglements and relationships that constitute cities and urban life [...] the complex interplay between scales, structural formations, and everyday practices, encompassing both human and nonhuman agency, and the varied power dynamics underlying these interactions (Amin and Lancione 2022, 2).

Everyday life practices within the urban space shape the language, expressions, practices, and relationships that emerge. In this context, I draw upon the work of Wangui Kimari, who was among the first scholars to introduce me to the world of vernacular approaches. Kimari (2021) examines urban planning strategies in Nairobi through the lens of the "ecologies of exclusion," which create a stratification of marginalities by spatially confining certain populations to the outskirts of Nairobi and depriving them of access to running water and other services. She explores practices of resistance through narratives and storytelling (Kimari 2021), thus underlining how the vernacular emerges *against* power relations, and is therefore intertwined with them. This happens either because it evolves through practices of resistance and struggle or because it conflicts with officially sanctioned narratives and governmental practices designed to maintain marginalised people in their marginalised state.

The case of Trieste is particularly interesting as these spaces are carved out within the urban tissue, which creates a situation of spatial segregation in plain sight. When I arrived in Trieste, I realised that these spaces of confinement and segregation were also conducive to the creative, albeit contested, negotiation of resistance practices precisely *because of* the forced co-habitation between different marginalities (people in wait, people on the move, migrants who had already accessed reception centres, beneficiaries of low threshold services), and the presence of large numbers of solidarity actors with different political and social backgrounds.

ii. Vernaculars in/outside of translation

Section I of this chapter has highlighted that vernacular approaches are not opposed to everyday approaches. Instead, there are convergences and intersections between the two bodies of literature, as the approaches start from similar epistemological grounds but provide analytical lenses that allow to highlight different dynamics. Vernacular approaches are specifically grounded in the importance of language, of speech acts, of the construction of on- the-ground theories, memory, and space through communication, signification, and non- hegemonic systems of knowledge. Vernacular actors adopt different rhetoric devices, communication mechanisms, or art forms to talk about their experiences. Baker (1984) has identified blues as the matrix. Kimari (2021) looks at irony

as a situated tool for resistance in marginal and racialised contexts. Vernacular memory scholars have looked at the vernacular construction of alternative places of memory away from official ones (Mihelj 2013; Mwambari 2021).

The main contributions of this thesis to vernacular and everyday approaches in border studies is that of placing the focus on two elements that have been often overlooked in vernacular studies, namely, that of *materiality* and of *translation*. The concept of "translation" has been used by scholars such as Sherry Simon (2012), Naoki Sakai (2014), Cristiana Giordano (2014), in the context of the study of borderland areas and of migration dynamics. In *Cities in Translation*, Simon (2012, 57) chose Trieste as a case study, among other cities like Kolkata, Montreal, and Barcelona. Simon defines Trieste as a "translational city," where spaces of connection and negotiation are formed through processes of translation between different languages, holding differential status across the urban space. "Translation" is, therefore, not a neutral process. Rather, it is positioned within the dynamics of power that underpin the relationship between languages/dialects and space and embedded within the conflictual and often violent history of imposition of vehicular languages over the languages of the minority (Simon 2012).

Indicative of the intersection between space and language is Sakai's argument that "translation" as traditionally understood operates within the nation-state paradigm, functioning "as a boundary that distinguishes the space. Its role is to introduce the threshold into space, in *bordering*, or the inscription of the border" (Sakai 2014, 16). According to the scholar, therefore, "translation" becomes a bordering device, inscribing and counterposing spaces of understandability and of intelligibility. In other words, it constructs an "us" and an "other." As Sakai continues, it is important to disrupt this territorial paradigm by looking at translation as a "concept of social event that, if handled wisely, could grant us the possibility to examine social action anew in general" (Sakai 2014, 12). Within vernacular scholarship, Baker has talked about "translation" when referring to the force of blues music as a matrix. In his work, the scholar refers to blues singers as translators of what they define as the "experiencing of experiences" (Baker 1984).

The conceptualisation of "vernacular actors" presented in this thesis is strongly linked to the concept of translation. To make sense of this concept, I draw a bridge between the work of Baker (1984) and the work of Cristiana Giordano (2014). Giordano argues that

the practice of translation works to “produce an intelligible account of the other, or to relate to difference, which poses the issue of alternative forms of life, of radically heterogeneous worlds that the state must reduce to recognizable categories” (Giordano 2014, i). Similarly to Sakai, Giordano (2014) points at the entrenchment of practices of translation carried out by state actors within a nation-state paradigm, whereby forms of heterogeneity, “strangeness,” and alterity are subsumed within recognisable, governable categories. However, the initial move of “translation” is a creative practice, which allows for the imagination of new worlds, for the negotiation of alternative political imaginaries. Along these lines, I conceptualise “vernacular actors” as partaking in practices of translation, whereby creativeness and subsuming mechanisms intersect within marginal spaces, and are carried out by people involved in Trieste’s migrant everyday life. Consequently, vernacular approaches are apt to analyse the experiences of the periods of forced waithood in which migrants have been forced in Trieste, as well as their impact on urban space.

These experiences, however, do not happen in a void. The ambivalence of the vernacular is, in fact, closely tied to the ambivalence of "mobility," which is both feared as a threat and valued as one of the core principles of the European Union (Tazzioli 2020, 106). Mobility is fundamentally linked to the ability to participate in, or be excluded from, the capitalist system. As Tazzioli (2020) notes, autonomy often aligns with a person's ability to function as both a citizen and a consumer. However, because people on the move are frequently barred from participating in consumer practices, they are often excluded from social activities that are culturally integral to urban life – as is also the case in Trieste. Furthermore, mobility functions as a political technology that creates hierarchies of lives and governs both individuals and populations based on factors such as race, gender, age, ability, and class (Tazzioli 2020). The entrenchment of borders within an extractivist capitalist society (see Mezzadra and Neilson 2013) distorts and shapes the experiences of time for people on the move in border cities and borderlands. This is evident in their experiences of being stuck in wait or forced into hypermobility (Tazzioli 2020), as well as being constantly exposed to the possibilities of deportation (Khosravi 2018).

It is in the intersection between these temporal and spatial governmental technologies and the creativeness that can arise through the encounter within cramped spaces that this thesis is positioned. Much like De Certeau's “users” of space, vernacular actors have a direct impact on places through their everyday practices. In fact, practices of translation

contribute to the negotiation of knowledge systems, in which the "border" is continuously re-signified through daily life and encounters. Thus, vernacular grammars, traces, and theories can be connected to the concept of "mobile commons." As Papadopoulos and Tsianos (2013, 190) write, "the mobile commons are neither private nor public, neither state owned nor part of civil society; rather it exists to the extent that people share it and generate it as they are mobile and when they arrive somewhere." Mobile commons comprise knowledge of mobility, infrastructure of connectivity, informal economies, and communities of justice, which contribute to the formation of "the real world of moving people [which] is assembled and materialised in these fields of everyday life (Papadopoulos and Tsianos 2013, 191-192; see also: English, Grazioli, and Martignoni 2019).

As noted in Chapter 1, I conceptualise "vernacular actors" as those who inhabit "vernacular, cramped spaces" and who partake in "vernacular acts," namely, in the radical negotiation of a relationship with space. In the thesis, therefore, I refer to "vernacular actors" to emphasise the creative, resistant move of the constellation of actors who become involved in the construction of grammars, traces, and theories. Throughout the text I also refer to "subjectivities" in relation to vernacular actors. Whenever this terminology is chosen, it aims to underline the differential, intersectional access to this repository of on-the-ground knowledge and place-making practices, which is based on the different socio-economic, racialised, subject position. The vernacular is a contested domain – it is not "horizontal." It may reinforce practices of spatial exclusion and power dynamics between vernacular subjectivities, influenced by political beliefs, ethnic differences, class disparities, and the dynamics embedded within the informal economies of those *en* route.

All of those who appear in this thesis are vernacular translators, as they appear as voices legitimated to present theories, narratives, and struggles. In the empirical section of the thesis, the voices of Matteo, Fabrizio, Ines, Gloria, Ayub, will appear with more frequency than others. This reflects the role that these vernacular actors took on in the synthesis and translation between different vernacular practices – serving as the bridge, and the device through which the "experience of the experience" was momentarily crystallised. This reflects the power dynamics that are embedded within the vernacular as well, whereby the most resonating translations are the ones that are conducted in a vehicular language, and with communicative practices that are accessible to a wider, European public. Some

voices have more weight due to the privileges and positionalities of these people vis-à-vis undocumented migrants who do not speak English and with whom it is more difficult to conduct interviews.

It is important to point out that mediators are also the strongest, most resonating voices in this specific vernacular analysis, as they were the people who were more likely to have collected other people's testimonies, and who often embodied a first translation of different experiences. The distinction between translators and mediators is not clear cut, as "mediators" function as a medium for vernacular actors who would otherwise be excluded from the conversation. To make sense of this move, I start from McLaughlin's understanding of vernacular theories as cunning practices of "thinking together" (McLaughlin 1996). In the case of Trieste's migrant geographies, this "thinking together" can occur through strategic or forced silences, conversations that are hard to conduct because of a lack of a linguistic medium, but also through learning how to act between formality and informality. For this reason, I borrow from Tazzioli's concept of "transversal alliances" (Tazzioli 2020) that are built between people on the move and other political subjectivities ("citizens", for instance)

iii. Vernacular epistemologies and methods

The vernacular approach proposed in this thesis is not simply an analytical lens. Rather, it is an epistemological and methodological perspective. Conceptualising the "vernacular" as acts of knowledge-production and practices of place-making, I accept that adopting a vernacular lens means to try and deconstruct the hierarchy between the knowledge produced within academic walls and vernacular "street smarts," which inform and are informed by people's everyday lives. Hence, the vernacular allows to embrace ambiguities, and to move away from the desire to systematically observe larger scale phenomena. Instead, it emphasises theories developed from the ground up, which might be informed by academic discourse or might not be in relation with it, which are connected to informal networks, international movements, and mobile commons, while they remain shaped by and situated in their context and situated.

This thesis makes two methodological points. First, when researching marginalised

groups, we never carry out research in a vacuum. We position ourselves within a "field" and enter the power relations that are inscribed within space. We become part of the "field." This means that a critical reflection on access is relevant not only to assess the quality of the research, but also because it shapes the kind of knowledge-making practices that are created, while inevitably silencing others because they are not accessible to us due to the lack of communication skills, or for several other reasons. Vernacular theories are relationally shaped by the researcher who functions as the interlocutor and contributes to knowledge-making, both in the process of data collection and in the writing stage.

My own interpretation and experience of the vernacular will, therefore, be fundamentally unique, influenced by my experience of spatial relations – a reflection that allows for the use of the body itself as an "ethnographic research tool" (Bain and Nash 2006, 99-100). Thus, I become a vernacular "translator," capturing the experience of the experience and crystallising it in this thesis. This piece of writing is therefore not an accurate account of the everyday life of people on the move in Trieste, but as a snapshot of the quotidian life, experiences, impressions to which I had access.

Second, vernacular voices do not have the same power. Some resonate more than others. And this differential resonation is strictly linked with the privileged subject position of the "white person." Vernacular theories are creative and reflect the negotiation of marginalised people with the territory they traverse. However, the words that are used, the people who are tasked with speaking about this situation, or who can afford to take the risk to be vocal about it, are not marginalised people, but rather, allies, activists, friends. The "translation" stages are, therefore, manyfold and stratified. Nevertheless, vernacular approaches open the door to include racialised and marginalised subjectivities in the conversation, albeit partially and often in isolated ways, taking into consideration their impact in shaping the spaces they more or less temporarily inhabit.

The methodological approaches adopted for the study of 'vernacular' have been varied. Critical security scholars and political scientists have made use of focus groups to include several participants, encouraging them to engage in conversations with one another (Vaughan- Williams 2021; Löfflmann and Vaughan-Williams 2018). Some scholars have adopted mixed qualitative and quantitative methods to explore practices of signification of the concept of "security" and its referents (Jarvis and Lister 2013). Textual analysis has been used to study vernacular narratives and theories (Mclaughlin 1996). Béatrice

Collignon (1996) has, instead, proposed the combination of ethnographic fieldwork and discourse analysis for the study of vernacular geographies, as well as a mapping exercise of place names in the context of Innuinnait communities in Canada. More recently, critical security scholars have been using interviews and fieldwork to conduct their research (Oyawale 2022), as well as netnography to analyse the rearticulations and negotiation of "security" on social media (Downing 2023).

Building on the conceptualisation of the vernacular offered in the previous section as spatially embedded, historically contextual, and connected with everyday, embodied, and intimate practices, my data collection was based on in-depth, embodied, ethnographic fieldwork. I carried out recurring periods of fieldwork over the course of the year 2022 and 2023 for a total of four cumulative months divided into six periods: July-August 2022, November 2022, January 2023, April 2023, May 2023, August 2023 (See Annex 1). While away from Trieste, I maintained contact with research participants, and with the solidarity actors and collectives active in the area.

The distribution of fieldwork over a longer period of time allowed me to observe and experience first-hand the spatial changes that the urban space and the conditions of people in wait underwent due to the initiatives of local authorities, but also due to circumstances playing out on a larger scale, such as the relaxation of COVID-19 regulations, the impact of the rising price of fuel and gas following the Russia-Ukraine conflict, and changes in the EU-Western Balkans relations.

The data collection combined periods of embedded participation with the conduction of interviews. At first, I actively took part in the everyday activities of solidarity networks in Trieste and in social activities with people in wait. I also took walks and hikes in the mountainous areas surrounding the city. The "vernacular spaces" that have become part of this thesis are: 1) Piazza della Libertà, the square located right in front of the city's railway station, which functions as a transit hub for people on the move, a cramped space for stuck people in wait, a social hub for migrants staying in the camps around the city or in accommodation in the centre; 2) the "Centro Diurno," a first-level reception centre destined to the daily use for people on the move, as well as a dormitory for a small number of migrants and other vulnerable communities; 3) the Silos, a squatted, private, decaying building where migrants sleep and find shelter while they wait to either proceed on their journeys or to be admitted in reception centres.

Although these are not the only spaces in the region where migrants' lives unfold, I chose to focus on these because they are the spaces inhabited and traversed by "people in wait" and where the effects of this forced immobility were most felt. This is why I decided not to focus on life in refugee camps or reception centres, although camps are inextricably linked with migrants' everyday lives in Trieste, both as a time referent for this "wait," namely, because people wait to access camps, and because migrants staying in camps come back to the Square for social activities or to the Centro Diurno for Italian classes. I have however included a focus on the forest and the mountaneous areas surrounding Trieste (see Chapter 6, section i). This was motivated by: 1) the urge to bring the analysis back to the border, to denounce how the administrative border between Italy and Slovenia is, and has been, theatre of violent and informal practices of readmission and border control; 2) the relevance of following material traces to further map the interconnectedness and web that form Trieste's migrant geographies, which pivot around, but are not limited to, its cramped spaces.

Embedded participation was mostly carried out in Piazza della Libertà and in the Centro Diurno. I went to the Silos only sporadically and always upon invitation from the people staying there. While in Piazza and in the Centro Diurno, I mainly carried out voluntary activities as part of Linea d'Ombra, engaging in distribution practices and in the Italian classes organised in the Centro Diurno. Embedding myself in this vernacular domain, and becoming an actor in its unfolding, as well as living its everyday experiences has allowed me to reflect on and challenge my positionality as a researcher and as an activist.

I recorded my experiences, impressions, and thoughts into physical and digital fieldwork diaries. At first, I described my days in great detail. Writing fieldnotes was useful to make sense of events, encounters, practices, and conversations, while also functioning as therapeutic devices to process their psychological impact. However, with the passing of time, life on fieldwork became more intense and unpredictable and I had very little time and energy to write my notes. I recorded my fieldnotes logs into material notebooks, which I safely stored at my apartment. I then proceeded to digitalise my fieldnotes, I anonymised the research participants and made sure to remove details that could have violated people's privacy and safety. The final file containing my fieldnotes amounted to 32042 words, divided into seven subchapters: 1) Summer 2022; 2) November 2022; 3) January 2023; 4) April 2023; 5) May 2023; 6) Early summer 2023; 7) August 2023. The file is safely stored in an encrypted drive.

For the first months of fieldwork, I refrained from conducting interviews. This decision was driven by three key motivations. First, I began my fieldwork with the intention of conducting interviews in both Trieste's migrant geographies, as well as at the commercial hubs located near administrative border crossings. My aim was to understand how everyday life at the border unfolded by taking into consideration both mobile people whose movement was encouraged, namely, consumers, and those whose movement was restricted and hindered people on the move. After the first periods of fieldwork, however, I realised that I would not have had the time to conduct this research within the three-years doctoral programme. Furthermore, I found myself involved and spontaneously drawn towards the everyday life of people in wait, which then became the only focus of my project.

Second, I tried to conduct a "slow" an ethnography, trying to negotiate this practice with the time constraints of the doctoral programme. This decision followed a political and a methodological line of reasoning. It was political insofar as it meant to put the activist before the researcher, and to try and think about the impact of my presence and the conduction of interviews in the context of overworked and often burnt-out operators/activists, and marginalised, vulnerable communities. Methodologically, proceeding at a relatively slow pace allowed me to explain my research in detail, and to observe the impact of my presence, as well as that of journalists and researchers on the "field". This led me to reflect on how and when to conduct interviews, what to ask – and more importantly, what *not* to ask. This method, however, was quite difficult to reconcile with the competitive nature of academic work. During fieldwork, I often felt anxious and unsuitable, I felt like I did not know what I was doing and was constantly trying to remind myself to take my time and not to listen to the pressure that I was feeling.

Third, I chose to wait due to a theoretical and political effort to avoid "choosing" research participants distinguishing between how many "citizens" and how many "migrants" I was going to interview, as I had planned at the beginning of my PhD. Taking the time allowed me to select participants according to their presence and usage of sites of encounter and of everyday life. Choosing to proceed in such an inductive method allowed me to carry out research *with* different actors, not *on* them, or at least to attempt to do so, still considering the privilege hierarchies that limit the operalisation of such a statement. What is more, as I became more involved in the everyday interactions as a researcher and an activist, I naturally gravitated towards certain people, who became quite spontaneously participants

in my research. This also, however, resulted in limits of access to other actors, whom I did not include in my thesis due to various facts, including ethical considerations.

Choosing to proceed from sites and to conceptualise participants as "vernacular actors" is not intended to homogenise their voice. Instead, I asked every participant who was interviewed to describe and define their "roles" in these spaces. I have reported the pseudonyms, together with these "roles," in Annex 2. When necessary, the descriptions have been adjusted in order to maintain the privacy of participants, while still conveying their declared "roles" and perspective. While I chose not to select participants based on their legal status, this does not mean turning a blind eye to the unequal distribution of privileges and power that they either benefitted from or lacked. A reflection on the positionality of the participants through an intersectional lens is, in fact, key to understanding how vernacular theories and practices related to and against the border originate within complex dynamics.

Following De Genova (2002, 431), researchers focussing on undocumented migrants' everyday life "need not become legal historians. Yet, with respect to the "illegality" of undocumented migrants, a viable critical scholarship is frankly unthinkable without an informed interrogation of immigration law." I do not have the resources nor the skills to carry out an analysis of the evolution of EU immigration law, however, it is necessary to position the unfolding of the vernacular within the context of Trieste's migrant geographies, as well as the bureaucratic procedure that migrants need to undergo to be able to obtain their documents – procedures that were often delayed, punctured with misinformation, glitches, bottlenecks, and which were one of the main reasons behind the situation of forced waithood in the city.

I conducted 30 formal interviews with various vernacular actors. I then carried out dozens of conversational interviews, of which 20 have been included in this thesis (see Annex 2). The latter were not recorded as they were mainly conducted with people in wait, to safeguard their privacy and not to store any information or data about them. Formal interviews were recorded with a voice recorder. While I recorded and transcribed most formal interviews, informal interviews were not recorded for ethical reasons. Apart from two people, whom I knew personally and could ensure were in a legally stable condition, I decided not to record people on the move to protect their privacy and to avoid any possible damage that could arise from them sharing their experiences with me. Files were

stored on an encrypted drive. Whenever interviews contained information that I deemed to be sensitive, I transcribed them entirely myself. If the interview did not contain sensitive information, I resorted to the aid of Artificial Intelligence to create an initial trace of the interview script, which I then revised by listening through the interview, correcting errors, and filling in information. I took this decision because of the number of interviews, the large dimension of the audio files and the limited amount of time that I had available to transcribe and analyse the empirical data. The final file with the transcribed interviews amounted to a total of 172983 words.

Formal interviews were mainly conducted in semi-structured or unstructured ways. I had a bullet-point list of questions to guide me, but they were meant to serve as prompts to foster a conversation with the interviewees. The interviews were generally quite long, with an average of 1 hour, which granted me the time to ask follow-up questions on specific statements or information that the interviewees reported. I have included a sample of the list of questions from which I started every formal interview (see Annex 3). The reader should bear in mind that these were only a partial script, and not all the questions were asked to each participant.

I informed the research participants of the interview process, either orally or using a print-out informed consent form. I did not use print-out forms with people in wait because asking for a signature on a form did not allow me to preserve an adequate level of anonymity. The informed consent procedure, both oral and in writing, was conducted in Italian and in English. I included in this research only the information with which research participants provided me and when I could make sure to be able to inform them of the research procedures sufficiently. I have included in the thesis only quotes that were conducted upon a clear understanding of my activities as a researcher and to which interviewees consented.

As Stierl (2018) writes, it is fundamental to maintain a "methodological eclecticism" when doing research in mobile contexts, drawing from "diverse but interrelated ethnographic registers", as well as leaving room for improvisation. Occasionally, and quite hectically, conversational interviews spontaneously evolved into informal, small "focus groups," which brought a new layer of complexity to the consent process. I took precautions to ensure participants were aware of this shift and could opt out if the discussion took an unintended direction. These spontaneous groups conversations proved

valuable, as participants often contributed to and built upon a collective language.

Because I was embedded in these spaces as a researcher, an activist, and a friend, I was provided with information even outside of the context of formal and conversational interviews. Much of my understanding of the vernacular emerged from the extensive time I spent in these spaces – talking to people, forming friendships, sharing my free time, engaging in solidarity practices, and exchanging ideas, information, experiences, and language skills. All these exchanges were not included in this thesis, although they inevitably informed my perception of the "field." Many of the conversations that I carried out with people in wait happened during the times when I was taking part in the Italian school organised by activists and volunteers from Linea d'Ombra and that took place in the Centro Diurno. During these lessons, I got to establish friendships and had interesting conversations about different cultural experiences. I also had the chance to better understand the interactions between different languages.

I had initially planned on carrying out interviews both *in loco* and online. I had envisioned, for methodological purposes, to be able to carry out interviews directly in the "vernacular spaces". This plan evolved and was adapted during my fieldwork for varied reasons. First, I abandoned the idea of carrying out formal interviews in the Square and the Centro Diurno because they were too disruptive to everyday activities and introduced an element of extraction to this very delicate and complex context saturated with journalists and researchers. I instead carried out conversational interviews in the Square, the Centro Diurno, while I conducted the formal interviews in cafes and bars around town. Second, I decided to not conduct interviews online, which I had initially taken into consideration to talk to people who for one reason or another had left the city but were once part of the constellation(s) of vernacular actors I encountered in 2022-2023. I avoided conducting online interviews as it did not allow for the same spontaneity in referring to places, and experiences, which having a coffee in bars, which were somehow connected to the lives of migrants and activists in the city, were conducive to. Moreover, I decided to include in the thesis only the people I had interacted with in those spaces during the time limits of this thesis.

While planning an interview, I would ask people whether they had a preference as to where to meet. Several times, I was asked to meet in one of the bars surrounding Piazza Libertà or close to the Centro Diurno. This was due to the fact that interviews were

carried out before or after work shifts of operators, or before the activities of Linea d'Ombra started in the Square. As Gloria, an activist, once told me, "I asked you to meet here so we can look at the Square while we talk about it" (Gloria, Trieste, 20th January 2023). Sitting down in these bars often meant that most of the times, we would meet other vernacular actors, who were either passing by, heading to the Square or the Centro Diurno, or simply spending their free time there. Since these bars are not centrally located in the city, they are frequented mainly by people who are part of Trieste's migrant geographies, or by those on their way to the station to catch a train. This situation was quite interesting, as it provided valuable inputs for the conversation, although it could sometimes disrupt the flow of the interviews.

There were instances when people spontaneously used maps as prompts during interviews. This was particularly common among people on the move, who used maps on their phones to show me their journeys, as well as to compensate for the lack of language skills or specific terminology. Maps were also employed by the people I interviewed in the municipality of Dolina/San Dorligo. Visualising the municipality's territory on the map helped them explain its extension along the administrative border, the fact that the majority of this territory was covered by the forest, as well as its proximity with Croatia. During interviews, I always clarified that I was not from Trieste, though my lack of knowledge about the territory or specific historical events made this quite apparent. Unpredictably, this proved to be an effective way to start interviews, as those who were either born or had lived in the region for a long time would spontaneously engage in unprompted geographical and/or historiographical discussions about the area – conversations that were incredibly insightful both in order to better understand the context and to grasp how history and geography were embedded in people's everyday language.

Understanding the vernacular as a methodology significantly impacted both the analysis and writing stages of my research. During data analysis, I first reviewed all my interviews and fieldnotes, identifying the main themes that emerged. Following this, I conducted a second reading, trying to discern the theories, discourses, and narratives that emerged. I then re- examined my data, coding it according to both themes and vernacular theories. I used a software for qualitative data analysis to carry out the first cycle of data analysis, drawing from coding theory (Saldaña 2016), which allowed me to identify the three main macro-themes of grammars, traces, and theories, as well as sub-themes that compose the subsections of Chapter 5, Chapter 6, and Chapter 7. I then carried out two cycles of

thematic analysis, which went hand in hand with the data analysis.

The process of understanding how the experience of wait was negotiated informed the division in the three empirical chapters: 1) language rumbles, building on on-the-ground grammars, discussions around terms, and the negotiations of struggles and of gender roles; 2) material traces, focusing on bottom-up mappings of migrant geographies starting from the intimate and bodily experiences of people on the move and people in wait and; 3) theories of time, grounded in the ways in which different groups of vernacular actors conceptualised time and created knowledge around the temporality aspect of the experience.

The main challenge during both phases was to keep in mind my aim to give legitimacy to vernacular theories, since it often clashed with deductive academic practices. Another challenge was that of reconciling a more descriptive style of writing with the expectations underpinning the process of thesis-writing. This attempt was made even more difficult when discussing data collected through ethnographic methods, taking into consideration the involvement of the researcher when they have actively participated in the events that they discuss. As Stierl writes, "in an ethnography of struggle, distinctions between subject/object or researcher/participant become blurred. Travelling, conceptually, temporally, and spatially between multiple sites is possible, as is the political implication of the researcher" (Stierl 2018, 18). Hence, I draw from Stierl's argument that "theory" should be conceived of as a verb, to debunk the dualistic understanding that counterposes theory and method. "Method," Stierl argues, is an "enactment of critical theory by a relational, situated and subjective being" (Stierl 2018, 17), and, in the case of this thesis, an attempt to put this in conversation with theories negotiated by vernacular actors involved in everyday life in the "field".

iv. The researcher as a translator

In this section, I discuss the role and positionality that I, as a border and migration researcher, acquired and negotiated through periods of fieldwork, as well as during the analysis and writing stage – positionality that inevitably had an impact on this final product. Talking about positionality is no easy task, and one that has often been criticised

as “checking a box,” or as an overplay of the role and the voce of the researcher within the research. The concept of "positionality,” introduced in the literature by feminist scholarship, has recently become a praxis that has been integrated in reflexive methodologies in the social sciences. Scholars such as Jacobs-Huey (2002) and Gani and Khan (Gani and Khan 2024) have criticised the praxis of “positionality statements” insofar as they can reinstate hierarchies of power between the hegemonic, white researcher and the “subject” of the research, by functioning as a justification for epistemic overdetermination. Positionality statements can also be seen as a way for the white researcher to reposition their centrality in the research (Gani and Khan 2024).

Despite this criticism, a reflection on my positionality within vernacular theories is necessary precisely because of my methodological choice of embedding myself, together with my baggage of life experience, privilege, and linguistic, social, and professional skills in the context of Trieste’s migrant geographies. Thus, in order to try and go beyond this “positionality statement,” further reflection is needed when it comes to the researcher’s role in the practice of knowledge construction, and how this position is negotiated intersubjectively.

Stielike et al. (2024) look at the growing field of Reflexive Migration Studies as a countermovement to mainstream applications of migration research to policymaking. Reflexive Migration Studies interrogates terminologies, categories, and the implications of migration researchers in the migration and border control “apparatus” (Stielike et al. 2024; see also: De Genova 2013). Drawing from this literature, I position this thesis project as, first and foremost, a political work in support of people on the move. It questions the ethics of research, especially the act of conducting research with vulnerable populations, and the potential replication of saviour dynamics whereby one group is perceived to be saving another.

This also included the affiliation of a researcher to academia. Research is an extractive practice – asking for information, stories, and details about people’s everyday life in context of spatial segregation, and racialised dynamics, to the end of writing a piece of research, an article, a PhD thesis, is ultimately a self-serving practice. However, taking part in the struggles, being conscious of the impact of research, aware of its limitations and putting its role into perspective is crucial to avoid and fight the instrumentalization of research the border control apparatus, as well as to try and deconstruct the hierarchies

between academic-sanctioned and practices of knowledge production from below.

In the context of pedagogy, and drawing from bell hooks and Paulo Freire, Acevedo et al. (2015) discuss different types of positionality: 1) biographical positionality; 2) discursive positioning, namely, the negotiation and "institutionalisation" of social identities and the power dynamics underpinning the differential legitimacy to ascribe positions; 3) somatic positioning, which they define as "bodily organisations through which we embody and enact our personal and sociocultural identities" (Acevedo et al. 2015, 36) and; 4) spatial positioning, that is, the privilege of occupying space, and the racialised dynamics underpinning spatial distribution.

In terms of biographic positionality, McLaughlin (1996, 29) writes, "I have worried throughout my project that I as an academic would mistranslate or distort these vernacular theories". He reflects on the fact that he was born in Philadelphia to a family who valued street smarts and grew up accustomed to the kind of vernacular ways of understanding the world which have long been discarded by academics. Along similar lines of reasoning, I was born in a rural setting, in the countryside close to the Alps and in an area adjacent the border between Italy and France. I grew up believing that there could be different explanations about the world. This vernacular that I was running from was strongly influenced by religious life that permeated the everyday life, as well as by the fact that this region's economic life is engrained in the relation with France and with its border. I witnessed how my village gradually became more and more multicultural, a place of relocation for asylum seekers, and how encounters with these people brought a different understanding of migration, either more conservative and reactionist or in solidarity with people on the move. This background has provided me with a sensitivity to on-the-ground, non-positivist knowledge making practices from an early age.

Positionality is, therefore, intersubjectively negotiated. More than this, it is negotiated through space. In her work, Aya Nassar (2020, 4) writes that,

> The field is not perceived here as a backdrop against which our question and research activity are performed. Rather, by acknowledging the very materiality of the field environment […], a space is created to reflect on how *the field* constitutes our subjectivity as researchers, in the city, in the archive, or elsewhere.

A material, embodied reflection on the "field" is necessary to understand the positionality of the researcher that is negotiated through direct and indirect encounter with human and non- human actors. As Chapter 6 highlights, materiality is key to the experiences of forced wait, as it is for other vernacular actors who are involved in migrants' everyday life – including researchers.

What is more, the specific characteristic of Trieste, and the position of the city at the juncture between different historical border reconfigurations, requires a reflection on how the researchers' subjectivity is negotiated vis-à-vis their degree of estrangement from collective experiences. I started my fieldwork and interviews engaging in conversations with activists and volunteers from Trieste who identified as "Triestin*."[8] To them, I was an outsider, a stranger, who could not partake in the shared heritage and reservoir of collective historical and cultural memory of the city.

While I started my ethnography thinking that I should have caught up on the historical details of the history of the city, as well as be on top of the latest research and activist reports on the "Balkan Route," I often found that my positionality as a "stranger" to these shared experiences was a way to open up a conversation. This often stimulated a desire in the participants to make me aware of the place in which I was living, a sense of urgency and passion in making me aware of a history that touched upon collective and firsthand experiences, traumas, and anxieties.

It is also on these occasion that I have been confronted with the ethical ambiguities of carrying out research with migrants. I constantly reflected and negotiated between the desire to conduct thorough and scientifically sound research, and the need to prioritise the safety and privacy of the research participants, and the people around me in general. As Stierl (2018, 20) argues, "advocating for a shared commitment with those most directly affected and subjugated does not translate into assumptions of (ideological) commonality […]."

As De Genova (2002) writes, ethnography has the potential to become an instrument of surveillance, and to be used by the state to further exercise control over people on the move and over its territory, as well as to perpetrate "epistemic violence" in reinstating

[8] Formal Italian rules would require the use of the extended masculine form of "Triestino" and "Triestini," respectively for the singular and plural form. Struggles from feminist and trans-feminist movements to push towards a less gendered, inclusive language have been arguing for the implementation of different solutions to replace the gendered suffix. I have chosen to use the * as it allows more fluidity within the text.

categories of (il)legality upon people. I have therefore removed from the interviews all the information that I deemed to be unfit to be disclosed in a formal and academic text such as this. This has sometimes translated into the choice *not to* include some information, *not to* interview some actors, or to keep some details private. Although I realise that the arbitrary decision to exclude some of the data could be objected to from a theoretical and methodological point, I made a conscious, political, and ethical effort to put the safety of the research participants before the academic value of this work.

Spending time in Piazza della Libertà, and working with Linea d'Ombra, made me realise that, in the minds of people on the move, as well as transit activists, or I have met and who were transiting through Trieste, I would be forever attached to the experiences of the Square as if I was an integral part of it – as if I was as much part of the vernacular domain as the people who inhabit it day in and day out. Moreover, I experienced the most diverse reactions to my presence in the Square, especially from activists – reactions ranging from benevolence and affection to tension and hostility. I am, in fact, a "stranger" to both migrants, and to Trieste's residents – I do not speak the local dialect, nor had I ever lived in the city before. The challenges of having to justify my role as a researcher amidst the sceptic attitudes of activists, was a struggle that was made easier by the genuine friendships that these same activists established with me. The fact that they could see behind the researcher and accept to get to know me as a person allowed me to come to terms with the at times irreconcilable nature of my political and academic positions. A brief reference to my own mental health during fieldwork is also relevant insofar as a neglect of this sphere could be harmful for the people with whom I would interact, as I might risk repeating and re-instating, albeit inadvertently, categorisations such as that of migrant/victim and activist/saviour.

In 2023, I carried out fieldwork by myself and with other researchers with whom I shared political ideas and academic background, and with whom I discussed the hybrid position of the scholar- activist, as well as the struggles of being young researchers identifying as women in a highly racialised and gendered contexts. Having frequent conversations with them was also a way of negotiating our presence as researchers within a complex context, and to try and to bring as little disruption to the everyday activities as possible – which often meant deciding what not to say and not to do. More specifically, I carried out some parts of ethnographic fieldwork together with Francesca Fortarezza and Ophelia Nicole-Berva. I shared many moments in the Square and in the Daily Centre during January 2023

and August 2023 with both Francesca and Ophelia. Moreover, Ophelia and I travelled to Rijeka and to Ljubljana together to understand the connections between previous segments of the "Route" and Trieste. We also decided to carry out some interviews together, to decrease the burden on some of the most active people in the Solidarity Network. This was an interesting experience, as it created the possibility for the interview to follow a much more conversational style, which in a way reminded me of the interactions that I had during periods of participant observation, or in the time I spent in these vernacular spaces as an activist.

v. Notes on language

A piece of research so reliant on language and linguistic practices cannot avoid a reflection on the language in which fieldwork was conducted, and in which this thesis is written. It has been complex to conduct interviews in multilingual settings where the voluntary or forced choice of idiom can influence the selection of research participant. My interviews were conducted both in English and Italian. Interviews with people in wait were conducted with a mixture of different languages. In most of these interviews, English served as a medium. Interviews with activists were conducted mostly in Italian. For privacy, ethical and practical reasons, I have decided not to include the transcriptions of the interviews in the thesis.

I have also often reflected on the responsibility of having to make decisions on how to translate, and convey concepts expressed by interviewees. Young scholars from non-English speaking countries are continuously in need to choose between writing in their native language, or to write in English to have as wide an audience as possible, to increase their chances of finding a job after their PhD. The motivation underpinning the choice of language for this work have been made according to this line of reasoning. The academic debate to which I aim to contribute is conducted on English-speaking platforms. Furthermore, although Italian is my native language, I have been trained during my undergraduate and postgraduate studies to write in "academic English," which up to date is still the style in which I feel more comfortable drafting a long piece of work such as a PhD thesis. I realise the problematic aspect of confining a piece of research on vernacular knowledge-construction within the structures of a colonial, vehicular language such as

English, namely, in the "dominant" way of speaking. However, choosing to write this thesis in Italian would not have eliminated this problem, especially in the context of Trieste and the violent linguistic history of the city where Italian was forced upon minority linguistic communities (see Chapter 4).

My initial intention was to include the original language version in the text as well as the translations. However, due to the space that I give to empirical material in Chapter 5, Chapter 6, and Chapter 7, it would have been impossible to include the text in both languages. I have therefore only reported the translated version of the interviews' quotes. Whenever the interviewee used a term in a different language than the vehicular one, or that had a particular meaning, I left the original word and included a brief explanation in a footnote. This choice added a new layer to my role as a "translator" discussed in the above section. While I do not claim to be able to speak "on behalf of" the vernacular actors that I interviewed, I am ultimately the narrator of this piece of scientific research, in the sense that the choices that I made concerning what material to include and what to exclude were only mine. These choices were of course motivated by qualitative analysis methods, and ethical lines of reasoning that are common praxis among border and migration scholars. I had the arbitrary role of positioning them within a narrative, and coherent analysis, as well as deciding how to translate quotes. I take full responsibility of these choices.

Despite these limitations, speaking Italian and my dialect as first languages, and having been educated to speak multiple languages, put me in a good position to appreciate the changes of linguistic register, and the contaminations among different languages. I hope to have been able to convey them through my translations and writing. During the writing stage of my research, I started learning Urdu, in order to understand at least the main rules and grammatical structure of this language and be able to navigate the sentence construction of Urdu-speakers. While I cannot say that I am now proficient in Urdu, speaking to my teacher, learning about the differences and similarities between Urdu and European languages, as well as having a better understanding of the relationship between Urdu as a vehicular language and other languages spoken in Pakistan and Afghanistan helped greatly to have a better sense of the linguistic exchanges in which I was involved or that I witnessed.

I am not a translator by training but as I did not have the funding to hire a professional translator, I carried out translations by myself, resorting to the help of native English

speakers when in doubt, and double-checked my translations with Artificial Intelligence tools. While I tried to be as accurate as possible, I struggled to render the right words and to do justice to what people wanted to convey. English and Italian are inherently different languages – and they are miles away from Indo-Iranian or Indo-Aryan which I do not speak nor understand (for further discussion, see Chapter 5, section i).

As the empirical part of this thesis strongly relies on the words of activists, it is important to make a point about inclusive language. Italian is a highly gendered language. Translations are often difficult, as the choice of different strategies of making Italian inclusive (or the choice not to do so), says a lot about the political positionality of the speaker, in a more nuanced way than English does. What I struggled the most with, however, was the translation of emotions, states of mind, and conversations and interactions that were based on feelings. I did feel the constraints of the different emotional depths of these two languages and was therefore not always able to do a good enough job in conveying the intensity with which the participant of my research talked about their everyday experiences.

Finally, a discussion on terminology is fundamental when writing a piece of research in the fields of Critical Border Studies and Critical Migration Studies. There has been much debate about the correct terminology to use, in order not to replicate and reinstate juridical statuses of "migrants" and "refugees" onto research participants (De Genova 2002). The term "people on the move" has widely been used in scholarship and by activists working along the "Balkan Route." In Italian activist circles, the preferred term is that of "*persone migranti,*" which literally translates into "migrant people." I have therefore decided to maintain the term "people on the move" as it aligns better with the Italian rendition. I use the term "people in wait" to convey the specific conditions of the research participants during my fieldwork. Whenever I use the word "migrants," I aim to encompass these different mobile subjectivities (people in wait, people on the move, people who have already accessed second-level reception systems).

Another key theme in a discussion on language is that of pseudonyms. There has been much debate in ethnography scholarship and anthropological research on the efficacy of pseudonymisation, as well as the contradictions that underpin this practice. As Zeiltyn (2022) writes, "respect for the privacy of individuals suggests anonymisation, closure or not archiving, whereas respect for the descendants of those individuals in the distant future

suggests openness and archiving for the long term." Scholars have discussed the possibilities to include research participants in the choice of pseudonyms (Allen and Wiles 2016; Brear 2018; Lahman, Thomas, and Teman 2023) as well as the power dynamics that are inherent to what has been called "the politics of naming" (Guenther 2009). Brear (2018, 738) suggests that researchers should involve research participants in "critically reflective deliberations about pseudonym use, which encourage the naming of racism and privilege." This practice is, however, difficult to engage in when doing research in contexts where people are transiting, and when there are time constraints due to both the legal conditions of research participants, as well as the limitation in research fundings.

As Guenther (2009) argues, "the decision to name or not to name is rife with overlapping ethical, political, methodological, and personal dilemmas." I therefore made this decision by taking into consideration the specificities of the research context in which I was positioned. Each name that appears in this thesis is a pseudonym. I chose the pseudonyms myself to avoid the possibility that participants could choose the same pseudonym, or that the pseudonym they chose corresponded to the given name of a person involved in this context. Although I am aware of the limitations and contradictions of this practice, as well as the assumptions that I had to make concerning the language and ethnicity of the chosen pseudonyms, I decided to carry out this process for two main reasons. First, I decided to pseudonymise every participant not to create further divisions between people who can be more vocal and those who are encouraged to speak less, to make themselves as invisible as possible, and to avoid the personification of the "vernacular domain." Second, due to the recent authoritarian developments and draft law proposed by the Meloni Government which aims to criminalise political participation and dissent ("Atto Camera n. 1660," n.d.), approved by the Deputy Chamber in September 2024, I am not in the position to assess what could be harmful for the research participants in the future, which is why I decided to avoid naming them in this thesis.

4. Who's a "stranger" in Trieste?

Quando ti dicevo, caro lettore, che scrivendo di Trieste sono quasi impazzito per la mole di materiale, non scherzavo. Non c'è viaggiatore che non si sia espresso. Forestiero o autoctono, non fa differenza. Come se una volta qua ci si sentisse obbligati ad esprimere un'opinione. Sarebbe normale se si trattasse della descrizione di un luogo o di un monumento, ma di solito la riflessione vira in altre direzioni, qualsiasi elemento di osservazione si fa spunto per analizzare l'identità della città e di chi vi abita. Diventiamo, noi triestini, cavie da laboratorio. Veniamo sezionati, l'anima scandagliata, veniamo giudicati. Ci autogiudichiamo. Cercano tutti, cerchiamo tutti affannosamente di risolvere l'enigma (Nacci 2019).

When I told you, dear reader, that while writing about Trieste I almost went insane because of the amount of material, I was not joking. There is hardly a traveller who has not expressed themselves on this city. Foreigner or native, it makes no difference. As if once here, they felt obliged to express their opinions. This would be normal if we were talking about the description of a place, or a monument, but usually, the reflection veers in other directions, every element of observation becomes a point of departure to analyse the identity of the city and of those who live in it. We, the people of Trieste, become like guinea pigs. We are dissected, our souls searched, we are judged. We judge ourselves. They are trying to; we are all frantically trying to solve the enigma (Nacci 2019).[9]

[9] Original text in Italian. Translation by Noemi Bergesio.

i. Stratifying ruins

This chapter positions Trieste along the so-called "Balkan Route," retracing how the intensification of arrivals from the informal migration corridor has added a new layer to the mobility and border stratifications that are characteristic of this region. Ultimately, the chapter aims to answer the question: "why Trieste?" and to highlight the specificities that contribute to making this city and borderland area particularly apt to be analysed through a vernacular approach. It is outside the scope of this thesis, and the skills of the author, to engage in a rendition and reconstruction of Trieste's history. This chapter will, instead provide a brief overview of the historical events that led to its current administrative position and role within the "Balkan Route," guiding the reader thorough the national and local organisation and management of the reception system, while offering an overview of Trieste's migrant geographies.

In *Trieste Selvatica*, Luigi Nacci (2019) accompanies the reader through the history of Trieste and its mountainous landscape. Nacci, a journalist and a teacher, has taken to organise walking tours around Trieste, to recount the history of this border region by retracing the steps of those who have walked the city's streets, and the trails located in the Karst, in the past. While virtually joining the author in one of his walking tours, the readers of *Trieste Selvatica* find themselves immersed in a history lesson, recounted by the places, streets, and landscapes encountered during the journey. In the quote reported at the beginning of this chapter, Nacci claims that many have tried to solve the enigma of the "identity" of the city of Trieste – an enigma that has inspired artistic, literary, and academic work.

The search for the city's identity is saturated by many interventions, studies, and analyses that have piled up over the years. Trieste has long grappled with an anxious search for an identity (Pizzi 1998; Minca 2009) – a struggle that is reflected in the city's linguistic landscape. Minca (2009) has retraced several geographical imaginaries that have been attributed and adopted for the city of Trieste throughout the years, which are useful to understand how the city conceives of its past/present and its position at the border (see also, Bialasiewicz and Minca 2010). This position is marked by the unfulfilled visions of past modernities, grounded in the antagonism between Italian and Slovenian populations, and are articulated "with respect to some far-off reference point, some future,

unreachable, historical and geographical horizon, an endlessly deferred, never-accomplished destiny" (Minca 2009, 258).

To situate this piece of work and make sense of the larger context in which Trieste's vernacular geographies emerge, it is crucial to emphasise the historical significance of the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region and the city of Trieste, both as a key point along the "Balkan Route" and as a city that has long associated with its border (Bialasiewicz and Minca 2010). The administrative reconfigurations of the border, the various political entities that have succeeded one another, and the conflicts that made this border region pivotal during the First World War, the Second World War, and the Cold War have been integral to the process of collective memory-making.

Engaging with the "border" in Trieste means to draw from, intersect with and encounter a common language, a repository of collective and individual memory, that has inscribed the urban space within a common, yet contested, heritage, full of symbolic reminders of the city's past as a centre of the Habsburg Empire, and its geographical position facing the "Balkans" (see, among others, Ara and Magris 1982; Cattaruzza 2007; Purvis and Atkinson 2009). To name some examples, it was in Trieste, in Piazza Unità d'Italia, that Mussolini proclaimed the racial laws on the 18th of September 1938. And it was in this territory that the only extermination camp in Italy was established, the Risiera di San Sabba. To this day, the memory of the "foibe" remains instrumental to the construction of the political rhetoric of the Italian far right and the historical reconstruction of these episodes is highly contested.[10] Trieste is also marked by a complex linguistic history, where Slovenian minorities were repressed during the Fascist "ventennio" and World War II. The local dialect, which is an integral part of everyday life, also plays a crucial role in the identity of the "Triestin*" people.[11]

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[10] One of the most contested episodes of Trieste's history is that of the "foibe" massacre. After the ceasefire was signed in September 1943, and Germany was occupying the FVG territories, partisan resistance grew stronger. In this period, local and popular tribunals were established and between 500 and 600 people among Italian fascists and prominent members of the Italian community were executed (Cattaruzza 2007). Their bodies were thrown into the "foibe," Karst caves of great depth. This was the first wave of these executions, which occurred throughout 1943-1945, with an intensification in May 1945, in the context of the Yugoslav occupation of the Venezia Giulia. For an in-depth overview and analysis of the foibe massacres, see Pupo 1996).

[11] A rich body of scholarship has dealt with the Triestino dialect and its role for the city of Trieste. It is outside the scope of this work and the academic competences of the author to engage in a discussion of the dialect throughout the city's history. More information can be found in: Ara and Magris (1982), and Minca (2009).

This region was also famously impacted by population displacement throughout the 20th Century, most notably, the exodus of 300 thousand Istrian refugees after the end of WW2 (Ballinger 2003). Trieste also witnessed the arrival of refugees during the conflicts that broke out after the collapse of Yugoslavia in 1991 (degli Uberti and Altin 2024). The arrivals of migrants from Istria and from the former Yugoslavian republics strongly impacted the urban fabric of Trieste.

The "border" between what are now administratively Italian and Slovenian territories underwent many reconfigurations throughout the centuries. Slovenia became a member of the European Union in 2004, and in 2007 the border between Italy and Slovenia was dismantled after the accession of Slovenia into the Schengen area (Cattaruzza 2007, 360). These "historical entanglements" manifest themselves through spatial stratifications and convoluted temporalities of mobilities in the region as they have an impact on space, and they can be seen observing the city's architecture, the traces and ruins of border posts and border control infrastructures in the Karst plateau (Altin 2024).

Trieste is therefore a privileged site for research due to its position along the border between Slovenia and Italy, an internal Schengen border where border infrastructures still exist as remnants. Scholars like Simon (2012) and Waley (Waley 2009) have argued that the European integration process and the reduction of border controls between Italy and Slovenia transformed Trieste into "the most positive version of a border city" (Waley 2009). They suggest that the city's proximity to the newly accessible markets and cultures fostered economic and cultural growth, making it a positive example of cross-border cooperation. However, this analysis overlooks some of the persistent challenges and complexities that have shaped Trieste's position within migration routes. In fact, border infrastructures remained intact, and ready to be repurposed – as has recently been the case with the "temporary reintroduction of border control" operated under the Schengen Border Code ("Temporary Reintroduction of Border Control," n.d.)[12]

[12] For more information, see: https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/schengen-borders-and-visa/schengen-area/temporary- reintroduction-border-control_en

ii. Intersecting routes

Recent reconfigurations of mobilities in the area followed from the entrance of Croatia in the Schengen area in January 2023 and evolving strategies of border and migration control adopted by countries positioned in previous sections of the "Balkan Route," as well as the ongoing negotiations of the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, which sanctions a strong securitising move of the EU vis-à-vis migration and external borders. Moreover, in 2022, far-right party Fratelli d'Italia won the Italian national elections, resulting in the formation of a coalition government led by Giorgia Meloni. The clear anti-migration stance of the government had an impact on both the situation of the reception system in Trieste, with the 2023 declaration of a "state of emergency" for the migratory situation in Italy and its extension in April 2024 (Delibera Del Consiglio Dei Ministri Dell'11 Aprile 2023; Delibera Del Consiglio Dei Ministri Del 9 Aprile 2024).

As early as the 1970s, Trieste witnessed the arrival of migrants from the Mediterranean Route. An early, tragic episode dating back to 1973 highlighted the harsh conditions faced by migrants, four young people from Mali died from exposure to the cold; they were later buried in a cemetery in San Dorligo/Dolina, a small municipality located in Istria. Since 1981, this event has been commemorated yearly during the event "Confini Aperti" (Open Borders), further contributing to the stratification of traces, mobilities, and memory ("'Odprta Meja– Confini Aperti' Nel Segno Della Cooperazione Transfrontaliera," n.d.)

Furthermore, Trieste has served as a transit point for many women from Eastern Europe who were involved in sexual exploitation networks. This situation led to the establishment of the Stella Polare project in the year 2000 by the Committee for the Civil Right of Prostitutes, a network that originated in order to safeguard the civil rights of sex workers, and that is still active in managing the anti-exploitation system in Trieste (Altin 2023). As Roberta Altin writes in the introduction of *Lucciole*, a book written for the 20th anniversary of the foundation of Stella Polare, "Trieste […] is a frontier city, and it has always been an entry and exit door with Eastern Europe, thus becoming a laboratory that intersects *smuggling of migrants* […] and *trafficking of human beings* (Altin 2023, 13)."[13]

[13] Original text in Italian, translation by Noemi Bergesio.

With the intensification of arrivals of migrants from Mediterranean Routes in 2015-2016, there was a rise in the number of asylum applications filed on grounds of sexual exploitation which further sanctioned the intersection between the asylum system and the anti-exploitation system (Palumbo 2023, 162).

Over the course of 2018, Trieste and the Friuli Venezia-Giulia region witnessed an intensification of migrant arrivals, corresponding to the moment when the Italy-Slovenia border became an integral point of passage for the informal migration corridor of the so-called "Balkan Route" (Minca and Collins 2021). The Italian portion of this borderland area belongs to the administrative region of Friuli- Venezia Giulia, and it is partly located in the Karst Alpine plateau, partly in the historically contested Istrian peninsula. The area surrounds the cities of Trieste, Monfalcone, and Gorizia, and is traversed daily by migrants aiming to reach the region's urban areas while trying to go unnoticed by the military patrolling the streets of the villages that they encounter in their paths.

Due to this, the forest and mountainous area surrounding the city of Trieste has become a site of direct and indirect encounters between people on the move and local residents. Migrants, in fact, often reach the city of Trieste by crossing the forest in Val Rosandra, a valley in the Karst Alpine region, which has been an attraction site for tourists and locals enjoying outdoor sports for decades. Val Rosandra hosts a natural reserve that has recently been reconfigured into a transborder natural park under the EU- funded project Geokarst ("geoparco transfrontaliero sul Carso"), as illustrated by Figure 1. As a network of local and international organisations involved in the coordination of monitoring activities and the first and second-level reception system in Trieste describe in a report, Trieste is "the first safe place of arrival for thousands of asylum seekers from the "Balkan Route," specifically the one that runs through Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, and Slovenia." The report reads:

> Trieste is in a peculiar geographical position and is connected through transport infrastructure with the main neighbouring cities (Ljubljana, Rijeka, Venice, Milan). Trieste is therefore one of the necessary stops for both those who immediately apply for asylum after they arrive in Italy and for those who intend to reach other Italian or European destinations for the most diverse reason (*Abandoned Lives* 2022).

Figure 1: Geopark at the border between Italy and Slovenia. Courtesy of Interreg.[14]

Even though border controls have officially been dismantled after 2007, this frontier has remained quite tangible for undocumented migrants travelling on foot along the "Balkan Route." As Walters (2002, 575) has remarked in the context of national borders that have been included within the Schengen area,

> We should see aspects of the control society at work in the Schengen border, for the border is no longer reducible to fixed control posts and sites of inspection and observation […]. It reaches back into the territory of the nation, but also outwards, linking systematically with gateways into the EU, such as foreign consulates, airlines, and travel agents (Walters 2002, 575).

In the case of this specific border, the networked system of control becomes legally entangled with the EU Dublin III Regulation, which is meant to assess which country should be responsible for processing migrant's asylum application, that is, the country of first arrival ("Country Responsible for Asylum Application (Dublin Regulation), n.d.). Although Italy is not the first EU country in which migrants arrive, and is not an external Schengen border, many people arriving in Trieste have not been fingerprinted in other EU countries, which *de facto* makes them Italian "*dublinati"* (which literally translates into "dublined"). On the other hand, if migrants' fingerprints have been collected elsewhere in the EU, they will be liable to readmission, regardless of the difficulties and perils that they have endured during their journeys. Recently, this discussion has evolved in the

[14] Accessible at: https://2014-2020.ita-slo.eu/it/tutte-le-notizie/news/grazie-del-progetto- geokarst-la-slovenia-e-l'italia-hanno-gettato-le-basi-la .

context of the "temporary reintroduction of border control" within the Schengen area, which have impacted this border as well ("Temporary Reintroduction of Border Control," n.d.). The Italian Slovenian border came to the spotlight in 2020-2021 due to the execution of informal readmissions of undocumented migrants from Italy into Slovenia (see section below).

Many operators active in Trieste's Solidarity Network challenged the narrative that defines Trieste as the "point of arrival of the Balkan Route." Instead, they argue, it is important to see Trieste as the "juncture" between different "Routes." As Caterina argued,

> The fact that Trieste is a border city intersects with the fact that Italy is very often a country of first entry. But in fact, this border has an entrance on one side and one on the other. There is a crossflow. It is a really dense junction. You have the entrance from the East, but you also have the entrance of those who come from Padua because they were told that Trieste is better... Our beneficiaries usually come from different "Routes." At the moment, we also have women from Kosovo, still in the context of the "Balkan Route", *their* "Balkan Route", a slightly more "privileged" route, if it even makes sense to use that word. And then there's definitely a lot of women from sub-Saharan Africa, so both Nigeria and Cameroon (Caterina, Trieste, 31st January 2023).

As Fabrizio, an activist and operator involved in monitoring activities since the COVID-19 pandemic, told me when asked whether he thought that Trieste could be conceived as the end of the "Balkan Route,"

> Seventy per cent of the people that we meet is in transit. They are in transit for routes that change. Some of the people I am in contact with who monitor borders in Ventimiglia and Oulx tell me that they haven't seen people from the Balkan Route for months. Everyone is going to Switzerland now. The situation has changed within a month. I mean, Oulx was full of "Balkan Routes," but at some point, they must have stopped going there. Because of the mountains, because the police push you back, because of the internal borders (Fabrizio, Trieste, 24th May 2023).

In 2022-2023, instead, the speed and the number of people migrating through the "Balkan Route" increased significantly. As Matteo, an activist involved in monitoring and

reporting activities in Linea d'Ombra reported,

> I think that the Route is a geography of places that keep getting further and closer. Depending on contingencies, on how states behave, on the prices that *passeurs* decide to make, on the possibility that after a police raid maybe 20 *passeurs* of a whole nucleus disappear at once so you can no longer get through. Even the economic resources of migrants themselves make the places you have to reach closer or further away. The impression I've had over the years is that it has come a bit closer. That the distances have shrunk a little bit, in a way (Matteo, Trieste, 22nd May 2023).

This evocative image of volatile, mutating "Routes" connects to a discussion that I often had with activists and members of the Solidarity Network on the usage of the term "Routes" instead of "Route." In fact, they argued, using this term in official reports meant to spread information would allow to convey the multiplicity and the fluidity of the informal migration corridor, made of different, changing paths that people on the move decide to undertake according to the information received by informal networks, as well as unpredictable event, and the repressive actions of national and European border authorities.

Changes along the Route strongly impacted the temporality of migrants' journeys. Shorter routes also meant that the physical health condition of people on the move was slightly better than before, due to the decrease of the time spent walking through the corridor. As two operators from DONK Humanitarian Medicine, a voluntary association of healthcare professionals who offer services to those who are excluded from the national healthcare system, told me, volunteers had witnessed a slight improvement in the conditions of migrants upon arrival. In 2019, people would get to Trieste gravely wounded, reporting that their injuries had been caused by police pushbacks along the "Route."

The number of migrant arrivals has been steadily growing over the last couple of years, with the year 2022 witnessing a total of 13127 recorded arrivals in the area surrounding Trieste's train station. People arriving in Trieste mostly come from Afghanistan (54%) and Pakistan (25%), with smaller percentages of people migrating from Bangladesh, Kashmir, India, Turkish Kurdistan, Nepal, and other counties represented in smaller numbers, such as Burundi, Iraq, and Iran (*Abandoned Lives* 2022).

The situation has been analysed by Fortarezza (2023; 2024), who has used the lens of solidarity activities in order to unveil authorities' in/actions, which make it necessary for the intersection between the formal reception system and an informal one. In this sense, Trieste's Solidarity Network has denounced the lack of commitment by the authorities to fulfil their responsibilities towards the allocation of facilities and suitable infrastructures to host asylum-seekers, as well as transit migrants, in the city. These people, they report, are in dire need of first aid, healthcare, clothes, shoes, food, and shelter, as well as reliable legal and practical information provided to them in a language that they can understand (*Vite Abbandonate* 2023). As the Report reads,

> The civil society organisations that contributed to this report have intervened to fill - at least partially and within their possibilities - the lack of institutional interventions. They have ensured daily monitoring of the situation, assistance through the distribution of food and clothing, medical and nursing care, information and legal guidance to migrants and asylum seekers without shelter. This has been done by operators, doctors, and nurses, linguistic-cultural mediators, and volunteers, funded by private resources or by popular solidarity campaigns […]. The consequences of these measures have been the abandonment of thousands of people, resulting in increased situations of urban decay caused by the lack of services (*Vite Abbandonate* 2023).

Although local authorities called for more restrictions and control, migrants were *de facto* left in a situation of abandonment and neglect, which contributes to building what Tazzioli (2021, 2) has called a "grey area" referring to "the structural violence of bordering mechanisms that are enacted by obstructing migrants from moving and getting access to infrastructures of support." This situation bares similarities to what Silvia Aru (2021) has spotlighted in the case of Ventimiglia, as well as what Barbara Pinelli has argued in the context of sea arrivals in Southern Italy, where "policies that exercise stringent control over subjects and their movements [act] at the same time repeatedly silencing their stories, abandoning them to long-lasting conditions of vulnerability, poverty and uncertainty (Pinelli 2018, 742).

iii. Securitising the reception system

Trieste's second level reception system relies on the scheme of "accoglienza diffusa," which translates into "widespread hospitality," meaning that asylum seekers are hosted in apartments spread over town instead of in big centres. This system is managed by different organisations and is coordinated by the ICS. ICS, short for "Consorzio Italiano di Solidarietà – Ufficio Rifugiati Onlus," is a not for profit, secular organisation born in 1998. The experience of ICS started in a less official shape even before then, in 1993, when it started as a non-governmental network engaged in the reception of refugees from the former Yugoslav Republics during the Balkan Wars.[15] ICS has also taken the lead in the coordination of Trieste's Solidarity Network, and it has been at the forefront of the legal struggle against informal readmissions into Slovenia in 2020/2021.

The experience of "widespread hospitality", which was initiated by the ICS contributed to the formalisation on a national level of the SPRAR (System for the Protection of Asylum Seekers and Refugees) in 2002, which was based on the involvement of local organisations and projects in order to contribute to the redistribution of refugees onto the national territory ("L'Accoglienza Della Rete Dello SPRAR," n.d.). The SPRAR system underwent many reconfigurations, going from its original shape to the SIPROIMI (Protection System for Beneficiaries of International Protection and for Unaccompanied Foreign Minors) in 2018, to its most recent rearticulation in the SAI (Reception and Integration System) in 2020.[16]

The first-level reception system is managed through the CAS, namely, a system of governmental reception or temporary centres, which are managed by the territorial Prefectures, which usually entrust the centres' management to external organisations. In the surrounding of Trieste, CAS centres are the former scout hostel Campo Sacro, located near Prosecco, and Casa Malala, located in Fernetti. Campo Sacro, much like the Silos, was used in the past as a refugee camp for Istrian exiles (Altin 2024). People on the move who apply for asylum in Trieste are usually admitted into a CAS and are then either forcibly transferred to another location in Italy or are located into apartments dotted around the

[15] For more information, see: ("ICS," n.d.): https://www.icsufficiorifugiati.org/chi-siamo/ .
[16] For more information, see: ASGI 2024; "System for the Protection of Asylum Seekers and Refugees SPRAR," n.d.

city to enter the SAI system. Because of the saturation of CAS centres in Trieste, and the unwillingness of local authorities to provide suitable infrastructures, the first-level reception of migrants arriving in the city is still predominantly managed by the "Solidarity Network" of informal and formal solidarity actors.

The second half of 2022, and the beginning of 2023 were a turning point for several reasons. First, in 2022, Croatia obtained the green light to enter the Schengen area, after much debate within European institutions on the account of the practices of violent and illegal pushbacks perpetrated by the Croatian police at the border between Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina (Bergesio and Bialasiewicz 2023). Croatian accession into the Schengen area was met with concern by solidarity movements along the "Route," which feared an increase of violent practices once the mediatic and political attention had decreased (Vale 2022). This decision became effective as of January 2023 when Croatia gained access, among other things, to the Schengen Information System (SIS) database, which allows the country access to more tools for the control of "irregular migration" (Jurist 2023). Unpredictably, this led to a decrease in violent practices of border control. Rather, Croatian authorities started issuing 7 days-papers that allowed people on the move to move freely within the country under the condition that they leave Croatian territory within a week (Hameršak 2023). This situation led to a decrease in the duration of the last section of migrants' *Games* and, therefore, resulted in a steep increment of arrivals in the winter of 2022-2023, despite the unfavourable climate conditions (*Vite Abbandonate* 2023).

Second, and consequently, the informal system of first-level reception entered a situation of profound crisis due to the rising numbers of arrivals. This caused a collapse of the informal distribution system in Piazza della Libertà, which will be described in more details in Section v of this Chapter. Third, CAS centres became saturated and due to the unwillingness of local and national authorities to provide additional infrastructures, an increasing number of migrants were denied access to reception facilities, despite having filed an asylum application. Migrants found themselves stuck into forced wait, without access to healthcare, accommodation, and legal help, and not knowing how much time it would have taken for their asylum application to be processed, as well as for a spot in the CAS centres to become available. During these months, moreover, transfers to other parts of Italy became sporadic, with long gaps between them (*Vite Abbandonate* 2023).

While reports based on monitoring activities of the Solidarity Network indicate that in the winter of 2021 (October-December) roughly 683 people on the move arrived in Trieste from the "Balkan Route," the number recorded for the same months of 2022 was 5940 (*Abandoned Lives* 2022). The report indicates a continuous increase in arrivals, with 1579 people recorded from the 1st of April to the 30th of June 2022, and 5225 from the 1st of July to the 30th of September 2022 (*Abandoned Lives* 2022). In 2023, about 16052 people received formal or informal assistance in Trieste, recording a 22% of increase of arrivals in Trieste, with a peak in the months of August/September 2023. The majority of the people who arrived in 2023 were from Afghanistan, following from the exodus of people escaping the country after the Taliban takeover in 2021 (*Vite Abbandonate* 2023).

As Gianfranco Schiavone, the president of ICS, argues, only 20% of people applied for asylum in Trieste (between 6 to 10 people a day) while the vast majority (between 50-60 people a day) were in transit. As Schiavone denounces, therefore, the numbers would be manageable by the authorities were they willing to invest to provide additional infrastructures to strengthen the first-level reception system. The construction of a "crisis" in the reception system, he argues, was being instrumentalised in order to justify the lack of intervention, and to push for a securitisation of the reception system (see Section iv of this chapter).[17]

In spite of this, in August 2023 ICS and the Solidarity Network registered a peak of about 420 recorded asylum seekers at a time who were denied access to reception facilities and left without accommodation and access to pocket money and healthcare (*Vite Abbandonate* 2023; Pretto 2023). It was in this context that "people on the move" turned into "people in wait," forced to find shelter in squatted buildings or to spend the night outside for up to four months. More specifically, migrants were forced to squat in an abandoned and decaying building called the "Silos," located next to the city's train station. As Altin (2019) writes,

> The recurring function of the Silos as a transit and partial settlement building, but also as a space of possible escape from the meshes of humanitarian bureaucratic governance, points to the necessity of intermediate spaces, both physical and symbolic, in-between the mobility

[17] See: ICS 2024, accessible at: https://www.icsufficiorifugiati.org/la-creazione-dellemergenza-nella-prima-accoglienza-a-trieste/

> of those in transit and the immobility of those residing. Apart from taming public space, this is a condition to construct sociality, and it is part and parcel of a process of subjectivation that, unsurprisingly, seeks "empty" spaces to preside […].[18]

Despite the potential for sociality that informal, cramped spaces provide, they are characterised by poor living and hygienic conditions, the lack of basic services, as well as the exposure to the low temperatures and the strong wings that characterise the climate of the city in the winter, as well as the heat waves that struck Italy during the summer of 2023.

Most people on the move arriving in Italy were "single men." However, it is important to be wary of the construction of the "masculinity" of migration along the "Balkan Route." Women were, in fact, present, albeit in a less visible way. As the reports show, of the 16000 people who were met in 2023 by the Solidarity Network, 4% of them were women. Out of these, 158 were single adult women against the 130 recorded in 2022. The reports signal that the number of families doubled, reaching 381 (it was 172 in 2022). They also recorded an increase in the number of unaccompanied minors: 2975 in 2023 against the 1406 arrived in 2022. Out of these women, the majority came from Nepal (59%), Turkey (15%), and India (12%). Most women continued travelling towards other countries, mainly Portugal and Germany. When single adult women or families arrived in the Square, they were redirected to the structures that could possibly host them. Some of these structures were only allowed to, or only had the capacity to, host them for one night (*Vite Abbandonate* 2023).

The public debate around the presence and arrival of migrants in the city has been quite polarised since 2018. Activists and associations working every day to support migrants have been vocal to denounce not only the lack of action from local authorities to address the appalling conditions in which migrants are forced to live, but also their very responsibility in creating these conditions. Some of the main points of contention were the manyfold attempts on behalf of local authorities (Trieste's mayor, the Prefecture, the Friuli-Venezia Giulia governor) as well as national authorities, to securitise the reception system in the region. This area already hosts a migrants' detention centre, the CPR in Gradisca d'Isonzo, operating in the Gorizia province since 2019 (Ansa.it 2019).

[18] Original text in Italian. Translation by Noemi Bergesio.

CPR stands for "Centri di Permanenza per il Rimpatrio," ("Holding Centres for Repatriation,") which are spread onto the national territory (for more information, see: ActionAid 2023). These are spaces of detention for foreign nationals awaiting the execution of an expulsion order.[19] The appalling living conditions, which have caused a rising rate of suicide by detainees, have caused migrants' revolts, hunger strikes, as well as demonstrations organised by activists (Reppucci and Alessio 2024).

The debate on the securitisation of reception and border control intensified in 2020-2021, which corresponded to the timeframe during which informal readmissions were carried out. The readmissions, namely, pushbacks of people on the move from Italy into Slovenia, were mainly conducted in 2020. Readmissions were declared extrajudicial by the Tribunal in Rome in January 2021, after a legal campaign brought forth by ICS. Although the readmissions have now officially stopped, there has been evidence of new attempts to restore these practices, as the Trieste's Solidarity Network have denounced, which led the Rome Tribunal to reinstate their decision in May 2023 (Di Bartolomeo 2023). The process that led to the Rome Tribunal decision is documented in the film "Trieste è bella di notte," a documentary that premiered at the Trieste Film Festival in January 2023, directed by Matteo Calore, Stefano Collizzoli and Andrea Segre.[20]

In spite of these rulings, the Friuli Venezia-Giulia region has continued to sponsor the adoption of border control infrastructures. In April 2024, during an interview for the national TV RAI, Trieste's prefect was asked about the efforts carried out by the region to accommodate migrants from Ukraine. In this context, he proceeds to divert the discussion on the need for Italy intensify collaboration with countries in the Western Balkans to "proceed with informal readmissions the same way we did in the past" for the "management" of migrants travelling along the "Balkan Route" (Di Bartolomeo 2023). Moreover, in the spring of 2023, the regional administration announced their intention to install thermal cameras that are normally used to monitor the presence of animals in natural areas to record the entrance of migrants in the mountainous areas of the region (La Repubblica 2023). The cameras have not been installed yet, but this announcement sparked a polarised political debate.

Reflecting the attitude of the local authorities, local and national media alternate moments

[19] CPRs are detention centres for foreign nationals awaiting the execution of their expulsion order. See: "I Centri di Permanenza per I Rimpatri" (2022).
[20] For more information, see: Zalab (n.d.).

of hyper coverage of the situation to moments of silence. During some of the outburst of attention, Trieste's mayor Roberto Dipiazza and the municipality's council, entirely composed of proponents of far-right parties Forza Italia and Lega, have appealed to concerns about the 'decorum' and the 'cleanliness' of the city and surrounding areas to justify their lack of intervention, and justify their stance towards a securitising response to migrants' presence ("Trieste, Il Pretesto Del 'Decoro' per Negare Diritti" 2022). On these grounds, the mayor Roberto Dipiazza threatened to evict Piazza della Libertà, or to "fence" it. As he argued during an interview for the News of "Telequattro,"

> If I get tired of seeing what I have seen thus far in Piazza Libertà, I will have it fenced. I will have construction mesh placed all around the Square and declare it a "no entry zone." Because *they* sleep there*, they* get the place dirty, *they* urinate and defecate there. The head of the Questura told me that these people have applied for asylum, so you can't do anything to them because they don't have documents. You cannot fine them. So, if we continue down this way, I will have the place fenced and declare it a "no entry zone" for dangers relating to the possibility of falling trees. There you go" (Telequattro 2022).

The discussion on "fencing" the Square was ongoing in 2022-2023 (see Chapter 6). This went hand in hand with continuous threats to evict the Silos. The local municipality and regional authorities, together with the owners of the Silos, Coop Alleanza 3.0, threatened several times to evict and tear the building down on the account of its decay. After years of debate and threats, the Silos was evicted on the 21st of June 2024, which caused the displacement of the people in wait who were sleeping there (Bearzi and Pribetti 2024).

In the aftermath of the election and constitution of the coalition government led by far-right leader Giorgia Meloni in 2022, there were efforts to establish a hotspot at the Italy-Slovenia border (Coloni 2023). A hotspot is a centre designated to manage arrivals of considerable numbers of people in borderland regions. Four hotspot areas have been identified in Southern Italy thus far (Pozzallo, Lampedusa, Trapani, and Taranto). The plans to establish a hotspot in Trieste apparently fell through due to the lack of suitable infrastructures to be allocated for the construction of the centre. Negotiations for the hotspot took place under the state of emergency declared for Trieste by the Meloni government, with Valerio Valenti, the former prefect of Trieste, serving as the Commissioner for the Migrant Emergency (Protezione Civile 2024).

By May 2023, the urgency to find a suitable building had intensified, as the available funds allocated in the framework of the state of emergency were set to expire in September 2023. There was speculation among the Solidarity Network that the prefecture might be considering Casa Malala as a backup plan. Casa Malala, an old barracks building located at the border, currently operates as a CAS (first-level reception centre) and was at the time managed by Caritas Trieste. However, the hub was meant to accommodate around 300 people, a capacity far beyond the 95-person limit of Casa Malala. Local authorities were also considering another former barracks building in Palmanova as a potential site (see also: Turco 2023).

The hotspot system would have allowed the local authorities to manage migrants' transfers to other parts of Italy independently. Currently, transfers must be coordinated with ICS, which keeps an updated list of people needing access to first- level reception centres in Trieste (CAS), Campo Sacro or Casa Malala. The hotspot system, instead, would be regulated under the "Cutro" Decree – a decree issued by the Meloni government on the 10th of March 2023.

The Decree was named after a tragic shipwreck near Crotone on the 26th of February 2023, where nearly 100 people lost their lives (Covella 2023; Melting Pot, n.d.). Among other things, one of the most significant effects of Cutro decree is that it could gradually dismantle the widespread reception system. The decree eliminates one of the three legal statuses for asylum seekers – specifically, special protection – leaving only the legal categories of asylum and subsidiary protection. Additionally, it introduces a new reception level distinct from the SPRAR/SIPROIMI/SAI and CAS systems. This new "emergency reception" level includes provisions such as detaining individuals in hotspots for up to four weeks for readmission into "safe countries." It also accelerates procedures for individuals subject to the Dublin Regulation. Moreover, the decree introduces new disciplinary measures, such as deducting pocket money for damages or imposing sanctions in coordination with the prefecture, which could lead to expulsion from the reception system – a decision that must be made by the prefecture based under the advice of the management bodies of the centres (Covella 2023; "Decreto-legge 10 Marzo 2023, n. 20" 2023).

Within the context of the progressive securitisation of the reception system, impacted by the New Pact, and the Cutro Decree, as well as the in/action of local authorities

(Fortarezza 2024) aimed at debilitating people on the move, Trieste's solidarity actors have been struggling against the spatial segregation of people on the move and people in wait. While institutionalised actors such as ICS have deployed legal tools to fight this situation, others are active towards providing basic assistance to people on the move (food, first aid, clothes, and legal information). The very title of the report *Abandoned Lives* draws a clear connection between this situation and the biopolitics of neglect and debilitation that have been described by scholarly literature (Davies, Isakjee and Dhesi 2017; Pinelli 2018; De Vries and Guild 2019; Aru 2021; Tazzioli 2020). Migrants, they denounce, are in dire need of first aid, healthcare, clothes, shoes, food, and shelter, as well as reliable legal and practical information (*Vite Abbandonate* 2023). As mentioned in Chapter 1, I call the spaces to which migrants' everyday life, and the activities of the Solidarity Network were carried out, "vernacular spaces" – migrants cramped spaces that intersect with the city's entangled history.

iv. Walking Trieste's vernacular spaces

Vernacular spaces are interlinked and interwoven in the network that composes Trieste's migrant geographies. During one of my periods of fieldwork, I was talking to Fabrizio about my reflections regarding the mapping of these geographies. Fabrizio, an activist and operator, who kindly offered to walk me around town. As we had had many conversations about the geographies of migration that define Trieste's urban space before, he thought it might be a good idea to walk past some of these spots and tell me about the many places and organisations that are part of the informal and semi-formal economies of the "Balkan Route" in Trieste. We took a walk from Cavana to Piazza Libertà, and then to the Centro Diurno, in Via Udine – a walk that somehow resembled the narrative device used by Nacci (2019), whose work provided the initial quote to this chapter.[21]

Spending a weekend in Trieste, you could easily observe the vibrant, agitated, busy life that unfolds in the city centre, especially in the neighbourhood Cavana, or near Piazza Unità d'Italia where consumer practices are usually carried out. The area around Piazza Unità d'Italia, Trieste's main Square facing the sea, hosts the building of the Prefecture, while

[21] For a visualisation of Trieste's city centre, see Discover Trieste. Accessible at: https://www.discover-trieste.it/ProxyVFS.axd?snode=20385&stream= .

the building of the Questura (the police headquarters) is not far away, close to the "Teatro Romano." Matteo, an activist from Linea d'Ombra, told me that the Prefecture is an interesting place to consider in mapping Trieste's migrant geographies. Apart from the institutional responsibilities that it symbolises, this building and Piazza Unità d'Italia with it, have been the theatre of some protest organised by migrants and the Solidarity Network against the situation of forced wait (Matteo, Trieste, 22nd May 2023). Moreover, the Questura is the building where people on the move go to file an asylum application and where they receive letters of invitation for appointments scheduled months away. At any moment during the day, it is possible to see people queueing in front of the building.

Walking towards the station, Fabrizio and I got to the Borgo Teresiano, which is the area enclosed by Via Carducci, via Ghega, and Corso Italia. But the closer you get to the train station, by crossing the Borgo, the emptier, stiller, darker the city looks and feels. It is an alienating feeling. This neighbourhood plays a crucial role in migrants' everyday life, with various shops and spots that serves as a meeting point. While we walk, Fabrizio tells me that these streets used to be occupied by saltworks before Empress Maria Teresa of Habsburg had the area reclaimed in the 18th Century. It is from this historical figure that the Borgo gets its name. While looking at small retail shops in the Borgo Teresiano, Fabrizio is reminded of the jeans market that used to take place in the city in the 1970s, which attracted people from all over Yugoslavia. He then pointed at the interconnectedness of these sites with migrants' communities, including spots like Chinese shops or kebab stands that serve as hubs for information-gathering, and social interaction.

From there, we continued to Via Udine, where the Centro Diurno, the "Daytime Care Centre" is located. The Centro is a 5 minutes' walk from the train station but as it is located in a street behind tall buildings, it is not visible from Piazza Libertà. It is located near a dormitory that opened about 19 years ago to accommodate marginalised communities, and is managed by the Comunità San Martino al Campo ONLUS, a voluntary organisation based in Trieste. The Centro Diurno allows people in wait and people on the move to access showers, bathrooms, and shelter during rainy and freezing days. In the Centro, migrants can charge their phones, attend Italian classes, and pass the time, as well as talk to operators to get legal and practical information and be received by DONK volunteer doctors.

The Centro Diurno was closed to people on the move during the COVID-19 pandemic

when only members of other marginalised communities residing in Trieste and accommodated in the adjacent dormitory could have access to its facilities. The centre was reopened "to the street," as operators say, in August 2022, to

> Improve assistance to migrants and partially limit the degradation resulting from the abandonment of people. At the same time, this has allowed civil society organisations to strengthen the monitoring activities, as they eventually had the possibility to talk to migrants in suitable environments (*Abandoned Lives*, 2022).

The Centro Diurno has become a central site of this network, one the main vernacular spaces where this research is situated. This centre offers essential services despite being overcrowded, and the limited resources available. It is also one of the sites where multiple marginalities intersect, since people on the move and other users of the centre share everyday life spaces (see Chapter 6).

Trieste has four main dormitories designated to host people in need of immediate shelter. One is the dormitory of San Martino al Campo, which can host about 25 people and is divided into bigger and smaller rooms, and which could also accommodate women. In the Centro Diurno, the Comunità San Martina al Campo is allowed to accommodate about 15 people during the colder months of the year, generally from December up until June, although this special concession was extended several times in 2023. There is also an ICS-run building in Via Bonomo, with a large room that can accommodate up to 20 people. Finally, there is a dormitory managed by Caritas Trieste in Via Sant'Anastasio, with the capacity to host 10 people. Considering the fact that different marginalised groups use these dormitories, and the rising numbers of people in wait, it becomes clear that these infrastructures cannot remedy the lack of adequate first-level reception facilities. As the report *Vite Abbandonate* (2023) reads,

> Due to its geographical location and international migration dynamics, the city of Trieste has the characteristics of a metropolitan area. It is therefore illusory to think that easy access services in Trieste should be calibrated only to the needs of the local population with problems of social marginality. Given the absence of suitable facilities to host migrants and asylum seekers, the Silos has been used as an informal settlement for many years (*Vite Abbandonate* 2023).

The Silos, which the report describes as "a huge, crumbling building next to the Trieste train station, cordoned off by barriers" (*Vite Abbandonate* 2023), is located behind the bus station. On the map, it corresponds to "parcheggio silos," which is the parking lot in front of the building. The Silos has become an integral part of the everyday activities of people in wait. To borrow from Matteo's words,

> The Silos has two floors. And two wings. So, it's two equal, parallel buildings that have a courtyard in the middle where the grass grows very high. Both buildings have two floors. The building furthest towards the tracks, towards the station, is not used… not that I know of, at least. The other building, however, is used and is used on the two floors, mainly the lower one, because it is more covered. However, even at the top there is a whole half where the roof has collapsed and is right out in the open, so it is unusable. It is a little more difficult to get there, it is perhaps a little more sheltered. At times, it happened that someone could be seen making a makeshift shelter there that was a little more well-made, for themselves, a little better taken cared of than the others (Matteo, Trieste, 22nd May 2023).

The Silos is a space of entanglements. In fact, the building was used as a Refugee Camp by Istrian exiles who migrated in Trieste in the aftermath of Second World War (for more information, see: Altin 2019). Moreover, life of the Silos is inextricably connected to the train station. Fabrizio tells me that the station used to host an "InfoPoint," an information desk where people on the move could stop and talk to local operators, explain their situations, and be directed to different institutional offices. The InfoPoint was closed in May 2020 with the COVID-19 pandemic and never re-opened.

Finally, from the station, we get to Piazza Libertà. This Square is the symbol of Trieste's migrant geographies and one of the most contested sites in the city. In the past years, it has become the centre of debate and epistemic struggles between local authorities and the Solidarity Network. Piazza Libertà is the most visible site within Trieste's migrant geographies, since the activities of Linea d'Ombra take place in the middle of the Square. Piazza Libertà was also, in 2022-2023, the main space for sociality in Trieste's migrant geographies. The hyper-visibility of the Square, and the everyday life that unfolds within its boundaries, have made this site the referent of threats of eviction from local authorities. Apart from being integral to the material and intimate geographies of people in wait in

Trieste, as well as functioning as a transit hub for people on the move, the Square has become a space of encounter for vernacular actors, as well as researchers, journalists, passers-by or people arriving in solidarity from other parts of Italy and Europe.

As Fabrizio told me, it is important to keep these sites in mind, but at the same time, it is important to zoom out from time to time. This resonated with something Matteo had told me when asked about which sites he thought the Square was connected to, he said that the Square had "tentacles." These tentacles connect the Square to the ICS headquarter, previously located in Via Scorcola, and recently relocated to Via Lavatoio; a 5 minutes' walk from the Square. The Square is connected to the above-cited dormitories, as well as the Alabarda Hotel, a shelter space managed by Caritas where women and families are usually hosted.

When the weather is nice, the neighbourhood of Barcola becomes another dot in the connective web. Barcola is located on the seafront. It is the place where people go to have a swim or sunbathe in the summer. It is often used by people in wait to take showers when the Centro Diurno is closed or overcrowded. The Square is quite connected to the CAS centres, especially with Campo Sacro. People staying there often go to the Square to socialise. Even if these tentacles were partly severed during the pandemic, the Solidarity Network was able to rebuild them, working against logistical challenges and the inactions of local and national authorities. They tentacles now link the Square to the Caritas canteen, in Via dell'Istria. People on the move and people in wait are now allowed to have meals in the canteen. However, because it is only reachable by bus, migrants are often issued fines for up to 70€ fines that they are unable to pay.

Furthermore, there are a lot of small "tentacles" connecting to private homes of activists, or to smugglers, perhaps, as well as all those realities that support the life of people on the move, like shops where they can buy SIM cards, or carry out international money transfers. There are shops where Linea d'Ombra and other activists or operators buy clothes, shoes, food that they then distribute to migrants. And there are informal solidarity or social networks that people on the move create among themselves. There are cafés, bars, and theatres such as Hangar theatres or Knulp café, where the Solidarity Network organises presentations and events to denounce the situation of migrants' abandonment in Trieste. As Matteo continued drawing from the metaphor of the connective web,

> Maybe we can make a bit of a distinction in what is the constant, daily structure that supports migrants, and those that are small "dots" in the web that are switched on time and again. I don't know… If I go to a school to make a presentation during the school assembly, that day there's a tiny light in the network that corresponds to that school (Matteo, Trieste, 22nd May 2023).

Zooming out even more, when I asked Fabrizio to engage in the same mapping exercise, he told me about how the arrival of people on the move is distributed in other areas of the Friuli Venezia-Giulia region. In this sense, he said,

> You've got Udine with the barracks in Cavarzerani.[22] There's... Gorizia with the Nazareno building.[23] There's a camp in Tarvisio, I think, s****y situations. Nonetheless, the widespread reception is indeed widespread in the region, which is not too bad (Fabrizio, Trieste, 24th May 2023).

Fabrizio told me that there are some connections with organisations in other areas of the region. For instance, Trieste's Solidarity Network is in contact with operators like *Ospiti in Arrivo* in Udine and Gorizia. Some of these associations are connected through the DASI network.[24] The mapping exercise was concluded with a reminder that other connections to Piazza Libertà are the train station in Milan, or Venice, where people on the move mostly travel to. He also mentioned places like Oulx, and Ventimiglia, located at the French Italian border, as well as previous segments of the "Balkan Route," like Bihać, Velika Kladuša, Preševo.

While the vernacular spaces that are presented in this city are not the only vernacular spaces in the city of Trieste, as well as not the only contexts within which migrants' everyday life unfolds, they serve the purpose of articulate the intersection of forced wait and spatial segregation/co-habitation that this thesis aims to analyse. While the Square is

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[22] For more information on Udine, see: Rossi (2024).
[23] For more information on Gorizia, see: Il Piccolo (2015).
[24] Trans-regional Network called the "Rete per I Diritti, l'Accoglienza e la Solidarietà Internazionale FVG". The DASI network is composed of: Rete Diritti Accoglienza Solidarietà Internazionale del Friuli Venezia Giulia, Centro di Accoglienza "Ernesto Balducci" Zugliano, Rete Radié Resch – Gruppo di Udine, Circolo ARCI Tina Merlin, Donne in Nero Udine, Gruppo Immigrazione Salute Friuli Venezia Giulia Gr.I.S. FVG, Time for Africa, Associazione La Tela APS- Udine, ICS (Consorzio Italiano di Solidarietà), Libertà e Giustizia-Udine, Movimento Politico per l'Unità FVG, Oikos Onlus, ANPI Provinciale Udine, Comitato per i Diritti Civili delle Prostitute Onlus, Associazione Strada Facendo- Manzano, ODV Salaam Ragazzi dell'Olivo Comitato Trieste, L'Arca della Pace ODV, Circolo ARCI MissKappa APS, Movimento di Cooperazione Educativa Gruppo di Udine, Dalla Parte dei Bambini Onlus.

indubitably the central focus, the juncture, of Trieste's migrant geographies, Chapter 4 aimed to position it in the web, and tentacles, that connect it to other vernacular places, as well as to public and private sites within and outside the city. At the same time, this Chapter emphasised that vernacular spaces do not exist in a void, rather, they are the result, and interact with, a wider system of mobility control – composed of different actors active on several and intersecting scales (the EU, the Italian Government, regional authorities, local authorities), as well as legal and infrastructural tools/limits that regulate the reception system in Italy. This premise is necessary to delve into the following part of the thesis, which will present the empirical findings of this research, focussing on grammars and linguistic practices; material traces and intimate violence; and vernacular theories and negotiation of time.

5. Language rumbles: Trieste's vernacular grammars

Anita is dealing with 'care' duties tonight. I stand close to her while she is tending to people's feet as she asks me to translate for her. Anita mostly speaks Triestino, she speaks very little English except for some sentences that she has learnt to ask migrants what happened to their feet. She manages to make herself understood very well though, very often with her eyes, gestures, pointing at different body parts. Migrants show her pictures to make her understand how they got injured. "The doctor is angry" says a person when Anita looks at them. The person sits down, showing their feet. They have blisters, boils, blisters within blisters. There are stones trapped inside the wounds. They say this was the result of three months of non-stop walking. Their nose was bruised and injured. They were beaten up by the Croatian police, they said. They told me: "I follow the rules of the doctor eh" when Anita gave them precise instructions on what to do and insisted that they came back the following day to get themselves checked (Fieldnotes entry, 1 July 2022).

The first empirical chapter of this thesis deals with language practices that are performed and negotiated within Trieste's vernacular spaces. As this vignette shows, communication in the Square happened in the most diverse ways, through the use of mediation, body language, mixture between languages, or through accepting the impossibility of understanding each other. In fact, the situation of "forced wait, allowed for the daily encounter between people with different language positionalities, as well as of different mobile subjectivities (people in wait, people on the move, migrants in the second-level reception system), and the Solidarity Network.

Mediators were clearly key figures in these contexts. However, as they were often overworked, vernacular actors had to find ways of making themselves understood. To make sense of how the situation of "forced wait" is experienced and negotiated by vernacular actors through their encounter, this chapter interrogates what kinds of language and grammars that these actors mobilise, and how they shape the urban space in which they are constructed. In other words, it looks at the terminology, concepts, and idioms vernacular actors engage to talk about their experiences, and to conduct everyday life practices.

It is through carrying out everyday practices that migrants and people from the Solidarity Network find ways of understanding each other. To look at practices of making oneself understood, and their relationship to space, I take inspiration from the work of Kramsch, Aparna, and Degu (2015), who propose the concept of "languaging practices" to talk about processes "of fully inhabiting a space that is constantly varying and modulating the acquired dominance of any one of the languages inhabiting (our) migrant-voices (Kramsch, Aparna, and Degu 2015, 1209). These languaging practices contribute to migrants' "postcolonial reworking of European borders" and allow them to participate in the negotiation of radical political imaginaries, where "finding one's voice becomes a practice of inhabiting the horizon of spaces yet-to-come" (Kramsch, Aparna, and Degu 2015, 1226). Not only, therefore, is the interaction between languages a way to deconstruct the hierarchies between colonial/post-colonial idioms, but through this conflictual process it is possible to imagine future spaces through radical political imaginaries of collective life.

With this in mind, I draw from the work of Ash Amin and Michele Lancione (2022). The scholars argue for the need for urban scholars to draw from nonbinary language, to

transcend categories, and to engage with terminologies that should be manifold and post-categorical, while being wary of their situatedness within space and structures of power and, therefore, of their contradictory character (Amin and Lancione 2002). This language, which they call "new grammars of the urban ground," can play out at diverse, intersecting scales, ranging from the workings of the capitalist society through socio-economic infrastructures, to the micro-scale of the body and everyday encounters, thus becoming the "space of not one but many performative logics" (Amin and Lancione 2022, 8). Inspired by their work, I propose the concept of "vernacular grammars," which aims to push this logic forward in order to underline the processuality and ephemerality of the encounters that allow for languaging practices to unfold, thus combining the on-the-ground approach of urban scholars, while at the same time keeping into account the geographies of languages of Trieste, both on the account of its history of linguistic diversity and violent language imposition , and as its position as a border-city along the "Balkan Route."

i. "La Piazza is a plaque tournante"

The tension between languages rooted within the same territory is far from peaceful and often stems from imperial and colonial legacies. The introduction of new, mixed languages within dichotomous conflicts, such as that between Slovenian and Italian, can lead to "pockets of resistance" which "confuse normative regimes of translation" (Simon 2012, 12). In the case of Trieste, this was partly the role of the Triestino dialect in the conflictual relationship between the two languages (Simon 2017, 7).[25] In fact, as Simon analyses, the conflictual relationship between Slovenian and Italian communities in Trieste has significantly shaped the linguistic and urban landscape of the city, where translation was often a way of constructing the "Other," of creating distance rather than reducing it (Simon 2017, 7).

The historical stratifications of mobilities, linguistic communities, and borders that are characteristic of Trieste have now been made more complex by the introduction of new

[25] In the context of Trieste's migrant geographies in the years 2022-2023, the dialect was not too important, due to the fact that only a very limited number of activists were originally from Trieste – a problem that many interviewees identified as indicative of the "indifference" of the rest of the city towards the situation of people on the move and people in wait reaching Trieste through the "Balkan Route."

languages from the so-called "Global South." The incorporation of Trieste as a segment of the "Balkan Route" in 2018 has introduced new idioms within the urban space: Indo-Iranian languages such as Pashto and Dari, or Indo-Aryan languages such Hindi-Urdu, Bengali, Punjabi, together with the myriad languages and dialects spoken in the Indian subcontinent. The relationship between these languages is not neutral, with some acting as vehicular languages and thus imposing themselves over others – with Urdu being the primary example. The intersection of migration routes further adds to the multiplication of languages, with the presence of Arab-speakers and francophones migrants, especially among unaccompanied minors (*Abandoned Lives* 2022; *Vite Abbandonate* 2023).

Gloria, a Triestin* volunteer of Linea d'Ombra whose life and work have been highly impacted by the study of languages, talked to me at length about the different experiences of hearing different idioms in the city in the seventies *vis-à-vis* now. In fact, she recounted me about how she was not used to hearing Croatian and Slovenian spoken in the streets of the city centre when she was young, due to the vehicular, overdetermining role that both Italian and the Triestino dialect had vis-à-vis linguistic minorities. She then told me that she was pleasantly surprised when, upon her return to Trieste, she heard how languages had multiplied in the city centre.

Starting from this personal anecdote, we started talking about how this could be declined to the context of Trieste's migrant geographies. When asked about this, Gloria told me,

> In French, you would define this a "plaque tournante." Piazza della Libertà is an incredibly important juncture, and a linguistic one as well, but that does not permeate in the city. It stays there (Gloria, Trieste, 20th January 2023).

Gloria's words indicate that, although different languages can be heard through the whole of the urban fabric, the juncture, the encounter remains spatially limited to Piazza Libertà. Within Trieste's vernacular spaces, instead, these interactions between languages follow from the fact that the vast majority of vernacular actors inhabit multiple language positionalities – both because they were socialised to different languages while growing up, or learnt them in school or at work, and/or because they use various languages as part of their everyday lives. This applies not only to migrants, but also to volunteers, activists, researchers, and operators.

In most cases, English served as a useful medium amidst this mixture of languages. However, the lack of/presence of English skills was linked to class and age dynamics, both among activists and among migrants. As many activists told me, the extent to which people on the move could speak English changed a lot throughout the years, and it was an indicator of the substantial changes in the social extraction of people on the move. As Ines, an activist who has been vocal and present in the Square since 2019 told me,

> While I had the impression of very lower-class Afghans in the 2020, today I have the impression of a middle-upper class fleeing, talking in very general terms. These are all impressions, though. (Ines, Trieste, 19th January 2023).

Ines' interpretations were based on realising that more and more people on the move could express themselves in fluent English, which was very unlikely to happen in 2019.

Moreover, many activists and volunteers belonging to the age group 60-80, who were quite numerous in the Solidarity Network and to which many of the founders of Linea d'Ombra belonged, were not always comfortable with their English skills, which they had not studied at school. Some of the people within this group said that they could easily make themselves understood. Others said that their lack of English skills, or of other languages, made them feel uncomfortable and useless in the Square –a situation that discouraged them from returning.

English, therefore, could not be relied upon to create comprehension among all the vernacular actors. Similarly, while Urdu was known by the vast majority of migrants from Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh, very few activists could speak and understand it. Both vehicular languages, therefore, failed to function as a bridge. Within this context, Farsi speakers and Arab speakers found it more difficult to integrate and communicate, both with other migrants, and with mediators and activists. Ines continued by arguing that one the things she found most challenging in the Square was the constant change in the linguistic composition, which required activists, mediators, and migrants to be flexible and find novel solutions to make themselves understood. This was made all the more complicated when Serbia applied a visa waiver for some countries, Burundi being one of the primary examples, who could thus fly to Belgrade to then travel along the "Balkan Route" by foot – a practice that was interrupted in 2022 following EU

diplomatic pressures on Serbian authorities (Schwikowski 2022).

In spite of these perceptions, Simona, an operator and mediator who knows Urdu and Pashto alongside Italian and English, told me that since 2018, the "linguistic landscape hasn't changed much" although there has been an increase in arrivals of people from Bangladesh and Iraqi Kurdistan, for instance (Simona, Trieste, 23rd May 2023). When I asked her if she could give me an overview of this "linguistic landscapes," she told me,

> The most widely spoken languages are, in my opinion, Pashto and Urdu. Perhaps Urdu even more so as it serves as a bit of a *lingua franca*. Many Bangladeshis speak Bangla. But since there are few Bangla-speakers, they tend to use Hindi. Hindi and Urdu are more or less the same… so, with Hindi or Urdu you manage to communicate with Pakistanis and with a lot of Afghans. Because many Afghans have lived in Pakistan… Or, I mean, watching movies… It's hard to find an Afghan who doesn't understand at least some Urdu, just historically a lot of them spent maybe even their childhood in Pakistan as refugees. Urdu is probably the most spoken language, it's the glue. Then, there's a lot of Pashto because there are so many Pashtuns. But for instance, in Pakistan, Pashtuns know Urdu, but Punjabis, or the others, don't know Pashto. While everyone knows Urdu because it is the national language (Simona, Trieste, 23rd May 2023).

As reflected in Simona's words, most of the people I got to know in 2022-2023were Pakistanis from the province of Pashtunistan (or Pakhtunistan), from the Punjab province, in the Western part of the country, or from Baluchistan. While Urdu and English are the official vehicular languages of Pakistan, more than 70 languages are spoken within this country.[26] The ways in which these languages would interact in the Square and the Centro Diurno allows to reflect on the entrenchment of Western notions of translation within the nation-state paradigm, following from the critique carried out by Sakai (2014). To the eye of the European people, including myself, regional languages were deemed "minor" because accessible to a narrower audience, and associated to ethnic groups. However, when I spoke to people in wait about this distinction, they identified Pashto, or Punjabi, or Balochi, as their national language, whilst Urdu was only considered as a medium, thus deconstructing the hierarchies between these languages.

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[26] For more information, see: https://translatorswithoutborders.org/language-data-for-pakistan .

Ilaria, a volunteer of the Italian School who speaks Hindi and some Urdu told me that he was deeply interested in understanding which language was used for which reason. According to her, Urdu was used for very practical communications, which had to do with everyday life practices, needs, actions. Instead, Punjabi, Kashmiri, and Pashto among others, were used for more "serious" communications, which had to do with the affective sphere (Ilaria, Trieste, 25th August 2023). When I asked Ayub, one of the mot present mediators in the Solidarity Network, he told me,

> In Europe, there are "nation states": there are the Italians, the Germans, the Swiss, the French. But in the world beyond-Europe, I don't know how much that's worth. I mean, at least in Pakistan, Afghanistan, India, those countries… Also, Turkey. If you see a Turkish Kurd, they won't speak Turkish to you, but their national language. This is a difference that exists (Ayub, Trieste, 18th April 2023).

In fact, many of the different linguistic provinces in which the languages mentioned above are spoken are trans-border area. The Pashtunistan region is located between Pakistan and Afghanistan, Punjab between Pakistan and India, and Baluchistan between Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan.[27]

The majority of Afghan people arriving in Trieste were Pashto speakers. Only a minority of those arriving to Italy via the "Balkan Route" in 2022-2023 spoke Persian-derived languages, like Dari and Farsi. As Ayub told me, these linguistic divisions were important also along the "Route." In fact, he said,

> I saw many Afghans, they get on very well with Dari speakers, with Tajiks… But on the other hand, they exclude the Daraa region. That's true for Pakistan as well. The Pakistani Pashtuns sometime connect with Punjabis, but when they meet someone from their nation [Pashtun, or Pathan], they reunite. I mean… it also depends on political waves, I wouldn't generalise. But also, in time of need, they all reunite. No distinctions. They know they did this thing [the Balkan Route] in the same conditions, they don't judge people too much (Ayub, Trieste, 18th April 2023).

[27] For more information about the language distribution in Pakistan, see: https://www.arcgis.com/apps/View/index.html?appid=11961f96109c4204b8ad579a8e06187a .

The division along ethnic lines was visible also in the spatial distribution within Trieste's vernacular spaces, especially in the Silos, and it was reported by people in wait as well. A similar commentary on the divisions for linguistic groups was given by Simona, who said,

> There are ethnic dynamics that we witness, sometimes without realising it too much. The people on the move I talk to tell me this as well. For instance, once I interviewed two Christian people and they were telling me: We are always by ourselves, we are always on the sidelines, we don't talk to anybody. And then you could see that, right? They would mind their own business. I mean… Generally, they don't mix too much. Pashtuns, Afghans, and Pakistanis do… But Afghans and Bangladeshis not too much, I would say. I mean it's also based on the language issue (Simona, Trieste, 23rd May 2023).

Simona's comment "you can see that, right?" points exactly to the spatial dynamics that these linguistic divisions allow, with the exclusion of language (and religious) minorities from taking space, from mixing with others, also because of safety reasons.

During my periods of fieldwork, I often reflected on the impact of language on space, on how it played a fundamental role in the distribution of people in the Square, the Silos, and the Centro Diurno. This happened both because of a tendency of people on the move to stick with their linguistic communities, as well as their attempts to learn Italian by engaging in conversations with activists and volunteers, which was often the case for people who had been in Trieste for several weeks. Multi-language interactions were also impacted by moments of stress, cold, or heat, when people did not have the energy to engage in linguistic practices outside of their first language.

While I was in Trieste, I had several opportunities to ask people in wait about how they communicated. In fact, this was one of the main topics of conversation, even outside of the context of the interviews conducted for this research. And in many conversations, we did spontaneously practice exactly what we were discussing: we continuously switched between languages. While I was mixing Italian, English, some French, and German here and there with people on the move who had already lived in Germany for some time, migrants switched between Urdu, Pashto, Bangla, and other languages, with the people who had intersecting language positionalities serving as a bridge, as mediators. Occasionally, Turkish served as a vehicular language. In fact, many migrants had spent at

least some months, if not years in Turkey, working and saving money to continue their journeys. As Khaan, a Pashtun Afghan told me,

> I speak a little Turkish. Because I worked in one *fabbrica* [factory] for a Pakistani guy. I don't understand Pakistani Urdu. But then I come to Turkey, and I read Turkish. Because the Turkey language was there and then I began to read the Turkish (Khaan, Trieste, 28th May 2023).

When a mediator was not present, people would get an English-speaking friend to translate for them, or an Urdu-speaking person to create a bridge to then translate into English or Italian. This often created a situation of "Chinese whispers," a game that in Italian is called "Telefono senza fili." During these passages, we discussed the meaning and intentionality behind the choice of our words, to convey it in the best possible way. This process itself created a discussion about the terminology that we were using.

When no mediator of sort was present, we would use AI translation tools. While these tools work quite well with Urdu, they struggle with Pashto. In fact, Pashtun speakers told me how Pashto is a less codified language, way more elusive than Urdu. Pashto does not have a strict connection between signifier and signified. As Khaan told me, there are at least four or five ways to call a thing in Pashto, not just depending on where you come from or your family, but on the fluid nature of the language (Khaan, Trieste, 28th May 2023). As Lmar said, Pashto is a language that works through metaphors. In order to explain to me how this works, he told me that, for instance, to say, "mango juice", Pashtuns would use a sentence meaning "the king of summer" (Lmar, Trieste, April 2023). He then referred to a sentence that became well-known in the "West" because of the 2018 movie "Mute" – "da stargo tora", meaning, "the black of my eyes," which, according to the movie, means "the thing that makes me feel beautiful", which is the ways in which Pashtun speakers express romantic feelings.

When communicating was difficult, vernacular actors often resorted to body language. For instance, migrants would use their bodies, their wounds, scars, blisters, and scratches as prompts to tell a story. Talking about the border between Croatia and Bosnia, for instance, was often linked with black and blue marks caused by the violence perpetrated by the Croatian police. The border between Italy and Slovenia, instead, was narrated through a mapping of the scratches that people had on their legs, due to walking in the

forest for days before getting to the city. This kind of communication was also used in order to show doctors and activists who tended to people's feet what had happened, and what had caused the wounds, how the wounds had progressed or to inform of any bandaging and treatment that they had been given by other activist groups or in institutional camps along the "Balkan Route."

In vernacular spaces, languaging practices led to the creation of a mixed, constantly changing idiom, particularly among people who kept returning to the Square or to the Centre. This idiom was composed of words in migrant vehicular and vernacular languages, as well as Italian, Triestino, English, as well as some Slavic terms that people on the move pick up on their journeys, and which contribute to a vernacular known as "migrant English", which evolve as people traverse the corridor, and to which words like "Game" belong. In a sense, the creative construction of new grammars, terminology, idioms that allow people to understand each other, might be seen as a reaction to the spatial segregation that confines people within Trieste's cramped spaces – confinement that is enforced also through the linguistic barriers that migrants encounter when trying to navigate the city's life at large.

ii. Teaching and being taught

Interactions between languages would often occur within Trieste's vernacular places through the practice of teaching and being taught, and of exchanging language skills. Many vernacular actors were, in fact, interested or in need of learning a language. People in wait were quite anxious about the impossibility to access institutionally organised Italian lessons and, therefore, sought alternative ways of learning the language. At the same time, many activists were interested in learning Urdu or Pashto. This often created informal language exchange groups. According to some of the activists I interviewed, getting to know migrant languages, even just a little, meant to learn how to correctly and respectfully address a person. Melissa, an activist from Linea d'Ombra who had been learning Urdu told me that she wanted to be as respectful as possible during interactions and communications with people in wait and people on the move. This also entailed an understanding of what could be considered rude to say (Melissa, Trieste, 12th January 2023).

The impossibility for people in wait to access Italian classes was one of the main reasons for concern for both migrants and activists. Many migrants with whom I talked stressed their need to understand the people around them, and, above all, their desire to be certain of being understood. The difficulties that arose due to the lack of Italian skills were manifold, ranging from their impossibility to argue against the fines given to them by ticket inspectors on buses directed to the Caritas canteen, to the hardship faced during the lengthy bureaucratic procedures following an asylum application.

Italian schools organised by volunteers were present in centres for unaccompanied minors, as well as in the CAS centres. However, they were organised only a couple of times a week. Moreover, people in wait were excluded from participating in these classes. For this reason, in February 2013, a group of activists affiliated with Linea d'Ombra but operating autonomously started organising Italian classes in the Centro Diurno. At first, the classes were held twice a week. After a while, however, the activists managed to guarantee classes from Tuesday to Saturday, from 10 am to 12 pm, which was the time when people would need to leave and get the bus to go to the Caritas canteen. The classes were well-attended by people in transit, people in wait, and sometimes also by people who had already entered camps or other reception facilities.

As Martina, one of the founders of the school, told me about the reasons behind the organisation of the school,

> Since there were others already who were taking care of the food, ICS was taking care of the bureaucratic part which I know nothing about… I wondered what could be needed. One thing that was clearly missing was a way of communicating. If you don't have a way of communicating with others… It's a very strong thing because it isolates you, and loneliness… I mean, a place that is so different, you always feel lonely. And if you can't speak, that's the apotheosis of loneliness (Martina, Trieste, 24th August 2023).

As Martina explained, the experience of the Italian school started spontaneously. In fact, she and other volunteers had already started holding individual classes with people in wait who had expressed the need to learn Italian quickly. However, this system could not sustain the rising number of people stuck within these cramped spaces. At this point, Martina, Ilaria, and the other people who had already started this activity decided to

structure their efforts. The school is now under the Linea d'Ombra umbrella but operates in parallel and is called "Chaikhana school."[28]

One of the main challenges of the Chaikhana school activists was finding the right place where they could organise classes. Both Martina and Ilaria, two of the volunteers, told me that they had initially tried organising classes in the Square. However, this place was not suitable, because of the exposure to weather conditions, the chaos of distribution moments, and the difficulties of finding space to sit in circles. This became especially true when an irrigation system was installed in the Square, making it even harder for people in wait to sit on the ground. The Centro Diurno represented a more comfortable, albeit equally chaotic alternative. It was an indoor space, to start with, and it offered the opportunities to store material, to organise classes around tables, and use whiteboards and other kinds of visual material. As Martina told me,

> Although the place is not ideal, having the school in the Centre means that people know it's there. I mean, now in the summer it is different. But during the winter when we had a bit more regularity and the numbers were smaller, every now and then you could actually have a sort of school class. I mean, you would get here, and people would be already sat at the table with their books and pens, waiting for the teachers. So, amidst all the chaos, you could have a little bit of peace (Martina, Trieste, 24th August 2023).

Organising classes in the Centro Diurno also meant to potentially be able to involve people who went there to charge their phones, take a shower, or go to the doctor and who might have not found out about the school yet. In fact, as Ilaria told me,

> The idea was that of creating another "entity," let's call it that, aside from the Square. To create some sociality beyond the Square. And Italian was obviously the best way to do it in this situation... I don't think any of us actually has the tools to teach an L2 language at a formal level, but then again, maybe it's not even necessary in that context. It's more about giving people the chance to spend time doing something different. You know,

[28] Chayekhana o Chaikhana is the name that was used by some people in wait to describe the "Centro Diurno".

> language teaching, is a very participative thing, because at a certain point you don't understand what the language means, so you switch from one language to another and... well, I don't know. There's a lot of dialogue between people, much more than in the Square, where groups of people are already consolidated (Ilaria, Trieste, 25th August 2023).

With time, I started spending more time in the Centro Diurno, and to take part in the activities of the Chaikhana school, both during my political time and while doing research. This allowed me to create trust relationship with people in wait, in a warmer setting, and with the possibility to establish reciprocal interactions where I could explain my projects over a couple of days' time. This also offered the space to try and establish more 'horizontal' conversations through exchanging language skills: I teach you a bit of Italian, you teach me a bit of Urdu or Pashto.

It was quite difficult to be able to conduct the class as I, too, do not have the skills and training to teach a language. Moreover, people had quite different Italian levels. Some had just arrived; some had been going to the school for some time already. The volunteers always tried to divide people according to their level, but when the school was overcrowded, we had to make do. Trying to communicate and explain grammar rules without having a medium language common for everyone was a challenge. Moreover, people in wait often told me that they had problems concentrating, because of the noise, as well as the fact that they did not sleep well (most of them were sleeping in the Silos), and they were in depressive states (See Chapter 7, section II). When I asked her which medium she would use, Martina told me,

> I try to find a middle ground. With a regular group, I would probably try and speak only Italian. But in this case, it would feel like a form of punishment. Because maybe there are people who only come that one time and then I make sure that there are people who can speak English and that there are people who can act as bridges. Some mediators, even not direct ones. Maybe someone who knows English and Urdu, and another person who knows Urdu and Pashto, or something like that. I make sure there is a way to get to everyone. And if not, I use technology (Martina, Trieste, 24th August 2023).

During the classes, one of the most common topics of conversation was that of the

situation of forced wait, the poor hygienic conditions of the Silos, and mental and physical health. In fact, as most of the books we were using to teach Italian drew from examples from everyday life, people were encouraged to talk about their routines, to get them to become familiar with present and past sentences. Sentences such as "I *only* have one t-shirt," or "I didn't sleep tonight," were quite common examples used to describe their situations. One day, when I was holding a lesson with a diverse group of people in wait, and the Centro Diurno was especially overcrowded, we started learning words based on the first things they would see in the morning, following someone's request. The list went like this: rat, hole, very little, too much, still/again, clouds, sky, free. Afterwards, I was asked to translate some sentences: *tu sei libera* "you are free; *io sono malato*, I am sick; *io ho male alla testa*, my head hurts (See Figure 2).

The activities in the Chaikhana school were carved out amidst the im/mobility of migrants and were therefore significantly impacted by periods of overcrowding and the lack /presence of transfers. The situation of forced wait allowed for *some* degree of continuity, and the creation of small class groups and opportunities for people to socialise with each other – especially with those who did not belong to the same language group.

The moments of transfer were therefore experienced with mixed feelings. They were highly anticipated events, both for people in camps, who hoped for more permanent arrangements, and for those in the streets, who saw it as a chance to enter a camp. However, the process was often disorganised, with little advance notice, leading to confusion and anxiety among migrants. This situation was exacerbated by pressures on the reception system due to arrivals from other Mediterranean migration routes and local administrative decisions that limited the expansion of SAI facilities, resulting in bottlenecks like those seen in Piazza Libertà. Transfers were especially traumatic because they disaggregated the small groups and everyday communities that had emerged in Trieste's vernacular spaces. Furthermore, transfers were experienced by the people with whom I talked as a traumatic experience because of the extraordinarily little information they were given before embarking on a journey to other places in Italy – often the island of Sardinia.

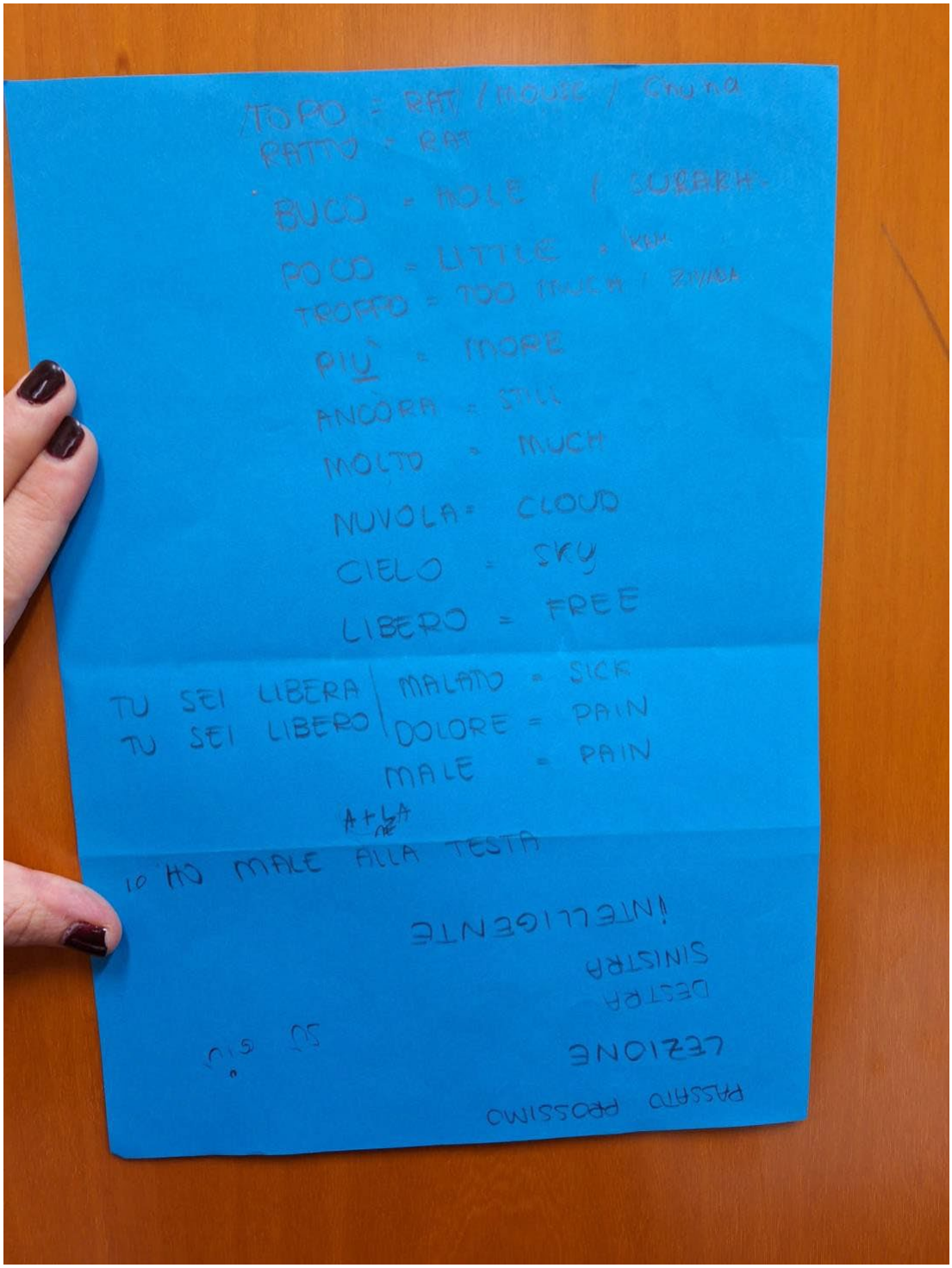

Figure 2: Worksheet from an Italian lesson. August 2023. Picture by Noemi Bergesio

iii. Mediation, expectations, and discomfort

Finding the words, concepts, the "right" ways of voicing discomfort, pain, mental health problems and depression, homesickness, and sense of displacement is not easy when languages and dialects clash with each other. Scholarship has discussed the political aspect of "stories," and the necessity as well as the difficulties for asylum-seekers to craft a coherent narrative of their journeys – one that translates into Western-centric tropes of the 'deserving' migrant (Squire et al. 2021; Novak 2021). This prevents people from having their voices heard, as the "stories" are confined within fixed categories and collapse within wider narratives of "migration crisis" (Squire et al. 2021). Not only were migrants forced to retell their stories over and over throughout their journeys, but they were asked to recount their violent experiences also when stuck in wait, by journalists, the police, volunteers, researchers, and activists engaged in monitoring activities.

While I made a conscious, ethical, and political effort not to ask migrants to tell me the story of their journey along the "Balkan Route," it was a topic that often came up spontaneously. Along similar political reasonings, I would not stop people from sharing their journeys when they wanted to do so. What I realised, however, is that they were telling me these stories because they *expected* that this was what I was after. This became clear when one day Abdul, a person in wait from Pakistan, asked me: "Are you one of those people who do research on us?" The discomfort and shame that I felt after this question led me to reflect on issues of "ventriloquism." This concept, albeit under a different terminology, was often discussed among activist circles. One of the bottleneck points of conversations on the No Border struggle in Trieste was that of how to avoid "sovradeterminazione." This term, which literally translates in "overdetermine", implies the action of determining something *on behalf of* someone else – in this case, the struggle. The worry was that bringing forward a struggle where migrants were not involved because of the conditions of im/mobility and the precarity of their legal statuses meant to engage in a ventriloquist act, to determine the struggle on behalf of those for whom the struggle was being fought for. At the same time, activists would often talk about the tensions between trying not to "overdetermine" migrant struggles, while at the same time mobilising their privilege as European citizens, which made it possible for them to engage in the struggle without running the risk of getting deported.

In this context, the role of mediators was crucial. Mediators, in fact, were the people who were tasked with making sure that enough information was distributed around migrants. They were also the people with more information regarding the struggles, problems, and desires of people in wait and people on the move. At the same time, they were often overworked and on the brink of burnout. Many of them had a migratory background, which made it even more difficult to have to pass down information such as: "there are no bed available tonight," or "the request has been denied."

Many people with whom I talked, namely activists, volunteers, or operators of the Solidarity Network talked about the fact that mediators were key figures in what I will call here "expectation settings." I discussed this concept, which has quite a corporate ring to it, in many interviews, when operators and activists expressed their concern and frustrations for not always being able to communicate effectively what people on the move should expect from the system of first reception in Trieste. As a matter of fact, what they needed to communicate was that the system was deeply flawed, characterised by long waiting periods, with a lack of response and cooperation from the authorities, which on an everyday level translated into the impossibility for migrants to find shelter, and access healthcare, and to move up the reception system for several months. They needed to communicate that it was impossible to predict what "several months" would have looked like.

Working with mediators who were familiar with the system, and which in many cases were also operators, was important, many activists told me, in order to be as transparent with people in wait as possible. The most important thing, I was told, was not to build people's hopes up, which could have had dire consequences for the already precarious mental health conditions of migrants (See Chapter 7, Section ii). As Fabrizio, told me when I asked him how they managed expectations, he told me that he thought about "puncturing balloons. With care, with tact." (Fabrizio, Trieste, 24th May 2023). Hope and disappointment, I was told, were part and parcel of the Game(s) and of the "Balkan Route." However, many of the people in wait with whom I talked told me that they saw Trieste as a point of arrival, with the hope to be able to finally relax and start a new chapter. When this did not happen, depression kicked in, exacerbated by forced waithood, boredom, horrible hygienic conditions, and quite extreme weather conditions in the winter and the summertime.

Apart from being fundamental in the translation of the struggle and expectation settings, mediators were also key in the spatial distribution of people in the Square. I often had the chance to observe how movement within the Square changed when mediators arrived. There would spontaneously be crowds of people gathering around the mediators. When I asked Ayub and Simona how they felt knowing that the Square was "mediator-centric," they said that it was quite a responsibility. As Simona told me, whenever she went to the Square, she had to consider that she would not have been able to leave soon, as the work that needed to be done was endless (Simona, Trieste, 23rd May 2023). I will reflect deeper on the concept of "roles" in Chapter 7, Section III. Suffice it here to say, that having such a set role impacted the experiences of mediators, who became the spatial referent for social and solidarity practices in Trieste's vernacular spaces, as well as in the re-translation of the experiences of people in wait.

While reflecting on language exchanges and mediation, I was surprised to be thinking most of the time about "gossip." During the times where hundreds of people were stuck in the Square for months, particularly during the summer of 2023, rumours and gossip were significant topics of conversation – rumours that were partially, or entirely, inaccessible to other vernacular actors. Whenever we became aware of this, because of the mediation of someone who could understand, we had a glimpse of this vernacular domain that was unfolding in parallel to the ones that this thesis is focused on.

One of the main feelings that this caused was that of "discomfort." For activists, volunteers, and researchers, discomfort meant not being able to navigate these languages, being oblivious to dynamics, rumours, and simply, not being 'in control' of one's role and position within these spaces. Linguistic barriers made it almost impossible for us to understand the interaction of people on the move vis-à-vis each other, as well as to be aware of gender, class, and racial dynamics. However, as Anzaldùa (1987) put it, discomfort is a feeling that people benefiting from the privileges of being born in the "West" and having access to vehicular languages need to accept and embrace considering how colonised societies were imposed vehicular languages with force, violence, and death. Even knowing this, and reflecting on it, I felt like I did not want to experience that discomfort, and I got to think about the fact that, despite reflecting on my positionality throughout the ethnographic experience, I was not exempt from experiencing some sort of white fragility (Ghani and Khan 2024).

Questions of gender played a crucial role in this situation. In the context of Polish migration to Norway, Erdal and Pawlak (2018) argue that continuity and change in the context of gender relations can run in parallel in migratory processes while being impacted by how much time migrants have spent in the country of arrival. In fact, they argue, since gender roles are learnt "through located experiences, temporal strategies and emplaced practices," migrants may engage in negotiations around these roles (Erdal and Pawlak 2018). Going back to Giordano's definition of "translation" as a rearticulation of a sense of the self around the "norms and expectations of the receiving society" (Giordano 2014, 2010), the effort of having to rearticulate terminologies, behaviours, as well as ontological assumptions about gender dynamics, while being abandoned and not knowing about one's future further contributed to migrants' feeling of estrangement.

Talking to people in wait, I was told that the difficulties in understanding gender dynamics was contributing to their sense of displacement and their discomfort. When I asked Ayub to talk about gender dynamics within these spaces, he said,

> Capitalist society in general is patriarchal. Then, when religion and capitalism mix and take power, that's when women suffer the most. I sometimes listen to very stupid comments about women. The same that I listen here coming from Italian people though. This will be one of the challenges that we will have to work on in the future (Ayub, Trieste, 18th April 2023).

Undeniably, women who spent time in the Square were subject to the male gaze, also due to the composition of the migrant population present in these everyday life spaces – mostly, young males. However, a discussion on these dynamics cannot overlook the fact that people in wait might have desires or seek romantic partnership. The construction of the figure of the "young male migrant" within local authorities' narratives of the migration "crisis" in Trieste had four main effects: 1) to reduce people in wait to the category of "single young men", not taking into consideration the possibility for the presence of queer people; 2) to completely overlook the fact that people in wait could have sentimental needs apart from material ones; 3) to draw from discourses of sexual violence and misogyny that are often appropriated within anti-migration discourses in order to further construct migrants as a "security threat" (see: Wahba 2016; Amar 2011) and; 4) of concealing the experiences of other migrants, such as families or women, or creating a hierarchy among

who “deserves” to be “here” the most (see Chapter 7, Section iv).

iv. (Who’s) reclaiming space?

In August 2023, I got to talk with an activist coming from a different Italian region. We spent some time taking part in social activities in the Square and started to talk about what we thought about the situation in Trieste. In that moment, they told me that they had the impression that the “Square” – both in the literal sense and in the figurative sense of participatory politics – was reclaiming space. Since then, I often wondered how, and especially who, was trying to reclaim that space.

Whilst partially (and temporarily) disrupting hierarchies between European and post-colonial languages, languaging practices also shed light onto the forms of racialisation and exclusion that can happen through language. This translated into the impossibility to use some spaces for linguistic minorities, the difficulties of understanding one’s position within inter- personal dynamics, or in the context of convoluted bureaucratic processes. The Solidarity Network had been bringing forward demands in to make space more accessible for people in wait and people on the move. In 2023, Ines, Matteo, Gloria, and other activists affiliated with Linea d’Ombra managed, after lengthy negotiations, to have recycling bins installed in the Square with signs written in different languages (Italian, English, Urdu, Arab). It is not surprising, however, that what the authorities agreed to do in order to codify the presence of post-colonial languages in the public space was related to waste. This links back to the construction of anti-migration narratives presented in Chapter 4, Section iv, and it will be further elaborated in Chapter 6.

When I asked people in wait what they thought about their experiences with language in Trieste, they often referred to a sense of alienation and, mostly, of exclusion. As Amar (Trieste, January 2023) once told me while recounting me about his first day in Trieste, he felt like the people he met in the streets were refusing to speak English with him, either pretending not to know the language, or avoiding speaking to him altogether. It is telling that Amar described this situation with a specific sensation. He said: “for a moment, I feared that I had a bad smell, because people were steering away from me and refusing to speak to me” (Amar, Trieste, January 2023). Exclusion through language had a corporeal

aspect, it became embodied in the racialisation of the "stranger" bodies. As Anzaldùa (1987) argues, it is the body of the migrant themselves that becomes a frontier.

The importance of language in enforcing spatial segregation was mirrored by an insistence on language in the No Border struggle. Practices of resistance based on language were conducted in many vernacular spaces. The first time I realised the importance of language in these spaces was during one of my first days in the Square. On this occasion, some activists were organising a gathering and a protest to commemorate the death of migrants along the Central Mediterranean Route. In preparation for the protest, we gathered close to a big white banner. One of the activists asked us to think about what to write on it. "Everyone should say what they think should go on the banner," they said, "language is important." Each term was negotiated, the sentence was meant to capture the rage, the unfairness, the violence of the EU border regime that had caused these people to die, while at the same time referring to key terminologies in the No Border struggles to position the protest.

Negotiations over terminology happened continuously. In the many conversations that I had with Matteo, one of the longest-term activists in Linea d'Ombra, I was always surprised by how many questions I was asked about the choice of the terms that I was using. Going back to what Davies et al. have written about the context of the "Balkan Route," the struggle was happening as much on material as well as on epistemological grounds (Davies, Isakjee and Obradovic-Wochnik 2023). The insistence on terminology, the continuous attempts to deconstruct authorities' narratives, was a testament to the awareness of the Trieste's Solidarity Network that in order to change the material situation of people in wait, it was necessary to change the ways in which the broader public opinion talked about them.

In her work, Sara Ahmed (2007) writes about the importance of naming. In fact, she argues, giving a name to an issue, a problem, allows for that problem to be noticed and to become a referent for struggle. Giving names gathers "scattered experiences into a tangible thing," as a way to make racism and sexism "appear outside of oneself; something that can be spoken of and addressed by and with others" (Ahmed 2007, 34). The negotiation of language from within the Solidarity Network, composed of diverse entities, both institutional and informal, was not always linear, nor peaceful. Examples of this conflictual negotiations that had a strong impact on everyday life were narrative-

framing and place-naming. As far narrative-framing is concerned, I observed two main positions on how to spread information about the struggle of migrants in Trieste to the outside. In other words, activists did not agree on how to "name" the problem. One of this was the narrative proposed by ICS, mainly based on legal frameworks, detailed information, and data collected through monitoring. This narrative was spread through the ICS website, press conferences, collaborations in projects like the documentary "Trieste è bella di notte," and connection to other solidarity networks around Italy and along the "Balkan Route."

The second position was presented on Linea d'Ombra's Facebook account, which counts about 160000 followers, and is administered by two of the founders of the association. The Facebook account is updated almost on a daily basis, and it follows a coherent narrative line to oppose the ways in which local authorities deal with the Square. This counter-narrative is centred on the "body," the interaction between people through the practice of "care," and it is an attempt to show the dehumanising conditions of life of people in Trieste.

The activists that I met on the ground, as well as the operators, were quite polarised around these various positions. While the former was criticised by some for being too institutionalised but apt at achieving goals through legal battles, the second was deemed to be entrenched in a "humanitarian" discourse framing migrants as victims, and operators as saviours (see: Fassin 2012; Pallister-Wilkins 2022a), while at the same time being very effective in attracting donations from other regions in Italy and in Europe. Both narratives were presented as a unified stance that contained and subsumed the diversity and nuances of the realities on the ground, to create a coherent and strong counterpart to authorities' narratives and to attract people's attention. The lived experiences of the Square reflected an uneasiness with the crystallisation of these narratives, as well as the diversity and cacophony that these narratives did not allow to express and give space to.

During fieldwork, I often noticed the fact that place-naming had become a way of reclaiming space, at least in the discursive realm. These could be seen as practices of resistance, as well as a point of tensions within the Solidarity Network. In the context of vernacular literature, place-naming has been discussed by Collignon (1996) in the context of Innuinnait communities in Canada. In her research, she conducted collaborative mapping projects to reclaim indigenous names passed down through oral histories, teaching, and

usage of space (Collignon 1996). Moreover, place-naming practices have become part of the decolonial struggle in European cities as well as indigenous struggles in North America (see, among others: Tuck, McKenzie, and McCoy 2014).

Place-naming practices were carried out by people in wait. These names, after a while, became part of the everyday vernacular of Trieste's vernacular spaces. The Silos, for instance, was called *Khandwala*, a Pashto word used throughout the "Balkan Route" to indicate squats and makeshift encampments organised in decaying buildings. Another term that was ironically used specifically by people in wait in 2023 was "five-star hotel," which was the answer many people gave to journalists, passers-by, and researchers when asked: "where are you staying?". It was a way of joking about the impossibility of life in the Silos. Similarly, the Centro Diurno came to be called "Chaykhana" – a term that inspired the name of the Italian school. The word indicates a tearoom. It became part of the vernacular under this form because during the winter, the Centro Diurno serves tea to people on the move to give them some relief from the cold temperatures. These names became so used in the context of everyday life that they were then reported in news articles and press releases about the situation in Trieste.

Practices of place-naming became more conflictual as far as Piazza Libertà was concerned. The Square, which was called "giardino" (the garden) by Triestin*, and the "park" by migrants became the centre of a debate.[29] One of the narrative lines sponsored through Linea d'Ombra's Facebook page is that of referring to the Square as "Piazza Mondo," literally "World Square". During an interview, I asked one of the founders of Linea d'Ombra why there was a need to rename the Square. As they said,

> It is a political meaning. Since the very beginning, our decisions have been political decisions [...] So, Piazza Mondo falls within this context, no? As a space of hospitality, of contestation of the State's rights to make decisions. *Ecco,* this is the key point. A contestation of the state's right to decide who can and cannot pass. Ultimately, to decide who can live and who might as well die. Because it is the same thing, isn't it? (Enzo, Trieste, 26th May 2023).

[29] "Park" is a migrant English term that indicates outdoor spaces where solidarity is organised, or where people on the move can connect to informal economies, or smuggling networks. It has a clear connection to Afghan Park in Belgrade (see: Minca and Collins 2021).

However, other activists and operators did not adopt this name. Some reported the logistical difficulties of presenting the Square as “Piazza Mondo” to the broader public. In fact, as some activist recounted, donors had come to Trieste in search for “Piazza Mondo,” instead of Piazza Libertà, without finding it. The name was also contested by some of the youngest members of the Solidarity Network and by anarchist activists on the grounds that Piazza Libertà, "Freedom Square", was already quite an adequate name to signify the struggles of resistance that were taking place on a daily basis within this site.

Disputes over the re-naming of the Square were also directed towards deconstructing the terminology used by Trieste’s mayor, Roberto Dipiazza, who often referred to the Square as “la piazza di Sissi,” Sissi’s Square. Sissi, namely, Empress Elizabeth, is the historical character represented by the statue located in Piazza Libertà. Using a symbol of the Habsburg Empire, Dipiazza drew from the collective memory of the city of Trieste as part of the Empire, and at the same time created a gendered narrative that transforms the Square as something to be protected.

v. Conclusion: On translation I

The forced cohabitation in Trieste’s vernacular spaces allowed for and made necessary the creation of relations, routines, habits, and exchanges, where language(s) played a key role in allowing for or preventing communication, political organisation, and the understanding of one’s legal conditions. The main argument of this chapter is that linguistic practices can become practices of resistance which allow for reclaiming space, at least partially. Following from this, the practice of giving name (to an issue, to an experience, to a place) can be seen as a practice of translation conceived as the encapsulation of the “experience of the experience” (Baker 1984), as well as reinforcing the political relationship of people in wait and/or Solidarity Network with the spaces they inhabit day in and day out. The encounter and interaction between people who inhabited different language positionalities could both reinforce racial and colonial hierarchies between vehicular and vernacular languages but could also create circumstances where these hierarchies were disrupted, allowing post-colonial vehicular or vernacular languages to become more prominent in the everyday life of certain spaces.

The re-negotiation and conflictual struggle against hierarchies among languages, place names and identities within the microcosm of migrant Trieste lays the groundwork for the development of a heterogeneous, ever-changing, dynamic vernacular, based on mediation, interactions, diverse radical and political nuances. At the same time, it creates situation of untranslatability, misunderstandings, discomfort, tensions, and hybrid language positionalities. This, I argue, creates the possibility for on-the-ground negotiations of new grammars of Trieste's urban space and of the border. In this context, different actors could "write back the grounds of the city into the *urban* in ways that are committed to social justice and radical change" (Lancione and Amin 2022, 20). Through the encounter with each other, the constellation of vernacular actors engaged in languaging and vernacular acts through which the "border" was renegotiated on different scales, both in embodied everyday life practices, as well as on online platforms, and through narratives presented to the wider public to contrast local authorities' discourses.

These grammars, which develop in cramped spaces, are constructed through the co-habitation of inadequate spaces, the shared experiences of severe exposure of migrants to unhealthy environments. These appalling conditions create a space of unliveability, where migrants are forced to tend to the most intimate, bodily needs without sanitary facilities, are not able to access medications, or to take care of their physical and mental health, as well as having little to no control over their time. For this reason, a discussion on the experiences of waiting cannot transcend a focus on the material effects of the materialisation of the border in everyday life, which Chapter 6 presents with a focus on material and intimate traces, used as a lens to analyse intimate violence, and adding to the analysis of the struggles to reclaim space

6. Intimate traces: migrant material and embodied geographies in and around Trieste

To safeguard and protect public spaces and areas it is forbidden to lie down on the ground and to bivouac in the streets, in squares, on pavements, near buildings with historical and monumental value, that is, obstructing entrance thresholds, or improperly making use of benches which prevents others from using them the normal way; it is forbidden to engage in behaviours in public places, or in plain sight, or to publicly display objects, nudity, sores and wounds that go against public decorum and hygiene; begging and requesting alms with minors or animals or displaying physical disability is forbidden; climbing monuments, furniture, poles, signs, gates, gratings is forbidden; smoking and drinking alcoholic beverages is forbidden in all public gardens, with the exception of duly authorised public establishments; playing games in public areas is forbidden when this may cause disruption or nuisance; being blasphemous and swearwords are forbidden. Many other things are forbidden, including tying 'velocipedes' to monuments, traffic lights, columns, etc. In other words, it is forbidden to tie your bicycle to a post (Nacci 2019).[30]

[30] Original text in Italian, translation by Noemi Bergesio.

In this quote, Luigi Nacci lists all the activities that have been forbidden in Trieste by the urban police.[31] Decorum and hygiene are displayed as important values to preserve, as well as the "normal" usage of public space. Activities that prevent this "normal" use are the display of sufferance, using public space to find shelter during the night, or even, to lie down. The discussion on language(ing) practices presented in the previous chapter (Chapter 5) unveiled the bodily and material aspects of everyday life of Trieste's vernacular spaces. The vernacular grammars of the urban ground that are negotiated, oftentimes in a conflictual way, draw from the bodily experiences of people in wait, who are left without access to bathrooms, shelter, and healthcare, while at the same time being accused of making public spaces "dirty" within local authorities' narratives. Starting from this point, this chapter looks at the material traces that can be encountered in Trieste's cramped spaces, or that are left behind by people on the move in the segment of the "Balkan Route" that connects Slovenia to Trieste.

This chapter engages in a double move. First, I draw upon Collignon's notion of 'vernacular knowledges' (Collignon 2005) to explore what intimate and bodily traces can tell us about the political relationship that people can establish with the territory they inhabit. While Collignon focusses on a relationship that Innuinnait communities in Canada form drawing from and contributing to a repository of knowledge and memory that is passed down from generation to generation, I argue that the temporary inhabitants of a territory can indeed contribute to its stratified landscape, materially reshaping it and, as a consequence, buying into the memory that is created through the collective experience of space.

Second, I draw from the literature on everyday, intimate violence to argue that a focus on material traces can shed light onto the everyday violence that results from the politics of in/action that result in the cramming of spaces within the urban tissue. As outlined in Chapter 2, scholarship has been interrogating how borders become embodied and experienced at the most intimate level (Anzaldúa 1987; Sundberg 2011; Squire 2014; Mountz 2018; Tyerman 2021; Casaglia 2022), reflecting a materialist turn in critical geopolitics (Squire 2015; see also: Koopman et al. 2021). Scholars have worked at the intersection between critical border studies (Tyerman 2021; 2022; Casaglia 2022), and studies of immigration detention centres (Conlon and Hiemstra 2019) – an intersection

[31] For more information, see: PoliziaUrbana2017_TestoCoordinato.pdf .

that feeds into what Tazzioli and De Genova (2023, 2) have conceptualised as the "confinement continuum," which is symptomatic of "the condition of migrant subordination, which […] extends far beyond any physical border site and commonly encompasses the full spectrum of migrant everyday life." Scholars have been focusing on the everyday, intimate effects of the border regime and technologies on the bodies of migrants both on the move/in wait or in detention centres (Conlon 2011; Hiemstra and Conlon 2019; Tyerman 2022), as well as the radical nature of everyday social, political, and mobile practices and their ability to produce "frictions that could open up spaces free from the power relations of subjection" (Fontanari and Ambrosini 2018).

Furthermore, scholarship focussing on the US-Mexico border has taken interest in objects left behind by migrants along migratory routes, focusing on the impact and the role of discarded objects in the construction of "material culture" (Sundberg 2008; 2011; Squire 2014). The role of objects in the "encounter" between migrants and other people (activists, passers-by, local residents) is that of allowing for a renegotiation of the very category of "the human," whereby passers-by can empathise with migrants' everyday life through the objects and contribute to the "re- humanisation" of migrants within public discourse (Squire 2014; see also: Sundberg 2008). A strand of scholarship has adopted archaeological methods to create an archive of the material lives, struggles, violence, and ultimately, death, of migrants *en* route in the Sonoran Desert (De Léon 2015). In the context of the "Balkan Route," the material aspects of migrants' experiences have been highlighted in the context of makeshift camps that form an archipelago in the Balkan region (Jordan and Minca 2023a; 2023b).

As this thesis focusses on the ways the experience of "forced wait" is lived, negotiated, as well as how it shapes urban space, I now turn to space itself, to understand what the urban and the mountainous landscapes in and around Trieste can tell us about the experiences of im/mobility. Although I do not classify the mountainous area around Trieste as a cramped, vernacular space, it is important to show the connections between spaces of segregation to the physical border, to see the "tentacles" that depart from the Square, to draw from Matteo's analogy (See Chapter 4, section v). To make sense of how these traces can become part of processes of knowledge construction from "below" and how they capture the "experience of the experience" of this situation of forced wait, I resort to a narrative style to bring the reader with me on the many walks that I took in the forest, the countless evenings that I spent in the Square, the visits to the Silos, and the

celebrations of Eid al-Fitr. This chapter, therefore, analyses traces produced and left behind by people on the move and people in wait and interrogates how and to what extent they shape and re-signify this stratified territory and serve as a lens to identify and denounce inherently violent practices of migration management. This chapter is a different perspective on the same thing, namely, on the struggle for reclaiming space. The focus on materiality is necessary to shed light onto the density and complexity of Trieste's vernacular spaces and to offer depth to the experiences of people in wait – as well as underline how the material realm can become a site of struggle and resistance.

i. Clothes and objects in the mountains

During the winter of 2022-2023, Piazza Libertà was as crowded as ever, with almost 300 people waiting to access the CAS reception centres located around the city. The situation was exacerbated by falling temperatures, the Bora wind was reaching up to 120/130 km/h and causing steep temperature falls. Every morning and every night, new people would arrive in Piazza Libertà, and activists, volunteers, and operators alike were exhausted, their resources and mental health seriously put to the test. Everyday life in the Square was characterised by a battle for jackets and sleeping bags, while people sleeping in the Silos were fighting against the high winds that would blow through the arches of the decaying building, the damp and flooded ground, and the insidiousness of seasonal illness.

New arrivals were easy to spot. The rule of thumb was that new people usually did not carry anything with them. They did not have their backpacks, which is one of the objects that are usually and intuitively associated with the "Balkan Route." Newcomers usually arrived with wounded and blistered feet, bruises, and starches of different sorts. The condition of their shoes made it easy to guess how long they had been walking for. Over time, I became familiar with the other signs that announced the imminent arrival of new people, especially of particularly numerous groups. Moments before, the energy in the Square would change noticeably. As Ayub, a mediator, operator, and activist told me, the Square would suddenly become "electric" (Ayub, Trieste, 18th April 2023). Information would be passed on through informal networks of different sorts, and the Square would become populated with unfamiliar faces, smugglers perhaps, waiting for those who needed to pay part of their smuggling fees upon arrival.

Because my fieldwork in Trieste was primarily conducted in Piazza Libertà, I first heard of how people arrived in Trieste by people on the move themselves. As many told me, the walk connecting a location near the Slovenian border, reachable by bus or train from Slovenia or Croatia to Trieste usually took migrants about two days. Many people I met in the Square told me that being so close to the destination point drained their energies. As Hamza described,

> I walked for fourteen days from Bosnia to the border between Italy and Slovenia. It was no problem. The walk from Val Rosandra to Trieste lasted two days. It never ended. Being so close to the end. Me and my friends were so tired. It never ended (Hamza, Trieste, 19th January 2023).

At first, I knew little about the paths that people on the move would walk to get to the Square. Equally, I did not know much about the moment in which they would cross the border between Italy and Slovenia, somewhere in the mountainous valleys of the Karst plateau and Istrian peninsula that surround the city. At the same time, I realised that the paths and routes travelled by migrants were common knowledge among Trieste's activists, although the roads undertaken by migrants would often slightly change, their course diverted, depending on weather conditions, the size of the group, as well as the presence or absence of military patrolling the area.

Travelling to these valleys and small villages is quite easy if you own a car. Driving on the secondary roads that connect the area now traversed by the highway linking Trieste to the Istrian city of Koper, it is possible to notice the presence of people walking at the edge of the streets. The buses that connect the area to the city run quite sporadically. One of the easily reachable villages in the area is Dolina/San Dorligo della Valle. This small, bilingual village covers one of the biggest border areas in the region, which are part of a natural reserve, the Geopark Transfrontier park (see Chapter 4, Section ii). The village counts about 5800 inhabitants, but it extends for 24.5 square kilometres. The municipality of Dolina/San Dorligo, similarly to other small villages in the area, is positioned within a political leftist tradition. As one of the councilmembers of Dolina/San Dorligo told me during an interview,

> Our municipality is the gateway of the "Balkan Route" to Italy. Just take

> a look at how it develops [he refers to a map hung behind his desk]. The municipality covers the very entrance, it takes the whole border strip, and then it stretches along the border. It goes without saying that it is the priority entrance, in the sense that coming from the south, they actually pass through Slovenian Istria and then they enter here, right? So, we are actually the main gateway. Not so much Muggia, maybe Trieste, even less so the Karst municipalities, but rather *our* municipality. And so, let's say that it is the geographical position of our municipality that makes us the fulcrum, in a way, since time immemorial. A personal anecdote: I remember migrations since forever. I live along the Rosandra stream and ever since I can remember, as a child, there were abandoned migrants' clothes. It has been at least thirty years that there's been this thing. (Daniele, Dolina/San Dorligo, 11th August 2023).

The connections that the councillor drew between different migratory movements adopting the same practice of discarding clothes testifies to the stratified nature of this borderland area. To research these material traces, I returned to Dolina/San Dorligo many times. I started taking walks along the trekking paths located in this area. Going on a small hike meant to come across objects of various kinds that were discarded by migrants: Backpacks, pieces of clothing, shoes, but also band-aids, energy drink bottles, pain killer packages, first-aid kits, and lots and lots of torn papers. I went there by myself, or with other researchers, which was always useful as it allowed for instant reflection on the emotional responses that we were having to these encounters, as well as what the objects were telling us about people on the move. On these walks, I often encountered papers from camps located in various locations along the "Balkan Route": papers that had been issued by the Croatian and Bosnian authorities to allow migrants to cross the border; bus tickets purchased in Bosnia; and some ID documents originating from people's countries of origin. However, most of the documents were unreadable as they had been abandoned on the damp ground and foliage. In an entry of my fieldwork diary dated 14th of January 2023, I recorded:

> I went to take a walk in Val Rosandra with Ophelia.[32] We parked the car and then walked for a couple of hours. While walking, we came across several mountain bikers, following these same trails in the forest. At first, there was not that much stuff, surely not as much as what I had previously

[32] A researcher with whom I carried out some walks and interviews, see: Chapter 3.

> encountered, and not in the same spots. Continuing on our walk, we saw more and more pieces of clothes and objects. In a clearing, we saw several shoes, trousers, energy drinks, a package of Indian tea, personal belongings, documents, papers, and train tickets. The more we continued, the more we saw. We reflected on the fact that the piles of objects became more visible and evident once we got closer to the hairpin turns of the mountain road. Reflecting on what we were seeing, we thought about the fact that it was impossible not to be taken aback by the amount of waste. However, we also discussed the fact that if we were fleeing our country, trying to avoid border control, blistered, wounded, and trying to survive, waste would be the least of our priorities (Fieldnotes, 14th of January 2023).

While walking in the forest, the objects and clothes allowed us to partially map the sites where people might have taken shelter during rainy and windy nights, where they might have rested or changed their clothes, and where they might have found solutions for the lack of food and sanitary facilities. As Sundberg (2008, 874) argues, "undocumented migrants create geographically specific landscapes of border crossing," physically redrawing the border with their bodies and their discarded belongings. It was in Trieste's migrant landscape that I/we were walking. As we continued, we saw that it was mainly composed of pieces of clothing clustered around and piled up, almost forming small makeshift encampments (Figure 3). As reported in the excerpt from my fieldnotes reported above, the piles of clothes became more present closer to the street connecting the mountains to the city (see Figure 4).

Figure 3: Pile of clothes near Dolina/San Dorligo. April 2023. Picture by Noemi Bergesio

Figure 4: Pieces of clothing near a street. April 2023. Picture by Noemi Bergesio

Many of the pieces of clothing that I/we came across with were neutral-coloured. Observing this, I was reminded of many a conversation that I had with activists and volunteers in Trieste during the first months of my fieldwork, when they were explaining to me how distribution practices worked. When going through piles of shoes that had been donated, we would always exclude the brightly coloured ones. Flavia, an activist from Linea d'Ombra, told me that people on the move usually do not accept clothes in bright colours because they do not want anything that could make them stand out from the crowd more than they already do. I then observed this pattern myself during the distribution of clothes and backpacks in the Square. Flashy-coloured pieces of clothing were often discarded in favour of black or blue ones.

Zooming in on the objects, it is possible to observe some of the symbols of the "Balkan Route" *Games*, namely shoes and backpacks (see Figure 5 and Figure 6). Shoes are the most used and consumed item of clothing by people trying to walk the "Balkan Route." The prolonged usage of shoes, long walks, and the exposure of the skin to water is likely to cause a medical condition that is known as "trench foot," where the sole of the feet is macerated due to continuous exposure to cold and water. Tending to people's feet was the reason why Linea d'Ombra was originally created. Looking after these physical problems, albeit temporarily, was key in order for migrants to be able to continue their journeys.

Many of the solidarity actors that I have interviewed shared the idea that discarding objects and getting changed was a strategy that migrants deployed in order not to be too visible when walking in the streets and arriving in Trieste, as a way to avoid the attention of the military that patrols the streets of the villages in the area. In fact, as Ines told me, ruined shoes and a torn backpack are the easiest way to identify a newcomer:

> It's the shoes, together with how tired they look, the stains of mud. You can see it, there's not much that they can do. You can see them. Especially if you keep an eye out, if you have it in your heart to see them. I mean, also how tired they look. I always carry energy bars with me in case I meet someone who I think have just arrived (Ines, Trieste, 19th January 2023).

Figure 5: Discarded shoes. April 2023. Picture by Noemi Bergesio

Figure 6: Discarded backpack and jacket. May 2023. Picture by Noemi Bergesio

The need to get rid of the signs that identified them as newcomers was confirmed by many of the people on the move with whom I talked about these objects. For instance, Khaan told me, while pointing things out on a map,

> Here, this is the water, I wash some things because very *brutta*. No good dress and change dress here [pointing at the map]. This is the water. I changed here and then I am back outside, and I go down to Trieste (Khaan, Trieste, 28th May 2023).

Unsurprisingly, many objects could be found close to the fountains located at the beginning of some trekking paths, probably used by migrants to wash themselves, shave and prepare to head towards the city centre. Many people expressed the need to look respectable and clean. Here and there, it was possible to find objects that attest to the everyday habits and bodily needs of migrants, such as cigarette packs, toothpaste, razor blades, as well as antibiotics, painkillers, food, water, and energy drink bottles. Some of these objects had been given to people on the move in camps along previous sections of the "Route" by international organisations (see Figure 7). However, these were the ones that struck me most as they testified to the need to tend to infections and resist pain in order to continue walking (see Figure 8), or the attempts by people on the move to pass the time while waiting to go back to their journeys (see Figure 9).

Figure 7: First aid kit issued by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) in Sarajevo. April 2023. Picture by Noemi Bergesio

Figure 8: Picture of antibiotics and food. November 2022. Picture by Noemi Bergesio

Figure 9: Playing cards, toothbrushes, and other objects. April 2023. Picture by Noemi Bergesio

Some of the people with whom I talked mentioned the strategy of discarding their documents, or papers that they had been given on previous parts of the "Balkan Route," often upon precise instruction from their smugglers (see Figure 10). Pasoon, a person from Afghanistan, told me that his smuggler had instructed him on the exact moment when he and his group had to discard their documents, rip them apart, and throw them away. He talked about the sense of loss that he felt by discarding something that he had protected for his whole migratory journey, and which was the last thing that linked them to their "identity."

Figure 10: Discarded paper issued by the Obrenovac transit camp, located in Serbia. January 2023. Picture by Noemi Bergesio

This strategy was meant to prevent the authorities from easily tracing their trajectories, which migrants feared might be used as a basis for readmissions into Croatia, Bosnia, or Serbia. As Canzutti and Tazzioli (2023) have argued, migrants attempt to manipulate the traces of their passage, both material and digital, to counterpose the unpredictability of

governmental tactics of traceability (see also: Tazzioli 2024). During my walks, I had the chance to observe the presence of an impressive number of plastic bags of various kinds, colours, and dimensions. While I had not thought about asking, I was given an explanation during an interview with Ines, an activist from Linea d'Ombra. She said,

> Once, a delegation of Members of the European Parliament came to Trieste. They came and asked for a meeting with the Solidarity Network. And I asked one of the people on the move: "What do you think I should ask these people? I do not want to speak on your behalf. I could talk about visas; I could talk as a European because I see things as a European. But what would *you* want me to say?" He thought about it for a while and then told me: "We need more trash bags. You know, the black, heavy-duty ones. The ones that do not tear apart." At first, I thought that I must have misunderstood. So, I asked him again: "See, I have to make some requests." And he told me: "Yes yes, look, it's fundamental. Then we will make do. But they should get us some black trash bags. If we have to walk, we'll walk. But if you need to float or if you need to bring your backpack with you across a river, or you want to sleep at night when it's raining, if you have to sit on the ground somewhere... you know, black trash bags are versatile (Ines, Trieste, 19th January 2023).

Oftentimes, migrants use trash bags to cope with humidity and rain, water streams that are characteristic of these forest areas, as well as to have some sort of isolation from the cold when they need to sleep on the ground. At the same time, plastic bags leave tangible traces of the hardships of the *Games*, as well as of the lack of assistance and commitment from local authorities, which prevents people on the move from tending to their most basic bodily needs. A couple of times, I found makeshift recycling bins that locals had left for people on the move to use at the beginning of the hiking paths / end of their descent trails. One of these makeshift bins was accompanied by a sign written in English, which read: "Hello. If you put your clothes in here, it will be easier to throw them in the garbage." The trash bag, which was positioned on a wooden bridge crossing a small stream of water, was empty (see Figure 11). Encountering these objects, I could experience how the border between Italy and Slovenia became tangible, materialised, and dispersed at the same time, adding a layer to this stratified border landscape, dotted around with ruins of past reconfigurations of the Eastern frontier.

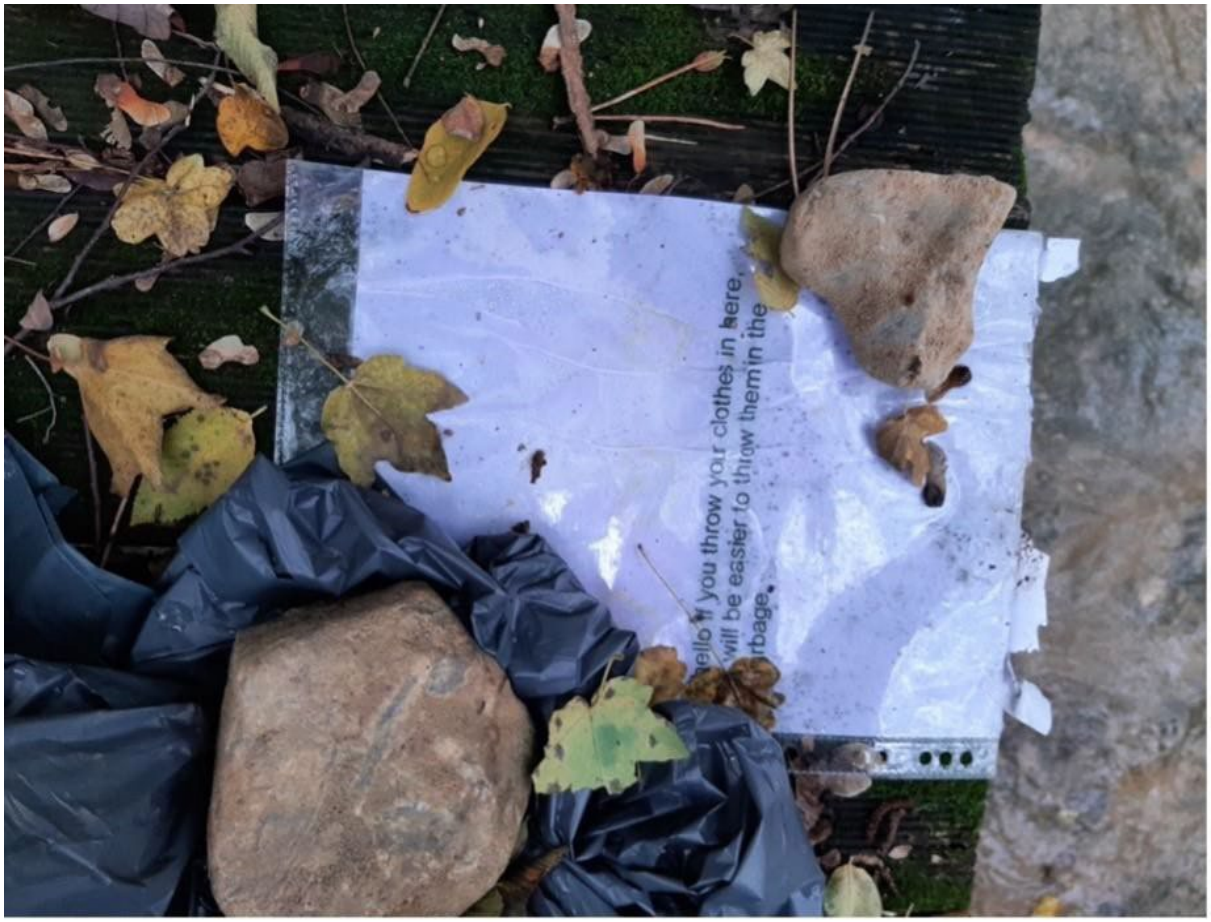

Figure 11: Makeshift recycling bin left for people on the move. November 2022. Picture by Noemi Bergesio

ii. The folds of a Shadow Line

On my first day in Trieste, in the summer of 2022, I arrived at the city's train station at around 5 pm, which is the time that I was told Linea d'Ombra would gather in the Square for their daily distribution of food and clothes and to tend to people's injured and blistered feet. I remember thinking that it was quite a striking view, and I said to myself: "How can people not know about this? It's, like, *right there.*" I was so shaken to be looking at a scene that seemed so detached from everything that was going on around it, almost following different rhythms. This was a Square in the middle of the city where food and clothes were distributed to people on the move and people in wait, while everyone else was circumnavigating this place and going on about their business, hardly looking up, directed towards the beach or to the aircon in their apartments. It was a pocket

of vital chaos, bursting energy, and depressed exhaustion interrupting the otherwise lethargic and sultry August days that characterise Italian summers.

When I got to my own air-conditioned room that night, leaving people on the move to suffer from the heat in the Square, I wrote down: "Segregation? Spatial isolation? I don't know. They are in plain sight, in display, *for everyone to see*" (fieldnotes, August 2022). I soon realised how easy it was for people arriving at the station to just avoid looking up, simply because the Square and whatever was happening there was not part of their lives. It simply *did not concern them*. As Sara Ahmed writes, we learn to recognise strangers, who become "containers of fear," but we also learn not to notice them (Ahmed 2017). This distinction between the bodies that deserve to be noticed and those who do not is predicated and enforced through violence (Ahmed 2017). As Ahmed argues, "as a child you might have been taught to turn away from homeless people on the street, to screen out not only their suffering but their very existence. They are not anything to do with you. Hurry on, move on" (Ahmed 2017, 32).

It was as if the lives of the mobile people travelling freely from and to Trieste were flowing in parallel to the lives of racialised people on the move – the two words touching but not intersecting. The fact that it is not necessary to cross the Square to get from the station to the streets that connect it with the city centre allows for avoiding contact and direct encounters. Or so I wrote down in my notes. Adding a puzzled: "Does it though?" at the end. As Sara Ahmed reinstates, "we are learning to screen out what gets in the way of our occupation of space" (Ahmed 2017, 32), based on racist assumptions about *who* is allowed to occupy that space.

One of the instances in which I saw racialised spatial practices was on a rainy November day in 2022, when the Bora wind was blowing at 120 km/h. The distribution and the solidarity activities had been moved to the underpass, which was usually the case when the weather conditions did not allow for the distribution and healthcare to be carried out outside. The underpass was closed at 10 pm, which created a problem when the activities needed to be carried out until late at night. When we moved to the underpass, we realised that very few people on the move had followed us there, at which point one of the activists asked me and another person to go to the train station and tell people where Linea d'Ombra was that night. When we entered the station, we saw the police right away. There were four of them, in a uniform. There were probably more in plain clothes. The

police were asking migrants for their train tickets. When they could not show their tickets, they were asked to leave. We saw migrants telling the police that they only wanted to find shelter from the cold. It was rainy and the wind was quite literally making motorbikes and small trees fly in the air. The police asked them to leave the premises, which they were forced to do. When we approached migrants to tell them to go to the underpass, where they would have found shelter and food, we were followed by two police officers who were watching over what we were doing. They stood there, happy to have done their job.

After this episode, I discussed the situation of migrants' segregation with activists at length, as well as the fact that authorities were preventing them from finding shelter even in the most extreme weather conditions. Through time, I developed a different perspective while spending almost every day in the Square when I was in Trieste. I noticed that whenever something happened in the Square that required external intervention *precisely* because it spilled over its boundaries, and could not be solved within its limits, this veil that separated the two worlds was breached. This would happen, for example, when a person would collapse due to heatstroke or debilitation and an ambulance had to be called. Or perhaps, when a fight would break out in the Square. Immediately, people passing by would notice what was happening and felt compelled to call the police. When these events happened, the two worlds would intersect, the Square becoming part of the lives of the people coming and going because of the noise, the disruption to their mobility, and the feeling that something was odd and out of place.

Enzo, one of the founders of Linea d'Ombra, described the Square as an enclave, existing somewhere where the normal rules were suspended, the folds of a Shadow Line, as the name of the association Linea d'Ombra suggests. Similarly, Giuseppe, another activist from Linea d'Ombra, told me,

> I see it as a space that is now separated from the life of the city. There have been a few attempts, like a demo that passed through the Square, but it remains quite disconnected. And moreover, I believe that by now the "guys" [as in, people on the move] have passed the word, that there is communication. They know. So many times, the situation of overcrowding that we have in the Square is almost a consequence of our presence, right? Because people who maybe would not need immediate help come there as well. They come because it's probably the only place where they are welcome, where they find friends, where they can chat

(Giuseppe, Trieste, 19th January 2023).

As Amelia, an activist from Trieste told me, at this point, the Square with all its activities had become part of the landscape, as it was "normal." In other words, people did not even notice anymore (Amelia, Trieste, 19th April 2023). Gloria, another activist, elaborated on the spatial segregation of migrants by explaining how this was reflected through movement. In fact, she told me,

> Piazza della Libertà is certainly central. The people of Trieste go there because they need to catch a train. It's a junction... a notable junction. Everyone passes through. They do walk by, but they keep to the edges of course, they don't cross the middle of the Square. They pass at the edges and carefully avoid crossing it, don't they? I would say that apparently the city, the fabric of the city, is not touched by this. I say unfortunately, because it is once again proof that there is a denial of reality, clearly encouraged by the municipal and regional administration (Gloria, Trieste, 20th January 2023).

Within this context of spatial segregation, the everyday life of the Square followed specific routines, mostly linked to practices of distribution of food and clothes. Practices of distribution changed through times, different methods were tested, as a consequence of the chaotic responses of local authorities, as well as the collective negotiations and tensions about the different political understandings of "care" and "solidarity."[33]

Every time I went back to Piazza Libertà after being away from Trieste for a while, it took me some time to readjust to the different sets of practices that had become part of its daily life. Before the summer of 2022, the distribution practices were quite organised and mostly managed by some key figures – the mediators – who could understand who had just arrived, take stock of what they needed, and ask each person for their shoe size. After that, they would compile a list with the number of shoes that were needed, carefully divide them according to size, and send it to the volunteers who were scheduled for a daily shift. At that point, volunteers would prepare backpacks containing a t-shirt; clean underwear; a "hygiene kit" with a razor, a toothbrush and toothpaste, and soap; a snack;

[33] For a thorough discussion on the political meanings of these concepts, and their relevance in the context of solidarity with people on the move, see: Milan and Martini 2024.

and shoes, according to what had been donated to Linea d'Ombra by a diverse range of donors, from individuals to NGOs, and private companies. Every backpack was then labelled according to shoe size and brought back to the Square, where the mediators would take care of the distribution with the aid of a ticket system. Tickets were only used to organise the distribution – every item was given for free to migrants. I took part in the backpack preparation during my first months in Trieste. The routine of preparing the items, and waiting for the mediators to send the list, was almost like a ritual, which unfolded alongside the medical procedures needed to take care of people's wounds and trench feet.

On the 15th of August 2022, Piazza della Libertà welcomed around 150 newly arrived migrants, against the backdrop of an average of 56 new arrivals per day in the months of July to September 2022 (*Vite Abbandonate* 2023). The 15th of August is a holiday in the Italian calendar, which usually means that the city empties out, most people are on holiday leave, and everyone makes a run to the beach. The preparation of 150 backpacks drained the very few activists who were left in the city, as well as most of the resources of Linea d'Ombra. The organisation of the distribution system collapsed, on a day where activists felt like the whole city was empty apart from what was happening in the Square.

People had different theories about why the system had collapsed in the first place, but what everyone seemed to agree on, was that volunteers, activists, and operators had reached a point of burnout and exhaustion that was not sustainable any longer. While the distribution system had to be readjusted, the communication between the different actors and entities composing the Solidarity Network was consolidating. As Fabrizio, one of the most present figures within the network told me,

> In 2019-2020, we were alone, we were powerless, we did not understand… We were in the middle of this flow of people, and we had to build a whole network that got stronger throughout the years. Back then, Linea d'Ombra was at the heart of the situation. Now, there's a structured network of organisations. Back then, when someone from LdO would come and tell us: "There's a person that has this problem." We would *cadere dalle nuvole*[34] and we had to start fighting to obtain help and services for that person and prevent them from being pushed back. Low threshold services like the Centro Diurno were not available. People on the move could not access the Caritas canteen, they could not access

[34] Literally, to "fall from the clouds," which translates into "to be taken aback."

> showers, or beds in the dormitory. *We* were alone, and *they* were alone. Now, when we are presented with a case, we know it already, we have seen it already, we work together (Fabrizio, Trieste, 24th May 2023).

The steep increase in arrivals that led to the collapse of the distribution system was met by the Solidarity Network with a solid reaction, which resulted in the Square became more ingrained within the city's more institutional reception geographies, NGOs and local actors like ICS became more present in its everyday activities.

After the summer of 2022, the distribution of clothing items in the Square came to coincide with chaotic overcrowded moments, with people fighting over jackets, and new pieces of clothing. This situation improved with the involvement of migrants who had already accessed the SAI system, and who came back each night to help with the distribution and the communication with newly arrived people, or with people in wait. Distribution also changed according to the season. Whilst in the summer the situation would correspond to chaotic and sudden redistribution of people within the Square whenever somebody arrived with clothes to distribute, in the winter, the activities were moved to the underpass, which provided shelter, but made the situation even more invisible.

The distribution of food was less chaotic in that there usually was sufficient food for everybody. This was especially true in 2023, when most people in the Square were people in wait, who had access to the Caritas canteen. The situation would change during Ramadan. In fact, as the canteen did not change the time of distribution of meals during the fasting, most people would not be able to have dinner. This meant that the distribution of Linea d'Ombra would have to cover this part of the migrants' population, too. The distribution would start quite late, in order to respect the Iftar time set for the day. However, these moments were always joyous, as the moment of the distribution became part of Iftar celebrations, and continued until quite late at night with dances, games, and socialisation. At the same time, the moments of distribution made it visible that vernacular spaces were not only inhabited by people in wait, rather, they were junctures at the intersection between different marginalised communities, as the next session will discuss.

iii. Intersecting marginalities

I did not go the Silos/Khandwala in my first months of fieldwork. The Silos is not a place to visit. And we did not go unless we were invited to do so by the people who lived there, or when organised cleaning activities took place. We wanted to avoid entering people's personal space, invading the little privacy they had managed to carve out for themselves. In January 2023, I was invited by some of the people in wait who resided in the Silos together with other researchers and activists. That night, it was pitch-black, and we could not see anything while entering the building I remember thinking that there was no way I could have even begun to imagine how big the building was just by looking at it from the outside, which was incredible considering that it is located right in the city centre, close to the train station. The striking difference between the complete darkness inside the Silos, and the strong public lights that illuminate Trieste's streets was chilling.

We had been invited to cook chai tea with milk. We brought firewood to light a fire, milk, sugar to cook the chai (see Figure 12). In that moment,

> We stood with a fire bin in a central spot. Activists had written with a spray can on the wall an English sentence that read: pallets and wood chips are *for free*. We started by cleaning the pots that somebody had used to make bread with tomato and milk to eat. Then, someone started making the fire. They put water, sugar, tea bags and milk at the end to make *chai*. Meanwhile, we all gathered around the fire. The warm colour of the bonfire light gave warmth to the place. The fact that there were people laughing, joking, and gathering was heartwarming. Everyone was stretching out their hands to get warmed up. We were all in a circle around the fire. The place was extremely cold, being all open and exposed. We ate a lot of different stuff. Whenever some food circulated, we asked for translations to Urdu or Farsi or Pashto and repeated all of those terms together (fieldnotes, 12th January 2023).

The people sleeping in the Khandwala frequently asked activists and volunteers to go and cook chai together – the fire and the routine of cleaning pots and cooking warmed up the place in more than the literal sense. At the beginning of 2023, there were not too many encampments in the Silos. As most of the people arriving in Trieste wanted to move forward, the majority of them would only sleep there for a couple of nights or preferred to

sleep outside because of the dangers posed by the decaying building and its bad hygienic conditions. In the spring of 2023, the situation had changed drastically. At that time, the Khandwala was occupied by hundreds of people in wait, left outside of first-level reception systems (see Chapter 4).

Figure 12: Chai tea preparation in the Silos/Khandwala, January 2023. Picture by Noemi Bergesio

The situation in the Silos changed over the years, with moments of peak and periods in which the building was quite empty. Matteo called these "phases," "cycles" of the Silos, which tended to repeat themselves. These phases heavily depended on the season (both the political season and the changes in climate), the frequency or absence of transfers, the activities of the police and the local authorities towards the presence of people on the

move. As Matteo told me when I asked him about the changes in the Silos, he said,

> I mean, the Silos hasn't changed much, it goes through very minor cycles, in my opinion. There are people there, and then there are none. There are more people and then there are less people. There's dirt and then there's a little less dirt. Depending on whether the big groups of Scouts, for instance, come to clean up. But in the end, it remains this abandoned building, and if it gets too much media coverage becomes a sensitive point, which leads to controls and so on. Otherwise, it is the dunghill where people can go to sleep and it remains an emergency shelter, which then becomes... for some people it also becomes home. Even some of those who could access Campo Sacro say: no, I prefer to stay here because I am closer to the city, because I manage myself, I come in when I want, there is no curfew, there are fewer people. But yes, it's an indecent place and the relationship with the Square… it is like the big dormitory, isn't it? The big dormitory of the Square. You have the park, the little park, you have the garden and then the place to sleep, they are contiguous (Matteo, Trieste, 22nd May 2023).

The image of the Silos as the dormitory of the Square is evocative of what has been previously discussed as an intricate web of sites that are interconnected, and which form Trieste's migrant geographies (see Chapter 4, Section v). As Matteo's quote shows, these spaces are connected also in that they cover different material needs: the Square offers food, clothes, and first aid, the Silos some sort of shelter, the Centro Diurno makes showers available.

I talked about the Silos with many people in wait. It was one of the main topics of conversation, as it was identified of the main causes of their depression (see Chapter 7, Section ii). With the increase in the number of residents, the Silos became increasingly organised, with makeshift encampments, informal economies, ethnic divisions. It accommodated both people who resided there for months and those who were only spending a couple of nights before embarking on a new journey. I went back to the Khandwala with other people to pick up some used sleeping bags, in an attempt to clean up a little. We went on one late afternoon in May 2023. The place was empty at that time of the day, but it was packed with makeshift encampments, tents, and other objects. Seeing the Silos in the daylight made me think once more about how enormous it was. And how degrading it must feel to have to sleep there. Problems linked to depression were

becoming more serious. Consequently, tensions started to arise among the residents. As Fabrizio told me,

> It's getting worse and worse. Rats everywhere and... tents being built all the time, more and more, more and more... There is an Afghan zone and a Paki zone. It is divided. That is: one on one side and the others on the other side. For peace of mind basically. Because the dynamics that emerge... I mean, like the Italians who go on Erasmus and stay only among Italians. It's not like that for everyone obviously but... And I mean, it's bad especially for ethnic minorities. Bangladeshi… Kashmiri… I mean, small groups. Because if you have a group of about twenty people to camp with, you're okay. Nobody will touch you. If there's only three of you… (Fabrizio, Trieste, 24th May 2023).

Similarly to what Simona had pointed out in her discussion of linguistic dynamics within Trieste's vernacular spaces, there are marginal groups also within the marginalised community of people in wait (see Chapter 5, section i). These tensions were visible in the Square, and breakouts became more likely to happen the more the periods of wait were prolonged. As Ayub, a mediator and operator told me,

> The Silos is the only place. Especially for transit migrants. A transit migrant who sleeps in front of the statue of Elizabeth… the police come and take their fingerprints and make trouble for them. Then lately, this year especially from October onwards there were so many cases of fragility because people were forced to sleep, to wait for three/four months. You stay there, you sleep until 3 pm, you eat maybe there, so... you have nothing else to do. You stay there. Then you start selling your place, maybe earn some money. You have a lot of debts, you have to pay debts, you have to work or do something to make do. There were also scenes of theft, but we solved it when we discovered it. Now it seems to be picking up again, because transfers are blocked again. If you have a fracture, transfers are necessary, or maybe another first-reception centre needs to be created (Ayub, Trieste, 18th April 2023).

The fracture about which Ayub talks was an internal fracture within the marginalised migrant community, and it often spilled out in the Square, which became at times quite difficult to manage. At the same time, many activists and operators were well aware of how quickly this situation could have been instrumentalised by local authorities to build

on their narrative of the "dangerous" migrants in Piazza Libertà.

The issue of the rising tension was also tied to a worsening of the hygienic conditions of the Silos. In spite the cleaning campaigns that were organised to clean up the building, and the daily work of its residents and the activists to keep it as clean as possible, the Khandwala was in horrible conditions. As many people in wait told me, the real residents of the Silos were the rats. Huge rats that were not scared of humans but would get closer and closer to people when they were sleeping. Many a times, the residents of the Silos would arrive in the Square with holes in their backpacks, or even bites in their flash, caused by rats at nighttime. Argun, a young resident of the Silos told me that he would always sleep holding a rock in his hands, to be able to drive rats away whenever they showed up (Argun, Trieste, Summer 2023). Waris, another resident, told me,

> We stay in the five-star-hotel – the Khandwala! The five-star-hotel is great. We don't sleep at night because of the rats. There are many now. We stay awake in the night, and then we sleep in the morning (Waris, Trieste, May 2023).

Irony was often used by people in wait to talk about their experiences in the Silos. In the context of Nairobi, Kimari describes a local comedian who talks about the recurrences of death in Mathare. Their shows, the author argues, can be seen as part of as a "tragicomedy vernacular that captured the Spatialities of life and death in Nairobi" (Kimari 2021). In this sense, the story of Waris can be seen as a practice of resistance that comes through the tool of irony, which partially allows to resist and survive this situation, as well as to fight its enormous impact on migrants' mental and physical health.

As Tyerman writes in the context of Calais, intimacy is key to the creation of hostile environments, whereby life is made "unliveable for certain subjects divided according to racialised global borderlines" (Tyerman 2021, 14). People in wait in Trieste did not have access to bathrooms. Activists often told me that Linea d'Ombra had been asking the municipality to install chemical toilets in the Square since the beginning of their activities in 2018, a request that had not been met as of late 2023. The situation reached a critical point during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the Centro Diurno was closed to migrants, thus depriving them of the only space where they could access showers. After much struggle and advocacy from the Solidarity Network, the Centre was reopened in 2021, but

this was still not enough to meet migrants' most basic needs. Many of the people in wait with whom I talked expressed their desperation not to have access to showers, and bathrooms, especially upon arrival. As Jamal told me, "When I arrived, I thought: "I smell. I am dirty. My body is dirty. I need to take a shower. That's all that I could think about" (Jamal, Trieste, Summer 2023). Similarly, Lmar complained that "all I do is stay in the park. Eat, sleep, pee. Everything I do there" (Lmar, Trieste, April 2023). This shows how the same cramped spaces in which migrants were supposed to eat, or sleep were also the only places where they could, in fact, pee, thus further contributing to their hazardous living conditions.

Some of the key issues that derived from the appalling conditions of the Silos, and the lack of sanitary facilities, were serious health problems. In fact, as Federico, a volunteer of the association DONK, which performs basic healthcare for people without access to the national healthcare system, said,

> The Silos is a huge sanitary problem, also because some of the people recently had to go to the hospital for pneumonia... And once they were dismissed, they had to go back to the Silos. Because there is no room, there are no more places to accommodate them. And so obviously, the hospital can't keep them beyond the time strictly necessary, but once the hospital dismisses them, these people don't have a place to go to. And it's not even as easy to find a place for them as... let's say, as it would seem, in the sense that there being a level of criticality one might think: okay, if this person has just been sent home because they have pneumonia and need to take antibiotics for a week, there surely must be a bed to put them in. But no. Centres for unaccompanied minors by regulation absolutely cannot accommodate adults. So, even in very delicate situations, we have failed several times to find accommodation for them. There is no way, sometimes, there are no beds available in the whole Trieste (Federico, Trieste, 25th August 2023).

The impossibility for people in wait to access adequate facilities for their treatment to be effective was reported by Maria, a doctor from DONK. As she told me, one of the main medical problems of people in wait are dermatological conditions picked up along the "Route," most notably, scabies. Although DONK receives the pharmaceuticals from the local healthcare service in sufficient quantities, people in wait do not have access to the necessary sanitary conditions for the treatment to work. In fact, as Maria told me,

> Up until now, we used to give people anti-scabies treatment, then we'd find them a bed for at least a couple of days, so that they could be able to get a shower, get changed. Now we give them the cream, they go to the Centro Diurno to take a shower, and then they have to go back to the Silos. And they have to go and sleep in the same sleeping bag as before (Maria, Trieste, 25th August 2023).

The intersection of marginalities within these spaces has another aspect to it. In fact, different marginal communities intersect through the daily usage of the Centro Diurno and, to some extent, of the Square. This translated into the forced cohabitation, the sharing of daily lives, of sanitary facilities. As Fabrizio told me when I asked about this co-habitation in the Centro Diurno,

> Are you asking me about the issue of homeless permanent residents and migrants? It was potentially very serious. While people on the move stay there during their transit, in the sense that they will eventually go to a "better" place, for the others, that's the last place they get to. So, the centre has a different function. And those are the old women and men who are *aficionados* of the Diurno, or the people with various problems. And there's some extra benefits for them. I mean, the women's bathroom in the centre has become the bathroom for permanent residents. That is, when one is permanent, they use the women's room. They eat in the Centro. They are still looked after by the network of social workers. But… they are tired of the chaos; they are fed up. But they've also had two years of pandemic in which that centre was closed to migrants... it was only for them. That is, it was only open for the people who slept in the dormitory, which is upstairs. They could stay in the Centre during the day. And so, there were 15, 20 people maximum. With the TV, with the library, with the tables, with the activities… and now there's a mess. And so, they put up with it. They mostly all stay in the entrance smoking cigarettes or hanging out (Fabrizio, Trieste, 24th May 2023).

The co-habitation of those who Fabrizio defines as "permanent residents" of the Daily Centre and migrants was, in the opinion of many operators of the Diurno, going more smoothly as it was expected, aside from some sporadic tensions due to the overcrowding of the centre. As Max, one of the coordinators of the centre told me,

> These are people in their old age, sick, with major difficulties, right? It is

> a forced cohabitation, in the sense that... The dormitory guests have nowhere else to stay during the day, except on the street. And they stay there. And migrant people, they don't have anywhere else to stay either, except the street, which maybe for some of them, who are younger, when it's warmer like now, it's fine. But anyway, it's a place that they also need for all the services. And so, they meet there. They are two groups that speak little to each other. Also because of language barriers, they have a different age, they have a different purpose at this time of life. And different needs. Sometimes there have been a little bit of... you know, clashes... but not even clashes. There have been a few little fights, you know. Luckily, it doesn't happen that often. It's certainly not easy for people to live together because, above all, the older, sick people, let's say, would like a quiet place. One of the beautiful things I see is that most of the young people, these young Afghans, Pakistanis, etc. in any case, they have the sensitivity to see the elderly person, the sick person, and therefore to be careful not to bother them, to give precedence in the queue, right? (Max, Trieste, 25th May 2023).

The intersection of these marginalities, which was, especially in the summer months, replicated in the Square, albeit on a smaller scale, testifies to the stratified characteristics of vernacular spaces. Not only do these sites have historical density, but they transversally touch upon different marginalised communities, where everyday lives intersect – margins that are never incorporated into the city's life but remain there. As Marcello, an operator in a centre for unaccompanied minors once told me, racialised dynamics are blatantly clear and straight- forward in the city. As he said, "Trieste surprises you with the way it's right in your face." (Marcello, Trieste, 19th January 2023).

iv. Fighting against/within intimate violence

Migrants' material traces have been quite present in the public debate, too. The theme that has been discussed most actively is that of objects left behind. Many activists of the Solidarity Network have stressed that the "issue" of the abandoned objects and pieces of clothing, often talked about as "trash," was instrumentalised by the local authorities to divert attention from the fact that large numbers of migrants of all ages were left without access to first-level reception centres, adequate sanitary facilities, and basic healthcare.

It is surely quite difficult not to think about the impact that these objects have on the natural reserve in which they get discarded. Nevertheless, in the context of this border, where migrants feel the urge to travel the final part of a long, often violent journey without getting caught, framing the abandonment of clothing as a voluntary polluting act on the side of the migrants, or a lack of respect and good manners, neglects the hardships and urgency that are distinctive of the *Games* that people undertake along the "Balkan Route", as well as replicates racialising narratives. As Sundberg has remarked in the context of the US-Mexico border, labelling the objects left behind by migrants as "trash" conceals the fact that these objects are, in fact, intimate and useful to conduct practices linked to daily life (Sundberg 2011). Instead, by subsuming them into generic terms related to waste, these objects can be instrumental to fuelling the narratives of the "undeserving migrants," where migrants are deemed to be worthy of receiving help and compassion only insofar as they present themselves as people who do not *own* anything.

In the summer of 2023, I interviewed two people from the municipal council of Dolina / San Dorligo. One of the main points of conversation was, indeed, that of the objects that are left in the area administered under their jurisdiction. As one of the council members told me,

> The only big problem, I would say, is that of environmental impact. What I mean is, they have this practice of getting changed completely, literally stripping themselves of everything they bring with them from the Route and putting on new clothes, also metaphorically speaking, when they enter Italy. Probably also for fear of forced readmissions, of course. Because there was that terrible time when there were precisely these forced readmissions and clearly this is still a bit of a scare. So, they change path all the time and clearly, they cover the whole territory. Because the routes to walk down are endless. And so, we have this problem that is spread over the whole territory, which is not to say vast, but it is large enough for a municipality that is relatively small in terms of population. And precisely, mainly green forests. And so, these abandonments are all over the place, literally, all over the border (Daniele, Dolina/San Dorligo, 11th August 2023).

As the council member argues, although it is important to focus on the environmental impact of these objects, it is key to place them within the structural violence that creates the need for people on the move to discard them in the first place. Namely, it is

fundamental to shift the perspective to the harsh technologies of border control, such as, for instance, the readmission, which force migrants to undertake journeys in these forests.

With a strong tradition that links this area to partisan resistance and the socialist left, the attitude of the people in Dolina/San Dorligo has traditionally been quite sympathetic towards the struggle of migrants walking along the "Balkan Route." As the council member told me, some of the residents filed complaints against the local bus company *Trieste Trasporti* as many people witnessed bus drivers refusing to stop to avoid picking up people on the move. The company, according to the councillor, answered these complaints by appealing to its internal regulation, which states that bus drivers may refuse access to people should they fail to comply with hygienic norms – an argument that ascribes migrants to what Pallister-Wilkins (2022) calls "bodies out of place," to be excluded from the daily activities of the city. However, he continued by saying that some local inhabitants started to express some degree of concern about the safeguarding of the natural reserve surrounding the village.

Many of the interviews that I conducted, both with migrants and with local activists, suggest that the abandonment of clothing in the forest is a strategic practice that people on the move adopt in order to get rid of every sign that can connect them to the *Game* and that can suggest that they have, indeed, just arrived in Italy. The "camouflage" techniques used by migrants to arrive in Trieste or other towns in the Friuli Venezia-Giulia region have been contested by authorities, especially by representatives of right-wing parties. In an article published in the local newspaper *Il Piccolo*, a town councillor of Monfalcone, a town located about 30 km from Trieste, reported the fact that he stumbled across backpacks and objects left behind by migrants while crossing the border between Italy and Slovenia as part of his habitual border- crossing walks. In the article, the councillor, who is affiliated with a centre-right party focused on the tutelage of the rights of retired persons ("Partito dei Pensionati") and was appointed for the term 2016-2022, stated that,

> [These items] are evidence of the passage of a group of clandestine immigrants who have gotten rid of whatever could have classified them as such in the event of arrest (*fermo*) from Italian authorities […]. It is sufficient to pass through vegetation located 50-100 metres south of the army post. With the GPS that these people have on their phones, they don't even need to have specific skills not to get lost. At that point, you can get in the Karst area behind Monfalcone and then descend to the city

> and it's done. Who can spot a newcomer in Monfalcone? (Blasich 2022).

What emerges from these words is the councillor's fear that the strategic discharge of old clothing adopted by migrants might prevent local authorities from detecting them. Despite his concerns, many of the participants in this research have reported many degrees of difficulties in walking towards Trieste without getting noticed.

Another main issue around objects left behind was that of cleaning practices. The interviewees from Dolina/San Dorligo reported that some residents of the villages of the area were involved in self-organised cleaning of this natural reserve but there was no instrumentalisation of these practices within an anti-migration discourse. Cleaning activities had also been organised by groups of scouts who spent time in Trieste during the summers, as well as by local volunteer organisations. One such example is SoS Carso, an association of speleologists active in cleaning Karst caves from objects discarded over the years. When I spoke to Nicholas, a representative of the association, he declared that SoS Carso defines itself as an apolitical group of people. Nicholas continued,

> We formed our group in 2017. We all live here, and we realised that since the end of WW2 up until the end of the 1990s, the Karst had been used as a landfill for any kind of waste. Our group was born because we wanted to clean the Karst caves. We are speleologists. So generally, we clean up the waste that was left there thirty, forty, or fifty years ago. Throughout the years, we have found a bit of everything, it almost feels like a plunge into the past when you clean up some areas. And sometimes, and I repeat, *sometimes*, we also clean up pieces of clothing left behind by migrants. I say sometimes because it is certainly not the kind of work that we prefer to do (Nicholas, Trieste, 25th January 2023).

From this excerpt, it is possible to reflect on the temporal aspect of waste in this mountainous area which, according to Nicholas, had stratified since WW2 up until the end of the 1990s. This shows that this region has been used to discard objects by locals for years. Although the "issue" of clothes and "trash" in the Karst is often described within anti-migration narratives as quite a recent phenomenon, a member of the administration of San Dorligo della Valle, as well as local activists, told me that these practices had been carried out in the Karst and Istrian valleys for a long time. As an activist from Trieste told me,

> We all know that the Karst has been used as a natural landfill by Trieste's residents for years, even though, contrarily to migrants, they did have access to facilities where they could have thrown out their own waste (Ines, Trieste, 19th January 2023).

Furthermore, in 2022, the Friuli Venezia-Giulia region allocated funding to the municipality of Trieste, as well as to villages and small towns located close to the border, among which are Dolina/San Dorligo della Valle and Muggia, to assist in the cleaning up of migrants' clothing. Since the allocation of funding, a local company has been paid to regularly pick up migrants' objects and clothes in the area administered by Dolina/San Dorligo.

Calls for past imperial grandeur marking the city's history, as well as encouragement and promotion of tourism in Trieste, have often been used to justify actions to evict squats used by people on the move, or to justify the presence of the police, cameras, and fences in the main Square. After the interviews released by Trieste's mayor threatening to fence the Square, in the summer of 2023, a temporary fence did indeed appear in the Piazza. In spite of encircling the whole Square, it "protected" the statue of Sissi, Habsburg Empress Elizabeth (see Figure 13). On this occasion, the local newspaper read,

> [Thanks to the fence] the Square already has a new face, and the municipal councilman tasked with responsibilities linked to the public 'green', Michele Babuder, reveals that, in order 'to protect the monument dedicated to the Empress of Austria,' which is used as a toilet by those who transit in the Square, he intends to 'build a fence around the statue, in the flowerbed that surrounds it' […] (Tonero 2023).

Not only did the instrumentalisation of the issue of urine allow for the construction of a fence in the middle of a public square, which *de facto* deprived people on the move of the only place where they could tend to their needs with some privacy, but it was also symbolically constructed as a protection for the statue of 'Sissi', used as a signifier of the (feminised) city of Trieste to be protected from the (single male) migrants who used it as a sheltered place to urinate. As Ines, an activist from Linea d'Ombra told me,

> The problem of urine and bathrooms becomes political when the mayor

says: ‘These people are disgusting, the Square smells, there is urine everywhere. I am going to close the Square.’ You are closing what? You are seriously going to close a *public* Square? And maybe even making excuses, like saying that the trees are unstable and could fall and hurt someone? (Ines, Trieste, 19th January 2023).

Figure 13: Fence built around "Sissi's statue". August 2023. Picture by Noemi Bergesio

Many activists, generally agreed with the fact that there is a clear environmental impact derived from migration along the “Balkan Route,” ranging from objects left behind, to the waste produced by solidarity actors in distribution practices. However, they argued that it is more important to look at the ecological struggle and the struggle for freedom of movement as intersected, rather than considering the problem of “waste” in a vacuum. Many activists agreed that a mere discussion on the ecological impact of migration was necessary. However, it is equally fundamental to take into consideration the struggle of migrants while walking the last section of the “Route” and trying to reach the city without being noticed by the police. At the same time, local authorities were arguing for the need

to protect the natural environment of the region, while being involved in projects meant for the construction of environmentally disruptive, big infrastructures, such as the "ovovia," a cable car meant to connect Trieste's train station to the Karst, which activists and other actors of the civil society have been opposing since its conception.[35]

v. Conclusion: On translation II

As shown by this chapter, the intimate traces of people on the move and people in wait contributed to the materialisation of the border through the paths undertaken to get to the city of Trieste, as well as within the urban ground. What has been labelled as "trash" and "urine" by local authorities adds to what degli Uberti and Altin (2024) have called the "stratification" of this border landscape. This contribution is twofold. First, clothes left behind in the Karst contribute to a stratification of waste that has been gathered and discarded in this mountainous region through the past several decades. Second, these traces have created testimonies of the migratory journeys undertaken by people on the move along the "Balkan Route," adding up to the entangled history of mobilities in the area (degli Uberti and Altin 2014; Altin 2024).

Through traces, migrants embodied experiences construct a constellation of material routes that shift and adapt according to their direct and mediated knowledge of the area. At the same time, these objects are co-opted and instrumentalised by local authorities that leave space for initiatives directed towards the tactical and filtered control of migrant passage (barbed wire, thermal cameras, military patrolling of the border). The overcrowding and the difficult hygienic conditions of Trieste's cramped spaces have also been instrumentalised by local authorities, who have repeatedly described the situation as harmful for the city's "decorum" and "cleanliness," as well as the safety of its "citizens."

This situation falls within the "heterogeneous modes of governing whose peculiarity consists precisely in their blurriness and in being played out in-between full visibility and invisibility, mobility and immobility" (Tazzioli 2021, 2-3) that feeds into the "opaqueness" of the governance of migration. While forced into periods of forced wait,

[35] For more information about the struggle against the ovovia, see: https://laburjana.noblogs.org/post/2023/09/04/lovovia-a-trieste-i-primi-passi-di-una-grande-opera-e-il-fronte-dei-boschi-che-si-ribella/; https://noovovia.it/blog/ .

without access to reception centres and camps, and with no other choice than to sleep in the streets or to squat in the Silos, the intimate traces of people on the move create an intricate network connecting the sites to which they are segregated (Piazza della Libertà, the Silos, the Centro Diurno), but that connect them to previous sections of the "Route," while permeating throughout the urban fabric. Intimate traces become material acts that translate migrants' experiences onto the spaces they traverse, and a lens to unveil intimate violence perpetrated on people in wait and people on the move to discourage their stay in Trieste – to make these places unliveable.

Building on each other, Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 offer an in-depth analysis of the language interaction and of the materiality that are characteristic of vernacular spaces, contributing, respectively, to the vernacular linguistic resignifications of what the "border" is and the creation of new grammars of the border and to zoom into the intimate, intersectional embodied experiences of the border. While highlighting how everyday life becomes crystallised within narratives, grammars and material traces, encompassing overlapping and ever-changing constellations of actors, a reflection on practices of knowledge construction is needed in order to reflect on how vernacular actors theorise and give meaning to their quotidian experiences, and the situation of stuckness that this thesis deals with. Chapter 7, therefore, presents four vernacular theories of time, presented through different voices, and reflecting diverging tactics of resistance and power dynamics outside and within the vernacular.

7. Transversal humanities: Four vernacular theories of time

> Those who teach theory in the academy, who know how hard it is to shake loose of cultural assumptions enough even to recognize they exist, ought to honour those moments in everyday life when individuals question the paradigm without the benefit of a tradition of critical philosophical analysis to help them dismantle the powerful systems of meaning in which they dwell. Theory is not the practice of an epistemological elite; it is a practice of ordinary citizens in everyday life. To think that "theorists" own theory is arrogance itself (McLaughlin 1996, 164).

In Chapter 5 and Chapter 6, I have argued that through linguistic practices, as well as intimate traces, people in wait and people on the move reclaim space, by impacting both the geographies of languages of the city of Trieste, as well as adding to the stratification of border ruins. These traces can be used as a lens to map systemic and intimate violence to which migrants are subject. Reclaiming space through these everyday practices needs to be understood within the context of "wait" in which people were forced, or of the hypermobility in which people on the move were constrained in order not to be noticed and be able to move forward to other destinations.

This chapter focuses on the experience of "time" within Trieste's vernacular spaces through the discussion of four vernacular theories, presented through the voices of vernacular actors with different political subjectivities. These theories are seen as political, performative vernacular acts. The negotiation of these theories was laborious, never-ending, and was presented in more or less coherent and 'compact' forms. As Stierl writes, during ethnography, the distinction between researcher and participant is oftentimes blurred (Stierl 2018, 18). Theory is, in fact, an "enactment of critical theory by a relational, situated and subjective being" (Stierl 2018, 17).

Critical migration scholars have been interested in the temporalities of migration regimes, as well as in the everyday life of borders. According to Shanthi Robertson, interrogating the temporalities of migration also means understanding how migrants negotiate time while positioned in the tension between their desired temporalities and "local lived realities as their migration trajectories unfold" (Robertson 2022, 119). Elisa Pascucci looks at the multidimensional aspect of lived time emphasising that infrastructures and spatialities inform migrants' experiences of time, producing "disrupted and uneven temporalities" that play out at different scales (Pascucci 2016, 327). Zehfuss and Vaughan-Williams (2024) look at the role that time and race have in the consolidation of a space/security imaginary that serves the nation- state paradigm, while at the same time creating hierarchies of marginalised subjectivities based on colonial past and the perspective of a *future* that presupposes that people on the move are either integrated or rejected from space-centred understandings of belonging. In this sense, migrants are positioned within a regime that controls and manages their time, "stealing" the possibility to build a future (Khosravi 2018), and maintaining them in constant situations of hypermobility (Tazzioli 2021) under the threat of "deportability" (De Genova, 2001). The temporalities produced by these technologies work towards the reduction of migrants to

temporary multiplicities, while also dividing and dispersing mobile subjects across space, making their presence less visible and preventing political organisation and resistance (Tazzioli 2020, 26). At the same time, "migrants are not merely acted upon by time but create and negotiate new forms and meaning of time" (Robertson 2022, 36).

Scholarship that has delved into the performative aspect of politics and of resistance has expanded on the concept of "performativity," drawing from a body of literature ranging from J. L. Austin to Judith Butler. Rai et al. (2021) analyse the effects and attribution of meaning that a performance can create, reinforce, or disrupt – which encompass both language- based and embodied performativity. As they write,

> It is through performativity – of scripts, sites, bodies, voices, gestures, and affects that a given frame comes to be established and perhaps regulated. Yet, it is also through the performativity of these elements that glitches, failures, subversions, improvisations, and breakages of the frame become possible" (Rai et al. 2021, 9).

The authors talk about performance as modes to unveil, namely, to *make visible*, relations of power – performances that become truly actualised through their transactional element, namely, in relation to an audience (Rai et al. 2021). This bears resemblance with what De Certeau argued with the concept of *la perruque,* namely, tactics of diverting and re-signifying work outside of the productive capitalist system through the use of trickery and cunning. The concept of "performativity," therefore, introduces the ways in which "artistic tricks" or popular techniques, what McLaughlin (1996) calls "street smarts", become ingrained within political practices.

Inspired by McLaughlin, I look at "vernacular theories" as forms of knowledge construction that derive from practices of "thinking together" (McLaughlin 1996), of reflecting and creating knowledge through one's own and collective experience. I draw a connection here between vernacular and Sara Ahmed's "sweaty concepts." The latter are defined as

> A reorientation of the world, a way of turning things around, a different slant on the same thing. More specifically, a sweaty concept comes out of a description of a body that is not at home in approaches the world. Sweat is bodily; we might sweat more during more strenuous and

> muscular activity. A sweaty concept might come out of a bodily experience that is trying (Ahmed 2017, 13).

When drawing from a domain of bodily and intimate experiences, we can induct that the process of knowledge construction will not be clean, nor tidy, abstract, and cerebral, but rather corporeal, tiring, laborious – allowing for the collapse of the difference between descriptive work and conceptual work in its embodied and situated aspect (Ahmed 2017). This chapter answers the question of how experiences of "time" are negotiated, explained, and lived by vernacular actors, and how this impacts practices of resistance, starting from a material domain, and relying on thick descriptions and sweaty concepts to convey the laborious process of vernacular knowledge production.

i. Vernacular theory 1: The (never)ending Square or, the temporalities of Piazza Libertà

During my time in Trieste, I spent almost every evening in Piazza Libertà, finding myself constantly drawn back there. Many of the interviews and conversations that allowed this project to exist were planned, decided, and even conducted in or around the Square. And sure enough, the Square remained the focal point of many of these conversations, even after I decided to stop my ethnographic research, enshrined in the shared memories, nostalgia, and friendships. While I was fairly new to the context, many of the solidarity activists, as well as the people who had arrived in Trieste before 2018, had experienced the Square and its connected sites, namely the Silos and the Centro Diurno, in their different re-configurations throughout the years.

The collapse and re-negotiation of distribution practices in the summer of 2022 and the harsh situation of forced wait in which migrants found themselves in 2023 led to the disappearance of some informal yet very formalised routines. After that, many activists kept looking at the time before the summer of 2022 with nostalgia, as some sort of "golden era" of solidarity in Piazza Libertà. Many of the activists and volunteers started to conceive of the Square as something ephemeral, with its very existence being threatened and always on the brink of extinction. When I talked to Matteo, one of the first activists of Linea d'Ombra, we talked about this feeling, as well as the continuous threats on behalf of local

authorities to evict or fence the Square. As he said,

> It benefits Piazza della Libertà and the solidarity network to say: "Oh my god, the Square might end at any moment now." And everyone then can repeat: "Oh my god, the Square will end at any moment." But how can a square end? This… this Square was a transit point before Linea d'Ombra, and it will be after Linea d'Ombra. And we go back to that cliché that goes like this: "To try and put an end to migration is like trying to stop water, or wind, with your bare hands." It is not possible. Arrivals and transit will continue to exist, and the Square will continue to exist, in my opinion. Even if Linea d'Ombra were to disappear, so long as there is a single person who comes to the Square, it will not cease to exist […]. So, if you ask me: "Is the Square going to end?" I mean, that's only one way of looking at it. The possibility for the Square to end serves as a tool for the Square to continue to exist. As a threat. And a threat makes sense only so long as it does not become real (Matteo, Trieste, 22nd May 2023).

As Matteo argued, the threat of eviction of the Square on behalf of the local authorities and the subsequent construction of a finite temporality of the Square, could only function insofar as this site, and everything that it represented, continued to exist. However, the very existence of the Square, and its many reconfigurations, made it difficult to understand what the "Square" stood for. In fact, the "Square" became a signifier for the various constellation of actors that inhabited at a certain time. The temporalities of the Square, according to him, transcended the organisation, as well as the individuals who formed this specific constellation of actors within the Square. As Massey (2005, 130) writes by coining the concept of "throwntogetherness," space is "a simultaneity of stories-so-far […], collection of those stories, articulation […] within the wider power-geometries of space." Following from this, Piazza Libertà cannot be seen as a unified space representing a radical political community or their collective identity. Instead, it is a space of "throwntogetherness," where the "negotiation of multiplicity" occurs continuously. As Massey suggests, a place should be understood as the intersection of various trajectories, shaped by a blend of order and chance (2005, 151). While each space is influenced by both explicit and implicit social or market rules, chance "may place us next to an unexpected neighbor" (Massey 2005, 151). Thus, spaces are always in negotiation, but the results of these negotiations are never predetermined.

I often found myself asking people whether they thought the "Square" (and what kind of

"Square) was going to end, as many conversations steered in this direction. In Matteo's words, the "thing," the "Square," is the movement of people, the arrival of migrants. The activities of himself, as well as the Solidarity Network, are only a limited part of what the "Square" is and do not define it. Changing the dynamics, and the practices, does not mean an end of the "Square" *per se*. Fabrizio had a similar stance. In fact, he said,

> There are so many intersecting dynamics that constantly change the face of the Square. Continuously. I realise that when I go away a few days and come back, I say: *bah*, something is different. It takes a few days before you realise what has changed. It takes you a few days to get into the new dimension: different people, different ways, different practices. We need to acknowledge the complexity of this Square, it's contradictory and all that (Fabrizio, Trieste, 24th May 2023).

Many answered that they were afraid that the situation as it was could not continue should local and national authorities have managed to build a hotspot at the border between Italy and Slovenia – which was under negotiation in 2023. Moreover, the political leaning of the Meloni government created a new level of unpredictability. As Enzo said,

> This [if the Square is going to end] is difficult to predict. I don't think so. I mean, evicting it would take great effort by the police. Daily work. And given the past situation, I don't think this falls within the possibilities of local institutions, however... we need to keep in mind that our government represents a step forward, in a negative sense, from previous governments, a deterioration especially on these aspects of repression, racism. So, we can't rule that out (Enzo, Trieste, 26th May 2023).

As Enzo's words point to, the election of the leader of Fratelli d'Italia Giorgia Meloni and the coalition government that was established in 2022 represented a significant worsening of the situation, with Meloni being openly opposed to the presence of people on the move on Italian territory. The sharp increase in the government's attention to the area, as well as the plans to build the hotspot, shook the few certainties that activists and solidarity actors in Trieste were relying upon – one of these being the lack of commitment from local institutions and authorities to stop solidarity work, which had been filling the gaps left open by their own inactions (Fortarezza 2024).

Similarly, Fabrizio, an operator and activist, told me that in his opinion, the authorities would intervene only if and when it was "politically convenient" for them to do so – which was not the case because authorities were unable, and unwilling, to offer alternative services, and facilities to accommodate migrants. However, he continued, it made no sense to hope that the local authorities would have found alternatives to the construction of a hotspot – "we are not in that political season, I am afraid" (Fabrizio, Trieste, 24th May 2023). If built, the hotspot could have the effect of 'emptying' the Square completely, Amelia told me: "There's more beneath the surface," she said (Amelia, Trieste, 19th April 2023). As Enzo told me in this regard,

> From the start, the relationship with institutions has been very ambiguous, which reflects the very ambiguous stance that institutions have in dealing with migrants in transit. The police leave us be. They let us do it. We would have never thought. There was only a period last year after an interview with *Il Piccolo* in which the mayor threatened to close the Square. Then for a while, the police were around. But they did not intervene. On that occasion, the Prefect called us and told us in a very calm manner that we would have had to clear the Square little by little and that they would have found a place to accommodate transit migrants for one or two nights... Transit migrants would have been able to access the daily centre and the night centre, which however have very limited places. We told them that we would not have abandoned the Square, because it was a place of socialisation. And then things stayed the same, as you see them today (Enzo, Trieste, 26th May 2023).

Despite what Fabrizio named the "axe pending over our heads," referring to the sword of Damocles that the plans to build a hotspot represented, activists seemed convinced that it would have taken too much effort and money for the local authorities to be able to get a hotspot up and running in the near future. The looming feeling that the "Square was going to end," according to some, was instrumentalised by authorities to maintain the Square under constant threat of eviction and to prevent the formation of collective political action.

Interestingly, both solidarity networks and local authorities were framing the Square as something that needed to be "protected." But while local authorities argued for the need to "fence" the Square in the name of the protection of the "decorum" of the city, activists and people on the move wanted to protect these pockets of everyday life, and the

solidarity, sociality, and provision of basic services that they allowed. This constant feeling that the situation in the Square would end created what many people described as a sort of "addiction," a difficulty to stay away from the Square. Many volunteers reported a sense of disorientation when they were in Piazza Libertà, as if they had lost sense of time: they would forget to eat and go to the bathroom.

Some activists worried about the fact that an over-attachment to this situation by some of the members of activist or volunteer groups could have prevented a collective effort to imagine new solutions and political scenarios that could benefit people in wait. In other words, they were concerned that insisting for the need to maintain the "Square" intact would have prevented the struggle for better solutions and everyday life conditions for those who were forced to inhabit this space day in and day out. This was exacerbated by the constant state of burnout in which solidarity activists and volunteers often found themselves, which was brought about by the feeling of *combattere contro i mulini a vento*, to "tilt at windmills," to fight a losing battle. This feeling of protection went hand in hand with the practices of signification of what the "Square" was. As Matteo's previous quote said, the Square was there well before the hosting the activities of Linea d'Ombra, and it would have continued to exist after that. As I wrote in an entry of my fieldwork diary in one of my first months of fieldwork,

> I realise that it becomes normal to scrutinise the new people who enter in the Square. Because at first you develop a feeling of protection which I, too, needed to deconstruct. This happens mostly when journalists enter the Square. A couple of days ago, a journalist from a big Italian TV network came in the Square, wearing a very expensive- looking, long coat. He was accompanied by a camera operator. It must have been that he was wearing such a flashy coat in a moment when jackets for people on the move were running low, and it was freezing. Or it must have been the big camera with a strong flashlight pointed in the face of everyone without asking for consent. It felt like this person did not belong, it almost felt like we should have asked them to leave (fieldnotes, 20th November 2022).

What is more, he continued, the experiences of both individual activists, and of the collective, had changed through time. Talking about his experience, he said

> I can no longer have that drive, that attachment, that desire to do so much that I had at the beginning and on which a series of experiences have impacted. In a way, I have a relationship that is a little lighter, for which I don't feel the need to... I mean, I experience it in a much more relaxed way, it still remains... after years I'm still here, the thing continues to exist, people continue to come, the world continues to be interested in this thing. While it's still there and it has already dragged in a lot of people... but I don't get involved as much as I used to. I managed to give it a sustainable dimension (Matteo, Trieste, 22nd May 2023).

The changes in the distribution practices, the arrival of new actors, like IGOs and NGOs, and the intensification of the presence of researchers and journalists, gave a new face to the Square. The constellation of actors that would find themselves together in the "Square" was always slightly different and unique. While the arrival of new activists and volunteers was regarded by some as a breath of fresh air, a way of bringing creativity and new energy to the struggle, some activists were worried about the fact that people would not stay for a long time, which did not allow for political and strategic organisation in the long run. As Giuseppe, a long-term activist, said,

> We have had a flood of losses of people who have left us, who have come and left. We have never really questioned the reasons for these abandonments… We have never made an assessment of our real strengths. And some might have felt inadequate, judged, uncomfortable. What destabilised me most though is that this is an "impossible task." So, the only way to defend ourselves from this total sense of powerlessness would be to structure ourselves and be in solidarity with one another (Giuseppe, Trieste, 19th January 2023).

Furthermore, what some activists pointed out, the "Square" understood as what in this thesis I have called a vernacular space, was only limited to the time of day after 5-6 pm when the activities of Linea d'Ombra began and various vernacular actors started to gather around the Square. However, as Michela, a social assistant from the Veneto region who sometimes travels to Trieste told me,

> We arrive here at 6 pm and we go away at 10 pm. The activities of the Solidarity Network last more or less until that time, and we think we know what happens in the Square just because we are there at that time.

> In reality, the lives of migrants go on in different ways, there are many dynamics that we surely do not know of and that happen in different moments of the day. Only, in those hours that we are there, we co-construct these dynamics with them. But we are only actors in something much bigger than ourselves in that specific moment (Michela, Trieste, 14th August 2023).

Interestingly, Michela used the word "co-construct" to indicate the practices that are carried out during the activities in which an encounter between the Solidarity Network and migrants occurs. Migrants' everyday life happens and unfolds, however, regardless of the presence of the Network and, therefore, we only saw and participated in a glimpse of what happened in Trieste's migrants' geographies.

ii. Vernacular theory 2: Killing time or, what to do when you have been made insane

The pockets of everyday life in Piazza Libertà were also a space for socialising. Many migrants who had already accessed first-level CAS centres, or had entered the second-level reception system, would come back to the Square every day, to take part in the distribution practices, or to spend their time chatting, playing volleyball, listening to music, and meeting people. Whenever we talked about why they were coming back to the Square so often, they would tell me that they were trying to "kill time," to create a routine and to give some sort of a sense to their everyday life. Many people denounced the fact that a lack of a routine to beat time, their impossibility to work, or to go to institutionally organised Italian classes, often associated with the continuous delays of the bureaucratic procedures of their asylum application, made them feel like they were going insane. As Nasir, a person in wait told me,

> If I had known that this was the situation, I never would have come to Italy. It took me four years to travel here. I was in a camp. Now I am here, and I live in *Khandwala*, *in 5 stars hotel*! The situation here is very bad, very bad. I did not go to university because my parents could not afford it. But I was very good at school. Now my father is dead. He died when I was in Greece, two years after I left. In Turkey, I asked if I could

> go back. But my smuggler didn't let me. Only forward. So, I came here. But the situation is very bad. Every day I wake up in Khandwala, I wash my face in the fountain in park. Then I go to Chayekhana for Italian class, then to Caritas for lunch. Then back to Khandwala for a little bit, then back to Chayekhana, then at 5 pm back to Caritas for dinner. Then back to park to play, or not play, to pass time (Nasir, Trieste, Summer 2023).

As Nasir's story shows, loneliness and boredom took a toll on the mental health of people in wait. Boredom and loneliness were also associated with the disappointment that people were feeling after arriving in Trieste and filing an asylum request, only to find out that they were destined to wait indefinitely to access the camp, and that afterward, they would have been transferred to other parts of Italy, probably Sardinia, without any notice. The deteriorating conditions of both migrants' mental health and the reception system was so strong in the summer of 2023 that people had very mixed feelings about transfers to Sardinia. While on the one hand it was an incredibly sad moment, full of goodbyes, that destroyed the social networks that people on the move had built over the months, on the other hand, they were at least a sign that things were moving, they were a way of getting partially unstuck from the stillness, temporarily liberated from the wait.

Boredom and depression would also affect people who had already accessed the second-level reception system and were hosted in apartments around town, which testifies to the fact that this situation did not end after people did indeed move up the reception system. As Khaan said,

> I work only because time pass. Because at home no time pass, just look at the mobile and the mobile and I start to go crazy. And I think: Okay, start to work and time pass. I come to Italy and then I think: "Okay. Now much better." Because you have friends. *Some* friends, okay. Just some Italian friends. Maybe someone in the park, you and some others speaking: "ciao, ciao, come stai." And the park: okay, my friend is coming, other people are coming. And in the house, I have a single house. It's okay but a single house. Other people live with three, four people and I think: Okay, maybe my life is like this. I have a place, one room. I think too much. I don't understand my life. I go to sleep. And tomorrow I wake up and go to work. And time pass. Yes, I am happy. Yes. Good. But sometimes I think: you worked so hard for what? (Khaan, Trieste, 28th May 2023).

Khaan's testimony was reflected by many others who expressed their difficulties to deal with traumas lived in their countries of origins, as well as along the "Balkan Route," and that it was difficult to reconcile the thought of what they had to go through with the situation in which they were living. Scholars focussing on the biopolitical aspects of border regimes have talked about how governmental strategies of debilitation and exhaustion of people on the move are conducted through the mobilisation of temporal mechanisms of control (de Vries and Guild 2019; Tazzioli 2020) or through epistemic violence, silencing migrants' experiences (Davies, Isakjee, and Obradovic-Wochnik 2023; De Genova 2017). Applying a Bourdieusian reading to the "Balkan Route" and the *Game*, Zocchi has analysed the relationship between ritualised practices of exhaustion that are part and parcel of the EUropean border regime, and the practices of subversion and of accumulation of capital (information, networks, knowledge about the territories that migrants traverse) that people on the move engage in to continue with their journeys (Zocchi 2023). The everyday experiences and bodily impact of these practices, and depression and mental health problems, are characteristic of what Giordano (2014, 210) describes as the difficulties of having to "rearticulate one's sense of self when faced with the ambivalent task or learning to reoccupy life according to the shifting norms and expectations of the receiving society," which, she continues, "puts one at risk of losing oneself in the labyrinth of what is often experienced as an unintelligible order (the law, institutions, and discourses on health and illness)."

Hamza, who arrived in Italy in 2020, told me that the thing that was most stressful for him was the continuous requests for stories – the fact that journalists, researchers, passers-by, volunteers would continuously ask people on the move where they came from, how their journey went, what they had to do to get to Trieste. He said,

> Sometimes, people help but they always ask for stories. I mean, I basically went to war for this. I mean, this [the "Balkan Route"] is war. The pushbacks, the Route, all of it. And then when I got to Trieste, people would ask me: "how did you get here?" I can tell you, no problem. But I mean, once you've heard my story, the story of two people, of a hundred people. It's the same. Some details are different. But I mean, this is the thing. And some things I don't want to say. But white people… white people want to listen. So, we tell them because they want to listen. But I mean, you are asking about the future of people when you don't know how much they've lost already (Hamza, Trieste, 19th January

2023).

I found myself reflecting on Hamza's words a lot, namely, the positionality and attitude of "the white people" (including myself) who want stories to consume were contributing to exploiting and extracting data from migrants – in this case, as Hamza thought, for the white people's own "entertainment". Often, stories were asked without realising the risks for re-traumatisation. The mental health of people in wait was often neglected, because of the urgency of their material needs – as if depression were, compared to the lack of bathrooms, not so urgent after all- not as tangible and visible. Instead, as this section aims to show, it was precisely this "being made insane" that was making the situation unbearable for people in wait.

At the same time, both people on the move and activists were often asked by journalists, passers-by, and researchers to explain what was happening. Many people told me that it almost felt like they were tour guides. In that sense, I was in an ambivalent position. One the one hand, I was a researcher myself, who came to collect stories of everyday life. As much as I paid attention to do everything that I could to make myself scarce, I was still asking people for their time, for information. On the other hand, I was in Trieste for quite a while, became friends with vernacular actors, and I became a "regular" within vernacular spaces. People often asked me to explain "what was happening," to give an overview of the situation. In one instance, over the summer of 2023, two people who had come from another Italian region to help for a couple of weeks asked me to meet with them because they had felt the need to contextualise what they were doing in the Square, to understand whether it made sense for them to be there. At times, it was activists themselves who asked me to talk to newcomers, because they were tired out. While I usually felt like I did not have a role, like I was an "impostor" in the Square, I was often attributed roles by people around me.

After 2023, the Centro Diurno became part of the everyday activities of people in wait, as the solidarity network attempted to create some sort of everyday life routine. As many people told me, having routines, fighting inertia and boredom, was a way for people to keep sane and deal with the frustration that made them wish they could go back. Ilaria, one of the organisers of the Italian school, told me,

> I mean, the idea behind the Italian school was exactly this. Okay, yes, learning Italian, which is fundamental. But in reality, it is much more to give people the chance to do something else during the day. Because in the first days that I spent in the Square, there was always this thing: Ah, I have nothing to do... I wake up, what do you want me to do? I come here, I wait to come here, I come to talk to you...full stop." And so, I really liked this thing of... creating moments of sociality that were somewhat different from distribution practices. So, I'm with people... with little knowledge of Italian. And I must say that in recent months, because of the transfers... that is, the non-transfers, the people are more or less the same. So, there has been a forced continuity, in a way. And people tend to come to the school (Ilaria, Trieste, 25th August 2023).

The Centro Diurno was also a way for migrants to have access to medical consultations with the volunteers of the group DONK, Humanitarian Medicine. When I spoke to Maria and Federico, respectively a volunteer doctor and a volunteer/operator active in DONK, they shared serious concerns about migrants' mental health. In fact, they told me, many people arrived in Trieste with injuries and dermatological conditions as a result of their journeys along the "Balkan Route." However, what was most striking, and most ignored, was the presence of depression signs. As Maria told me,

> The thing that strikes me most about these people is that they arrive, and they are the majority, they are very lively, strong, active, you can see it. Contented, even, that they have arrived. Of course, they arrive with an upset stomach and with bruises. The problem is that after two months here they become depressed. They have 100 problems, because… They sleep badly. They eat what they can, they're nervous, because they say: well, I've come this far, and I thought I'd start working. And so, to fix things a bit, you have to pay your parents, send money home, pay the *passeurs* and all that. And that disappoints them. So many times, they come to us hoping to get a place [to sleep] because they know that sometimes we can say, please find a place for this person. At this point we can't choose based on depression; we only have to choose based on very physical things. And lately there is nothing. Lately it's just a disaster (Maria, Trieste, 25th August 2023).

As Maria's words show, even though they were quite concerned about the seriousness of depression signs in people in wait, the choice as to who to allocate a bed to was made on account of physical conditions. This put them, as well as the operators, in the condition to

create a hierarchy of pain, where physical pain was deemed as more serious and deserving of special attention because it was, indeed, more visible.

Likewise, Federico was worried about the lack of institutional initiatives to activate psychological services for people in wait, but also the problem with finding volunteer therapists, also due to the difficulties of conducting therapy sessions in different languages as well as the burden that already fell onto the shoulders of the mediators. According to him, the lack of attention to this point was striking for a city like Trieste, which has been at the core of mental institutions' abolitionist movement since Franco Basaglia, an Italian psychiatrist who was at the core of the abolitionist movement of psychiatric institutions. As a matter of fact, the system of widespread reception that was built by ICS and was still at the heart of the reception and solidarity system in Trieste derived from Basaglia's work, which has also inspired important academic work and initiatives in Italy to reconstruct and rethink through concepts such as that of "trauma".[36] As Federico said drawing this parallel,

> I was a bit surprised that nobody took initiative… actually this would almost be a new strand, I mean... Psychological assistance to migrants could become a new school, a bit like the Basaglia movement. I mean, Trieste, if people wanted to, if there was a will, could become that place where a new school of thought is created, a new psychological school, which is assisting migrants dealing with traumas. This is a problem; we don't find people ready to jump in. But we didn't give up because in my opinion, at this moment it is fundamental, and it is the priority. Especially with unaccompanied minors (Federico, Trieste, 25th August 2023).

Activists positioned within the anarchist tradition were equally concerned about migrants' depressive states. However, they were worried that giving too much attention to what was constructed as "mental health" and fighting towards activating individualised forms of help would divert the attention from the systemic causes of depression – namely, the "killing" action of temporality as a technology of migration control and pushing towards

[36] A body of scholarship connected to the work of anthropologist and psychiatrist Roberto Beneduce has problematised the concept of "trauma" and the 'scientific' categories associated with its use within psychology, which contributes to concealing the responsibilities of structural violence (Beneduce 2019). In this sense, the "Centro Frantz Fanon", established in Turin in 1997, works to establish psychotherapy and psychosocial service desks for "migrants, refugees, and victims of torture," drawing from the work of Frantz Fanon and mindful of the relations of power that underpin the very practice of psychotherapy (See: https://associazionefanon.it).

a collective response to it.

Both Federico and Maria highlighted that the sudden incidence of transfers created further problems for the treatment of both physical and psychological conditions, and the fact that this situation did not allow the stability necessary for people to feel comfortable sharing what happened to them, nor to be able to initiate a psychological path. Not only were migrants subject to the constant fear of deportation (Khosravi 2018), but also to the looming prospect of being transferred without any notice, which made it impossible to organise, logistically, socially, and politically.

Federico and Maria insisted on the fact that the lack of time prevented them from being able to establish trust relationships with people on the move and people in wait. This was an issue both in terms of mental health, as well as for the treatment of other medical conditions. As Maria said,

> I usually like to take time when I visit people. Because people also need to take time to figure out what to say. One time, I was in Casa Malala. There was a man, in his thirties. I could see that he was sick. He looked very depressed, too. You don't know to what extent it is psychological health and to what extent it is physical at times. He told me very little, said that he had a cough. A little bit of phlegm. And I took it for a seasonal thing, right? It was November. And I asked him how long he had had the cough for. He told me about 15 days. So, I thought, it must be a virus. He came back after about a week. He was still sick. But this time a friend who spoke English came with him. And the friend told me: "Look, he's been sick since he was in Bosnia. He stayed for two months because he was sick." Meanwhile, while the first time his lungs were clear, this time I heard a lot of noise at the back of his lungs. So, we sent him to the ER immediately. It was *tuberculosis* (Maria, Trieste, 25th August 2023).

What Maria highlighted was that the speed with which they had to visit people – people who sometimes did not come back for a second visit, which created immense difficulties in diagnosing, which went hand in hand with the impossibility to conduct blood tests, lab examinations, as well as with problems of language interactions. She also said that she would have liked to have more time to explain to people how the national health system works in Italy, but she was never able to do that due to the lack of time. This often translated into an improper use of the ER, situations of misunderstandings, which often

discourages people in wait to seek medical treatment.

As already mentioned above (see Chapter 6, Section iii), in the spring of 2023, tensions were rising in Piazza Libertà. It was difficult to co-exist, to share space when the space was so limited. Every day became a bit of a competition for who had the right to be in the Square, to speak with people. The activists, operators, and volunteers were getting increasingly scared by the deterioration of the psycho-physical conditions of people in wait due to the stretched waiting periods in horrible hygienic conditions and with little to no prospect of being able to have access to decent accommodation. At times, when I witnessed moments of tension, someone from the people in wait would tell me: "Leave them be. They are going crazy. People in five-star hotel go crazy" (Samir, Trieste, April 2023).

The theory of "killing time" encompasses both a denunciation of the governmental strategies of the local authorities to leave people in conditions of stretched temporalities, appalling material conditions, and boredom, as well as the creation of routines and practices to pass the time and, therefore, create pockets of liveability within spaces of segregation. Being able to establish daily routines while going to Italian classes, or going back to the Square in the evening, as well as being able to share important moments such as the beginning and the end of Ramadan, allowed people to continue resisting the strategies of debilitation and exhaustion that were exercised upon them, and to partially reclaim their time through the everyday usage of cramped spaces.

iii. Vernacular theory 3: "I need to find myself a role," or performances of resistance

The theory of roles emerged during several conversations I had with Fabrizio, an operator, and an activist, over the course of my fieldwork, and that we then discussed in more details during our interview. I remember I was always struck by the attention to roles and organisation that was deemed as necessary for the activities of the Square, and which was mainly explained by some vernacular actors as an effect of the compulsive need to protect "Piazza Libertà" and the pockets of everyday life, relief, and support that it allowed. This situation also intersected with the deteriorating mental health of activists. As Fabrizio told

me, in fact,

> I did not go to the Square for a year, because I was completely burnt out. Because those feelings of loneliness and rage and injustice… It drained me. But I also became aware that even when I tried to go back there after I quit my job, I didn't know what to do. Because in that Square, it is key to find yourself a role. And you can find whichever role you want. But I was so drained that I could not find another one. And to be there and listen to the stories of violence along the "Balkan Route," to listen to what people were telling me… I know that. Although each story is different, if you don't know what to do about it, what answers to give… it is only… you are a receiver of *discomfort*. And so, you need to be able to provide some answers. Because… yes, you can welcome people, and yes, the social aspect. But welcoming people happens through practice. Practical acts. And political acts, in a way. I mean, if you are a working white man, you can take the liberty to do certain things and to use certain channels. A person on the street with a document that is worth the same as wrapping paper, who sleeps on the streets, who has a debt of 5000/6000 euros to pay for the journey and so on… who will not have a job for a long, long time, who will not have a tessera sanitaria,[37] who is not going to have anything, it is difficult… You need to calibrate the relationship [on privilege] (Fabrizio, Trieste, 24th May 2023).

As Fabrizio's quote shows, having a role was important to be able to face the situation every day and try and stay out of burnout, while at the same time mobilising privilege to engage in the struggle for freedom of movement. In other words, if you could not preserve your mental health, your contribution to the struggle would have been quite limited – as well as putting you at risk of establishing toxic environments in these contexts.

After being let in on this theory, I began to use it to reflect on my own presence in Piazza Libertà, as a way to make sense of the discomfort and the inadequacy that I often felt whenever I did not know exactly what I was supposed to be doing there. I saw these feelings reflected on many other people, who sometimes stopped coming to the Square precisely because of this not knowing what to do. With this theory in mind, I read back through my fieldnotes diaries. My first day of fieldwork in June 2022, I recorded this entry,

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[37] A healthcare card issued by the state testifying to a person's right to use the national healthcare system.

> I arrived in Trieste at 5ish and when I got to the station, I saw a lot of people in the Square, mainly young people on the move in their 20s. Some of them looked even younger than that. I also saw some volunteers – some of them were engaging in some healthcare practices. One had a colourful, long, flowery dress. What struck me most was that everyone seemed to know their way around the Square. Where they were supposed to be. Or at least, so it seemed from a distance to a person who had never been there before. I felt like I should stop and say hi, but I didn't. I felt out of place (Fieldnotes, 23rd June 2022).

This feeling "out of place" originated from the impression that I was excluded from the movement of the "Square." Not only did I not know what to do, I also did not know where to stand.

In this chapter, I have not used the "theory of roles" in order to organise the activities in the Square, as these roles were not formalised within a coherent "line of action." On the contrary, they were mostly used as a lens to understand how the space was used, and why some activists would go back to the Square while others were leaving. Over time, I realised that Fabrizio's theory was grounded in the awareness and critical analysis of the political nuances and differences within the heterogeneous group of actors that composes Trieste's Solidarity Network. In his case, he was fundamentally anchored in his positionality as an activist, an operator, and an anarchist – and the different roles that he had to take on were at times inherently contradictory.

According to this vernacular theory, roles gave people a way of engaging with the everyday practices of the Square, it gave them a sense of direction, a trajectory on how to physically *use* space and move within these sites. Matteo told me about different typologies of people who "help," according to how "solidarity" is conceptualised and politically understood. With this, he meant that "roles" were (self)attributed according to the political position of each actor, which did not exclude the presence of "competing roles," especially in the context of a less structured and dis-organised distribution (Matteo, Trieste, 22nd May 2023). According to him, this also impacted the ways people moved and used space within the Square – either moving transversally to talk to as many people as possible and being more approachable or occupying a specific spot where people could easily find them for distribution or medical practices.

One of the most important roles within the Square was that of the mediators. The

presence or absence of mediators would impact the spatial re-configurations of the Square, and the distribution of people around it. As argued in Chapter 5, section iii, the Square was mediator-centric, meaning that whenever a person who could speak Urdu, or Pashto, was present, they became the core of the activities and spatial practices. Mediators could be professional figures, but also people on the move who would spontaneously engage in practices of translation on behalf of friends who could not speak English, or Italian, to facilitate comprehension and communication. The figure of the mediator was also pivotal in the ongoing struggle that the solidarity network was conducting to distance smugglers from the Square. The work of the mediators in the first years of activity of the Solidarity Network was, in fact, that of identifying and eliminating practices of extraction and exploitation in the Square. One of the main tasks of the mediators was that of clarifying that everything people were receiving on the Square was free, in order to avoid speculative practices, as well as to spot and identify dynamics of power among people in wait. This role would put the mediators in dangerous positions. As Ayub told me about these activities,

> If there hadn't been this network in the Square, we would have found another big square of exploitation. If we hadn't taken stock of this situation, we would have found the Square turned upside down (Ayub, interview, 18th April 2023).

A vital role was that of the *cura* ("care"), which was a term used in that context to indicate the practices of tending to people's feet. Another was that of the "distributor." Most of the times, the distribution roles were taken up by migrants who had already been in Trieste for several months and had been admitted into the second-level reception centres, who could speak the language and were able to better handle the chaotic distribution moments.

As both Ayub and Matteo told me, roles were not well defined and most of the time, the blurring of the distinction of roles overlapped with a blur between personal and professional life. Many mediators were activists and operators, many of them had been migrants themselves. The Square, especially in the beginning of the activities of Linea d'Ombra, was a way for many to establish friendships based on the alignment of political values and personal affinities, both with other activists and people on the move – a

situation that had an impact on the formation and the consolidation of the Solidarity Network. During my time in Trieste, I had the chance to observe how these roles were indeed not static, but susceptible to change because of the external circumstances that would impact everyday life within the Square, as well as personal circumstances that would change the balance of relationships within the Solidarity Network.

The overlap of roles would make some people necessary, as they served as a bridge between different, and more or less institutionalised actors, thus creating hierarchies within the Solidarity Network, as well as within migrants' communities. The links and connections between the Network were, in fact, mostly based on the actions of individuals, and the web of relations that connected them and their being positioned across different roles. As Fabrizio continued,

> In Trieste, there is an overlap between operators and activists. So, anyone who does this job in that dimension is a person somewhat involved in the No Border struggle. And we also passed this onto the public sphere. The fact that there is a massive presence in the Square and therefore the police stay out, except for rare apparitions every now and then, is telling. It's not to be taken for granted. Because we [the Solidarity Network] have carved this out, we have conquered space with daily work, perseverance, consistency (Fabrizio, Trieste, 24th May 2023).

The Solidarity Network is roughly composed of two realities, namely, institutionalised, and informal actors, which virtually and partially correspond to the Centro Diurno and the Square. At first, many of the members of the Network told me, it was quite difficult to manage the connection and to establish diplomatic relationships, and above all, to coordinate actions. Trust had been, however, been established, also thanks to "bridge people." As Max, one of the coordinators of the Centro Diurno reported,

> I mean, I feel comfortable working with those two or three people who act as reference points for every association. Who are present in the Centro Diurno as a meeting point. And I mean… we try and put up a united front because every association is specific, with its own needs, and even its own limitations, right? (Max, Trieste, 25th May 2023).

Two of the coordinators of the anti-trafficking project, Frida and Caterina, told me that the

role of the "bridge people" also further highlighted the failure of the local authorities to establish a coordinating network. In fact, Frida told me that every time a person leaves –a person who constituted a link in the network of institutions, services, and associations – it was necessary to build everything from the scratch. Whenever these people left their role for any reason, the whole chain and network had to be renegotiated. In this sense, Caterina told me,

> I mean, it seems to me that on the issue of migration there is always a bit of a tendency to play hot potato. Like: *They* will take care of it. But there is no solid systemic vision. That is, when *they* are missing, because they change function or retire, everything has to be rebuilt. I was reminded of this because recently we worked on a case of a person with a very strong psychic vulnerability and we had to rebuild the chain in the meantime, just to use an ugly word, but... it was like that because the doctor who took care of this person was no longer there and so we just had to rebuild everything. Then now it works quite well, but it's clear that these are things that tire you out (Caterina, Trieste, 31st January 2023).

The constant re-negotiations on and/or conflict over the meaning of "roles," and their attributions, materialised in the fact that most of the times, roles were attributed according to the distribution and medical treatment practices, which is why many people found it difficult to re-adjust after the collapse of the distribution system in the summer of 2022. In November 2022, I went back to Trieste after a break of a couple of months, and I started reflecting on what it meant to not have a role within the Square:

> There is something fundamentally different in the distribution practices. There is a different type of mechanism, I can't understand what my role is, and whether there is space for me to have a role within the new system. This makes it more difficult to be in the Square, not only for me but for a lot of other people. What is more, in the winter the distribution and medical treatment practices are sometimes moved to the underpass, in order for people on the move and activists to be protected from the rain and wind. When things are moved there, the whole spatial distribution changes. I can see that people tend to gravitate around certain spots, that some parts of the underpass are destined for different purposes, but I can also see how it impacts sociability and, at times, creates tensions (Fieldnotes, November 2022).

Other people felt uncomfortable going to the Square because while some of the organisation had dissolved, some roles were instead very clear, to the point that they defined the distribution of people in the Square with a hierarchical organisation of space and practices. For this reason, Matteo told me that the presence of people who came and went was fundamental because otherwise, the Square would become a pre-programmed experience, which permeated into an "intrinsic territoriality" (Matteo, Trieste, 22nd May 2023). He also said that he made a conscious effort, like many others, to walk around the Square, to not just position himself in a specific spot, but to try and use the whole of the Piazza. Here, the theme of movement comes back to testify to the importance of redistributing the actors' presence throughout space as a way of deconstructing power relations. Matteo, like other activists, said that the presence of people coming and going was a "breath of fresh air" to avoid for the Square to "collapse into the ugliness of routine" (Matteo, Trieste, 22nd May 2023).

At times, however, the continuous coming and going of people created tensions, problems, and overcrowding. Some journalists, for instance, were very indelicate in their practices, as illustrated in the vignette at page 170. At the same time, Marcello told me that he wished there were more communication with activists from other places coming to help in Trieste. In fact,

> If you come to a territory that I inhabit day in and day out and you do something, then I am the one who's going to have to live with the product of what you've done, right? Because otherwise I am the stranger who goes to someone else's house, who goes there, breaks the vase and leaves you with the pieces. It doesn't work like that (Marcello, Trieste, 19th January 2023).

When the situation in the Square became more and more difficult, some people felt the need to find new roles for themselves, to engage in different solidarity practices that could allow them to build new connections and collaborations. As Martina, one of the founders of the Chayekhana Italian school told me,

> When I joined Linea d'Ombra, I didn't really know what role I had there. I mean, I was trying to help but I couldn't really understand what I had to do and so...I don't know, I felt like I wasn't using that time to the best of

my abilities (Martina, Trieste, 24th August 2023).

The temporal aspect of having a role, namely, the disorientation that derived from not knowing what to do, emerged in many similar conversations. Not knowing how to move and navigate these spaces, how to manage the social, interpersonal, and political dynamics that permeate these sites, and not having a recognise role to take on often made people feel like they were wasting time and not being active in a situation of emergency. Ilaria, another founder of the Italian school, told me that through the consolidation of the school's activities,

> We created this sort of peaceful island where things work somehow. There is a kind of order, everyone had their role which is not at all hierarchical, on the contrary. It is a role… I mean, it is very useful for us, first of all because as you well know in the Square the roles... there are *some* roles, let's say. But most of them are not there. And... I don't know. This also helps you to feel part of a reality (Ilaria, Trieste, 25th August 2023).

As Martina and Ilaria's words show, there were contradictions and tensions around roles. One the one hand, tensions naturally arose over the legitimacy to attribute roles and the fight of activists positioned within the anarchist tradition against these attribution practices. On the other hand, not having roles created confusion and many activists argued that knowing what to do helped preserve their mental health and fight the exhaustion, fatigue and frustration that derived from fighting a "losing battle."

iv. Vernacular theory 4: Intersectional experiences of time

The everyday life of people in wait that I have described up until this point was a story of "single (mostly young) male migrants." Throughout my fieldwork, and even more so during the analysis and writing stage, I found myself reflecting on the gendered dimension of the story I was trying to tell. They were my main interlocutors, they were the people I met in these sites, the people with whom I became friends. And I kept asking myself and others: where are the women? I knew that families usually used different informal

migration networks and routes, and I met some women in the Square a couple of times, but they soon disappeared from this daily life in which we were embedded.

In the spring of 2023, I met two of the coordinators of the Cooperativa Stella Polare. This project offers protection to those who have been victim of sexual trafficking or other kinds of exploitation. Stella Polare is part of the Committee for the Civil Rights of Prostitutes and provides help to sex workers with information and legal support concerning their work and healthcare rights, and with people who are forced to engage in sex work to support them towards the end of their exploitative situations and to be able to obtain a residence permit should they need one. The beneficiaries of the project are diverse and testify to the situation of intersecting marginalities that was touched upon in Chapter 6, section iii. The beneficiaries of the project are members of the trans-gender community, migrant women, women who are sexually exploited. Migrant women who become part of the project mostly arrive through the "Central Mediterranean Route" – a situation that the increase of arrivals from the "Balkan Route" has made even more complex and diversified.

When I talked to Frida and Caterina, two of the operators of Stella Polare, they spoke to both the spatial and the temporal aspect of the everyday life of migrant women in the city of Trieste. First, they told me, while at the beginning of their project they used to operate in the streets, after COVID-19, sex work had generally been moved to private buildings, apart from some exceptions. This is why, according to them, migrant women subject to sexual exploitation did not *appear* within Trieste's cramped spaces, which made it much more and more difficult for the operators to identify people in need of help and offering them options and support being wary of the possibility of putting them in dangerous positions.

The different spatiality and temporality of migrant and other marginalised women also impacted the context of the "Balkan Route." As Caterina argued in this respect,

> Women who arrive via the "Balkan Route" are there, even if they are seen less, right? You know that there is a lack of official data, and we can deduct from this the reason why there is a lack of official data. But as you know, all the on-the-ground organisations that monitor mainly see male subjects. But then... we know that women perhaps have somewhat "faster" access channels, in quotation marks. Let me give you an

> example: This summer I happened to conduct a meeting with a young girl from Kosovo. A young girl indeed, 16 years old, incredibly young. She had arrived in a camper van, paying €2,000 to this couple who looked like her parents. And she arrived in this way" (Caterina, Trieste, 31st January 2023).

However, as Frida continued, there is a huge discrepancy between the quick movements of women and the incredibly long timeframe of bureaucratic procedures for those who can stay and decide to do so. This reflects the outdated nature of the process, which does not take into consideration the changes that migration has undergone throughout the years as well as the evolution of the exploitation systems in the national territory. The post-COVID spatialities of sex work and the faster temporalities of women migration further contribute to their invisibilisation. Because of this intersection, women's daily life unfolds in private places, which are not accessible. This goes hand in hand with a lack of adequate official data on the movement of women, as the elusive characteristic of their mobilities does not allow for monitoring activities organised by the Solidarity Network to be effective.

In 2022-2023, the operators of Stella Polare, and other actors within the Solidarity Network, were able to observe the arrival of Nepalese women, some travelling from Cyprus where they had previously lived, or Bangladeshi women arriving with a visa to countries in Eastern Europe and from there travelling along the "Balkan Route." In 2023, Caterina told me, they also met Chinese women with a similar migratory journey (Caterina, Trieste, 31st January 2023). The main problem with this situation, Stella Polare's operators said, is that often, they did not have the time to make a preliminary assessment, namely, to give some basic information regarding the risks that these women could encounter during their migratory journeys. Unfortunately, they said, the anti-trafficking project could not accommodate these women for a couple of nights only. The hands of the operators were tied by the bureaucratic procedures that they needed to follow to "prove" that women had indeed been subject to trafficking. As Frida recounted,

> In Trieste, colleagues from other associations call us, especially for striking cases of great vulnerability, suspected trafficking, sexual exploitation. And so, if we can see these people, we go, at least to bring some information. Nevertheless, some decide to leave. This usually happens with women from Nepal, from Bangladesh, who prefer to

continue their journey (Frida, Trieste, 22nd August 2023).

Another reason behind the lack of data is that many women arrive in Trieste following what Caterina and Frida called "secondary migration." These may be women who applied for asylum in Trieste and then left for other countries and came back because they needed to pick up their paperwork trail, or they were not able to find a job in the country they moved to. These women arrived by train and usually had a place to stay for a couple of nights before going to the Stella Polare association to ask for help. In this case, Frida and Caterina told me that what the Stella Polare project was tasked with was the assessment of a person's vulnerabilities, like the lack of accommodation and documents, the presence of children, or exploitative situations. As Caterina told me,

> There is another category of women that we see, and that is, women returning from Europe. So, women who arrived in Italy in 2015, I'm talking about women from Sub- Saharan Africa, they were maybe in a CAS or a SPRAR here and there, they didn't see the progress in their programme… Some were sexually exploited in Italy. And at some point, they decided that they had had enough with Italy – they went to Germany, to France. Because of word of mouth, or because there's a friend who's there and doing really well, they have got a house, pocket money, and so on. So, they leave. And then they come back after two or three years that they've been there with a residence permit for asylum or humanitarian reasons that has now expired. So, they come back, and to help them, you have to retrace their path in Italy. And sometimes, when they come back, they are no longer alone (Caterina, Trieste, 31st January 2023).

What emerges from this discussion is that a fundamental aspect of this complex situation is its intersectional aspect, adding a new layer to what Stojić Mitrović and Vilenica (2019) have described in terms of "circularity" of mobility along the "Balkan Route." The cases that the project was dealing with were complicated in terms of intersecting and stratifying vulnerabilities, which also included mental health problems. Another aspect linked to this was emphasised by Frida, who told me,

> The gender discourse changes. For a decade, more or less from 2000 until 2017, we worked a lot with women, mostly with women. The migration phenomenon changes in general, and males start arriving [in the project] as well. So, the first males we took in for some time, they also arrived by sea, so Trieste was not yet invested with this flow from the "Balkan Route." So, we took in boys who made the journey from Mali, when there was the crisis in Mali, or the Gambia. And in their stories, there were already elements of trafficking and elements of exploitation and of violation of their rights. So, it's a phenomenon that affects everyone, and not just women. Now, with the "Balkan Route," the situation is much more complex. Because I personally think that almost everyone has, in some way, come across some form of trafficking or exploitation. Even the guy who says: I left voluntarily, at some point in his journey there is an exchange of something. In money or in other ways. Boys say it less. But we know that there is an exchange. There is also labour exploitation that also comes from outside Italy, it happens in Romania, it happens in Greece. These are stories that we collect when they arrive and apply for asylum and the territorial commission calls us to delve into this story. And they are stories of males, of young boys and men (Frida, Trieste, 22nd August 2023).

Reflecting on these complexities, and the emerging stories of sexual exploitation of unaccompanied minors, both Frida and Caterina denounced the fact that the anti-exploitation system in Italy is based on a gendered understanding of "exploitation," whereby sexual exploitation is stereotypically constructed as impacting the "female/feminine migrant" while the "male/masculine" migrant is seen as targeted by labour exploitation and at the same time constructed within anti-migration discourse as a possible perpetrator of sexual violence. As Caterina told me,

> We always want to emphasise that women are here, because there is always this very masculine narrative, which, it's there, it's obvious. Perhaps there is a mistaken tendency to think that a feminist approach means dedicating oneself only to women. But no, a feminist approach can just as well be applied to young boys, who by the way, 100 per cent of all those we met, suffer every kind of abuse on their journeys (Caterina, Trieste, 31st January 2023).

Under these circumstances, they both denounced the difficulties in dealing with cases of unaccompanied male minors and "single men" migrants who suffered from sexual abuse,

together with labour exploitation, along their journeys. Operators of different cooperatives, organisations, and activists have emphasised their difficulties in dealing with these cases because of a lack of legal, institutional, and psychological resources and training.

Additionally, because the project accommodates migrants with different national backgrounds and language skills, mediators are key in each phase of the process. The role of therapists is also fundamental in order to support the beneficiaries, who need to be able to construct a narrative to bureaucratically be categorised as a "victim" of sexual exploitation to get adequate help – a detrimental process for victims of sexual violence. Frida told me that they pay great attention to support people in telling their stories, trying not to extract information when the person does not want to share to avoid perpetrating further violence. Finally, the intersection between different migration routes makes it even more complicated to have adequate skills to deal with cases of sexual and work exploitation with migrants from different cultural and religious backgrounds. Here, too, the problem of not having enough time to establish trust relationships, together with the need to condense and reduce people's stories to a narrative that could be palatable and successful in the asylum application forum contributes to the de-humanisation of the past experiences and traumas of victims of exploitation. Struggles to reclaim people's stories, as well as granting them a longer timeframe to undertake a healing process is carried out by institutionalised actors, who need to interact and cooperate with the authorities. These struggles intersect with operators' and activists' efforts to adapt to the different and intersectional temporalities of the Route, dealing with either prolonged periods of wait, or fast journeys which make women migrants invisible.

v. Conclusion: On translation III

This thesis focusses on the situations of *stuckness* that turn people on the move into people in wait. For this reason, the concept of time and temporalities are fundamental in order to grasp the experiences of those who inhabit spaces to which this wait has been segregated, or those who are less visible but partake in parallel, everyday lives – namely, those who are victims of sexual exploitation. This chapter focuses on the theories that emerge from the embodied experience of time of different actors. These theories are

compelling examples of the intersectional ways in which borders materialise onto the bodies of people, according to their class, gender, and race. While experiences of time translate onto migrants and victims of exploitation in intimate violence (lack of access to basic hygienic facilities, sexual exploitation, rape), or into the intersection with other marginalised communities through forced co-habitation, activists experience time as a way of understanding the dynamics of power that underpin vernacular spaces, both in terms of the signification of what the "Square" is, and the entitlement to spend time in it.

Nevertheless, these theories become vernacular acts of resistance in that they emphasise and denounce the link between migrants' temporal experiences and the local in/action meant to make their lives unliveable. Chapter 5 shows that vernacular grammars are negotiated to voice discomfort, to reclaim spaces through practices of renaming, and the deconstruction of the hierarchies between languages that shape space and contribute to the spatial segregation of racialised migrants. Following from this argument, Chapter 6 shows that the experiences of the border and of the situation of forced wait becomes embodied, materialising onto the everyday life of people in wait which do not have access to decent living conditions, while co-inhabiting and negotiating the presence in vernacular sites with intersecting marginalised communities. It follows that daily encounters become the preferred context to discuss the situation, analyse and deconstruct the material effects of changes in EU or the national migration regimes and legislation, and a way of reconnecting the everyday experiences with a focus on technologies of border control which act at intersecting scales.

Vernacular spaces in Trieste are intrinsically gendered – migrant women from these everyday pockets of resistance, either because of the faster mobility caused by sexual trafficking, or because of their categorisation as "fragile" which allows them easier access to reception centres. Furthermore, negotiations and deconstruction of gender roles that were part of everyday conversations and experiences of women activist in the Square.

The vernacular approach helps here to understand how the negotiation and deconstruction of the power dynamics that underpin the concept of "time" are put in relation with space by vernacular actors, namely, through the construction and theorisation of an "outside" and an "inside", where the "outside" is the instrumentalisation of time to debilitate migrants, and the "inside" is the vital force of resistance of vernacular spaces that needs to be defended. Thus, these theories re-signify a border that delimitates cramped spaces

seen both as vital spaces of resistance and as spaces of segregation. This dividing line clearly spotlight how these spaces are separated from the trajectories of everyday life in the city that unfold (apparently) detached from Trieste migrant geographies.

Vernacular theories create different epistemic boundaries that allow for imagining the possibilities for the construction of collective subjectivities – what Ines, an activist, described as "the creation of a transversal humanity" (Ines, Trieste, 19th January 2023). The story of everyday life in Piazza della Libertà, and the vernacular theories that are negotiated and performed, are punctuated by emergencies, and unforeseen circumstances. The lived experiences of the Square differ depending on the ways in which the border performs its temporal effect on bodies along lines of race, gender, and physical and mental health. "Piazza della Libertà" comes to signify a set of social, solidarity, and political practices that are constantly under threat of eviction from the local authorities. Because of this, the temporality of the Square stretches indefinitely, making it difficult for the solidarity network to organise long-term but also making it tedious for local authorities to intervene and stop the provision of basic help that they would otherwise need to take over.

8. Reclaiming the border: vernacular acts of resistance

> Our privileged condition implies the extreme condition of others. We are all in search of an elsewhere that we can only build together. Therefore, of another temporality that we can only build together. A world, in short, in which life is liveable, not based on exploitation, expropriation, or the destruction of the Earth. And this also refers back to an experience of time, that is, that of the migrant's time before, when they left their land, from that time, no? And before eventually integrating as workers and so on. This suspended time of migration, in which there is a "going elsewhere." There is this experience of a time, which they somehow communicate to us. We too are in the Game, in a way. We risk living a life purely instrumental to the mechanisms of capital (Enzo, Trieste, 26th May 2023).

i. Time and space within the vernacular domain

This thesis aimed to understand how the situation of "forced wait" of migrants was negotiated and experienced by the actors who meet, interact, and share these cramped spaces in the timeframe of this thesis, namely, 2022-2023. In other words, it looks at Trieste's "Balkan Route" geographies in their manifestation through everyday life within specific sites in and around the city. When I started writing this thesis, I aimed to look at practices of illegal readmissions from Italy into Slovenia, which had been reported by the Solidarity Network, and ICS specifically, and declared illegal by the Tribunal in Rome in 2020-2021. However, when I arrived in Trieste, I realised that the situation had drastically changed. While readmissions had stopped, aside from some failed attempts to restore these practices, a specific conjuncture of events and circumstances had created a situation of stillness, *stuckness*, and impossibility to access basic accommodation and healthcare facilities - which reached a peak in the years 2022-2023. This situation turned "people on the move" into "people in wait," put 'on hold' for months after applying for asylum, forced to "make do" while hoping that a bed would become available in the first-level reception system, namely, in camps locating in surrounding areas.

At the same time, the deterioration of the situation was met with a stronger organisation between the solidarity actors in Trieste, which led to the construction of what I call throughout the thesis the "Solidarity Network." This network was composed of quite different associations, groups, and individuals both informal and more institutionalised. The organisation of the cooperation of the Network was built because of the extreme circumstances, and sometimes with unease due to the difference in political colour, attitude vis-à-vis institutions, and practices of support and/or resistance.

As the thesis aims to look at everyday materialisation of the border, it is positioned within the interdisciplinary field of Critical Border Studies. Specifically, the thesis draws from contributions that have looked at everyday aspects of borders (Rajaram and Grundy-Warr 2007; Rumford 2008; 2012; Jones and Johnson 2016; Cassidy et al. 2018; Tyerman 2022). This literature has been key to shedding light onto the materiality of borderwork, and its intersectional embodiment through practices of social and spatial exclusion, which connects to the broader framework of a materialist, feminist strand of critical geopolitics (Conlon 2011; Mountz and Hyndman 2006; Squire 2015; Hiemstra and Conlon 2019).

Another strand of border scholars interested in the everyday scale have argued for a focus on the attribution of responsibility for the enforcement of borderwork to the "ordinary people," arguing for the need to vernacularise border studies to reflect this trend (Perkins and Chris Rumford 2013). Literature that has emerged from this strand has veered towards an intersection with vernacular security studies, emerged in 2005 after Bubandt's contribution, and shedding light onto linguistic practices of signification of concepts of "in/security" which, in turn, influence public demands for tougher border control or more transparency from national authorities on the actions undertaken to make the "community" safer (Bubandt 2005; see also: Vaughan-Williams 2021; Löfflmann and Vaughan-Williams 2018, 383; Jarvis 2019; Oyawale 2022; Downing 2023).

It is from here that the "vernacular," understood in its etymological sense as the "language of the slaves" becomes the crystallisation, the translation, of the experiences of the experience (Baker 1984). Inhabiting vernacular spaces day in and day out, "vernacular act-ors" engage in political acts of translating their experiences onto the spaces they traverse, reclaiming their right to everyday life in both its spatial and temporal aspects. Everyday vernacular acts allow for the co-construction of new imaginaries, tactics and strategies of resistance, as well as coping mechanisms based on what Baker (1984) called the "subjugated knowledge of ordinary people," as well as reflecting on who is or is not allowed to partake in the "vernacular domain." While the novelty of this approach is that it works towards de-constructing privilege that underpins the hierarchies between "street smarts" and "academic knowledge," it also starts from the ethical acknowledgement that any piece of research, including this one, conducted within the institution of the "academia," and translated onto a format legible, understandable, and conducive for the admission into the academic sphere replicates, inescapably, hierarchies of power encountered on the ground.

The everyday life of these "people in wait" unfolded within some specific sites in the city, to which social activities, as well as material aid, healthcare assistance, and the reception of legal information were confined. Following from the conceptualisation of Walters and Lüthi (2016, 361), the concept of "cramped spaces" helps to understand the collapse of different scales within space, pointing to the "deprivation, constriction, and obstruction", while also allowing to take into consideration the potential for struggle and resistance. Cramped spaces are therefore an adequate conceptual framework to delimit the spaces where this research is positioned, namely, spaces of forced wait and spatial segregation to

the impossibility to tend to the most basic needs – in other words, spaces of intimate violence. I understand "cramped spaces" as "vernacular spaces," namely, those sites within the urban fabric that allow for everyday conversations, encounters, and interactions precisely *because of* their function as a juncture between migrant struggles and solidarity activities anchored in urban space.

The "vernacular spaces" taken into consideration in this research are: 1) Piazza della Libertà, the Square located near the railway station, where the intersection between people in wait and people on the move played out in the context of the activities of the Solidarity Network; 2) The Silos/Khandwala, the decaying building located behind the station and squatted by people in wait and; 3) The Centro Diurno/Chayekhana, the daily centre which offered showers, legal information, and the possibility for shelter during the day and to be visited by volunteer doctors, in the context of the intersection between other marginalised communities. As emerged in the thesis, these spaces do not exist in a vacuum, but are deeply connected to each other, and to other sites within the city – a situation that has been defined throughout the thesis as the "tentacles of the Square," borrowing from the words of one of the participants of this research. For this reason, section I of Chapter 6 moves the analysis to the mountainous area surrounding the city of Trieste, which is a privileged ground to analyse the interconnections between Trieste's urban space and previous sections of the "Balkan Route. As Chapter 7 draws attention to, these were the only spaces where everyday life at the margins unfolds. They were, however, central to Trieste's migrant geographies and the situation of forced wait that this thesis analyses and from which the analysis departs.

In order to answer this question, I looked at the linguistic practices and grammars mobilised by actors; the material traces of this everyday life and the theories negotiated on-the-ground on the "temporalities" of their experiences. In other words, as the title of this section suggests, I focused on the interaction between space and time within migrants' everyday life and their struggles.

This thesis starts by arguing that material and linguistic aspects should be considered in their interaction through space. In doing so, the main theoretical contribution of this piece of work is to create a bridge between different conceptualisation of the "vernacular," which have been proposed in disciplines as cultural geography, cultural studies, and CSS. Establishing a cross- disciplinary conversation, in fact, allows to 1) define the vernacular

domain as interlinked with the spaces in which the encounter between people who share spaces of everyday life unfold , following from the conceptualisation of French geographer Béatrice Collignon (1996); 2) to maintain a focus on the inherently radical nature of the vernacular (McLaughlin 1996), while at the same time refocusing its 'radicality' within context of racialisation (Baker 1984) and;3) in the tactics of survival of intersecting marginalised communities (Kimari 2021).

This kind of vernacular approach allows to focus on the temporalities of migration without losing focus on the spatial dimension and the materiality of the migratory experiences, which are at the core of the everyday lives of people on the move and are still the main struggle that both migrants and solidarity networks need to carry out against intimately violent or neglectful technologies of control. In this sense, it is important to remember that the vernacular grammars, traces, and practices that I engage with in this thesis are only a snapshot of what was accessible to me in the limited time that I had available, and the encounters, interactions, and conversations that I could understand and partake in.

ii. Through Trieste's vernacular spaces

This thesis is divided into three main parts. The first part, composed of Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, laid out the theoretical and methodological groundwork of this project. Chapter 2 offered a review of the literature in Critical Border Studies, highlighting the main turns that have characterised this field of study since the 1990s. The aim of this chapter was to show the intersections between CBS and other fields, mainly, Critical Migration Studies and Critical Security Studies, but also, critical geopolitics, carceral geographies, mobility studies, and camp studies, to name a few. While an in-depth literature review of CBS was conducted as it was the starting ground for the development of this work, the rest of the thesis offers brief theoretical discussions of other bodies of scholarship, when needed. Chapter 3 focusses on the methodological underpinnings of this work. It offers a detailed explanation of the periods of ethnographic fieldwork that I conducted in Trieste between 2022-2023, an overview of the informal and formal interviews that I conducted, as well as a discussion of the ethical considerations that need to be kept in mind when conducting research with migrant communities.

In this Chapter, I delved further into the concept of "translation," arguing that the vernacular acts presented in this thesis are a crystallisation of the "experience" of spatial segregation that is negotiated on the ground. At the same time, I discussed the fact that vernacular voices do not have the same weight. In this regard, there was tension in the process of data collection and during the writing stage between trying to give enough space to all the different vernacular actors, while safeguarding the privacy and anonymity of people on the move and people in wait. If this thesis reports more citations and quotations of members of the Solidarity Network, it is because this reflects the privilege of different subject positions to transition to a collectivisation of their experiences.

The second part of this thesis functioned as an *intermezzo*. Chapter 3, in fact, was intended as a transition between the theoretical and the empirical parts of the thesis, in order to familiarise the reader with the complex context of the city of Trieste, the reconfigurations of the border between Italy and Slovenia, as well as an overview of the reception system in the Friuli Venezia-Giulia region and Italy.

Finally, the third part of the thesis presented the analysis of the empirical data and is structured among the inductive conceptualisation of three declinations of vernacular acts: 1) vernacular grammars; 2) material traces and 3) vernacular theories of time. Chapter 5, "Language Rumbles," looks at the interactions between vehicular and vernacular languages, as well as colonial and post- colonial idioms through space, as well as practices of place-naming, the negotiation of the experience of discomfort cause by the need for people in wait to adapt to different gender relationships. Through the analysis of these interactions, of the words that are created and negotiated, and the activities of the Italian school, this chapter argued that linguistic practices can act towards reclaiming space. Examples of this are the negotiations of terms that become associated with Trieste's vernacular spaces, such as "Khandwala," or "Chayekhana," which become dominant within the vernacular domain, but still contribute to the marginalisation of religious and ethnic minorities within the migrant communities. At the same time, the interaction through practices of language exchange allowed migrants to spend some time together in a situation of *quasi* continuity, creating trust relationship and ways of communication based on the materiality of their everyday experiences.

Chapter 6, "Intimate traces," started from this assumption to build on the material traces

left by people in wait and people on the move and linking them with the public discourse constructed around the "polluting" presence of migrants in the city and surrounding mountainous areas, thus trying to underline the entrenchment of vernacular spaces in wider "Balkan Route" geographies. The chapter reflects of pieces of clothes and objects left behind in Val Rosandra, on the materiality of distribution practices in Piazza Libertà, the intersection of marginalities within the Silos and the Centro Diurno, respectively, between different migrants' communities, and between people in wait/people on the move and other marginal communities that benefit from the "low threshold" services offered in Trieste. These traces, I argued, contribute to what has been described in the literature with the concept of "stratification" of this border landscape, its ruins, and the migratory processes that have traversed it (Altin 2024). Material traces also become a lens to look at the local authorities' in/actions, and their attempts to conceal their responsibilities through co-opting bodily waste and objects within a discourse centred around notions of "decorum" and "cleanliness," as well as to unveil the intimate violence perpetrated on people in wait.

Chapter 7, "Creating a transversal humanity" builds from four theories of time negotiated by different vernacular actors: members of the Solidarity Network as well as people in wait. These theories try and make sense of this situation of *stuckness* through: 1) a reflection on the construction of a "finite" temporality of Piazza della Libertà, conceived as a signifier for the Solidarity Network's activities and the vitality of migrants' everyday life, as well as its co- option in the management of resistance; 2) the debilitating effect of periods of forced wait on the mental health of people in wait, and the total lack of infrastructures, resources, and theoretical frameworks to be able to tackle migrants' depression and its structural causes; 3) a theory on "roles," reflecting on how the dynamics, movement, and distribution across cramped spaces has changed through time, following from changes in the national government, as well as along previous segments of the "Balkan Route", the importance of having a specific role and position within this vernacular, and the competition and tensions that can break out within these spaces; 4) the intersectionality that underpins migrants' temporalities, with "single male migrants" forced into endless and unpredictable periods of wait, while women are channelled through hyper-mobilities because of their involvement in sexually exploitative networks.

iii. Marginalit(ies)

In 1984, Michel De Certeau (1984, xvii) wrote about the fact that the condition of marginality is "today no longer limited to minority groups but is rather massive and pervasive." Not only that, but marginalities are multiple and intersecting, as Wangui Kimari (2021) writes in the context of the "slums" in Nairobi. Kimari argues that the normalisation of multiple marginalities becomes part of how urban spatial management is enforced and becomes a result of the "ecologies of exclusion" that are part and parcel of politics of governance of the urban space. In Trieste, this translates into a stratification of marginalisations that are often segregated to the same sites within the city. The marginalities of Piazza Libertà, as well as those of the Silos and the Centro Diurno, are manifold and heterogeneous. Piazza della Libertà and the Centro Diurno are characterised by the intersection of these marginalities, with people on the move inhabiting and experiencing these spaces together with other communities that have access to "servizi di bassa soglia,"[38] and who are often also part of ethnic minorities and bring onto their bodies signs of past processes of migration towards Italy. This falls into what Tazzioli and De Genova have called a "differential continuum of degrees of non-citizenship of the vast majority of ostensible citizens" along the lines of "class, gender, and race [which blurs] the boundaries between the 'migrant' and 'citizen' and the interlocking modes of racialization and hierarchies of non/citizenship" (Tazzioli and De Genova 2023, 14-15).

The intersection of different marginalities in Trieste follows the lines of what Sara Ahmed described in *Strange Encounters*, namely, the fact that "strangers" are constructed and embodied through what she calls "practices and technologies of differentiation" that are established relationally. In other words, "difference is not simply found in the body, but is established as a relation between bodies: this suggests that the particular body carries traces of the differences that are registered in the bodies of others" (Ahmed 2000). This works through the establishment and enforcement of a separation between an "inside" and an "outside," the familiar and the stranger.

The pockets of everyday life that are described and analysed in this thesis carry the

[38] The literature translation is "low threshold services," meaning easily accessible, basic services for marginalised communities in Trieste. The "Centro Diurno" in via Udine is classified as a low threshold service.

potential to reappropriate this process of creating an "inside" and an "outside," to reappropriate bordering processes though vernacular acts of resistance. In fact, the construction of non- hegemonic urban grammars, the embodiment of the frontier through material traces, and the construction of theories that denounce the co-option of temporality within governmental strategies of migration control allow for the partial instrumentalisation of a boundary between an "inside" and an "outside", between what "vernacular spaces" signify and an indifferent or hostile "outside", a referent for the resistance struggle. Vernacular actors do not define themselves vis-à-vis the "citizen," but rather, vis-a-vis each other, and against what is "outside."

Within the vernacular, some people are more or less allowed to theorise, according to their involvement in the everyday practices, the roles that they take up, or are attributed by others, and the possibilities of making themselves understood. The dissonant voices become channelled within routines or cause the collapse of such routines, and tensions as well as friendships characterise the daily interactions and encounter between vernacular actors. Tracing a boundary between the marginalised spaces and the rest of the city, vernacular actors become translators, as they act as the codifiers of "experiences' multiplicities," not fixing it but providing "expressing equivalence" (Baker 1984), while at the same time identifying an "outside" that corresponds to the indifferent practices of everyday life that unfold in the rest of the city and local authorities that at times perform their presence around the Square.

As Maurice Stierl (2018, 95) writes, "at the margins, claims to togetherness seem necessarily riven from the very beginning, but are, at the same time, indispensable in the formation of collective transborder resistance." The need for routines and roles, of common languages, and of ways of expressing discomfort and of being able to tend to the most basic, intimate needs, creates a sense of community, contributing to the formation of an "inside" that needs to be protected from an "outside." Vernacular theories create different epistemic boundaries that allow for imagining the possibilities for the construction of collective subjectivities – what Ines, an activist, described as "the creation of a transversal humanity" (Ines, Trieste, 19th January 2023).

Hence, I argue that a vernacular methodological approach can be complementary to everyday approaches inasmuch as it allows to deconstruct hierarchical differences between academic theory and theorising from below, precisely because it stems from the

everyday "use" and struggle for space and becomes engrained within the construction of counter-knowledge. This contributes to resisting what Davies, Isakjee and Obradovic-Wochnik (2023) have called "epistemic borderwork," namely, the silencing of the experiences and stories of people on the move through censorship and silencing of their experiences and traumas. In understanding vernacular actors as translators, I do not mean to conceal the nuances and struggles that are inherent to the vernacular domain. Rather, I see translation as a continuous and dialectical passage between "tactics" into "strategies" of resistance, embedded within the intersection of different marginalities and the subversion of hierarchies of power, allowing, in turn, the development of what Kimari calls "a plethora of situated tools that help [marginalised communities] survive being forgotten" (Kimari 2021, 142) and the collective, albeit temporarily, negotiation of space and time beyond the nation-state paradigm.

The translation of individual actors into vernacular, collective subjectivities can be seen as temporary translations of everyday tactics into strategies, following from the distinction made by De Certeau (1984; See Chapter 3 of this thesis). Vernacular acts are, in fact, located within a physical space (Piazza Libertà, the Silos, and the Centro Diurno), synthetised within an epistemological system (vernacular theories), and underpinned by a temporary overturn of power relations (locating an "inside" to protect versus an indifferent or hostile "outside"), which works towards resisting, struggling, and reclaiming, albeit temporarily, public spaces and co-constructing new, radical political imaginaries of living together.

iv. Life after the vernacular

This thesis starts as a contribution to the field of Critical Border Studies, and it ends at the intersection between CBS, Critical Security Studies, Critical Migration Studies, and many other bodies of scholarships into which I did not have the time to delve deeper. This thesis is also the result of a process of trial and error, it is the tale of an experience within the context of migrants' everyday life in 2022-2023 told by my very situated subject position. While I have claimed theoretical and methodological contributions to the literature in the paragraphs above, I do not claim to have represented faithfully what I witnessed. I can only hope to have done it justice.

This thesis has many limits. One of those was the fact that a thesis relying on language interactions, communications and terminology is necessarily a partial account when not all the languages spoken are accessible to the researcher. As this journey into Trieste's vernacular shows, the complexities of this approach, as well as of the context in which the research was conducted, would require more people, time, and language skills that I do not have. In this sense, while this thesis started out as an attempt to shed light onto migrants' experiences of everyday life within cramped spaces, it had to be adjusted to the testimonies of those who were more vocal within these spaces. What is more, as initially envisioned, this thesis should have included the voices of people conducting their everyday life activities in Trieste right outside of vernacular spaces. However, due to a lack of access and of time, I was not able to carry out enough interviews to be able to say something meaningful about what the experience of those who are constructed within this "outside" is – which could be further researcher within future research projects.

An important theme that this thesis touches upon is that of gender. My thesis was mainly conducted with "single male migrants." However, what emerged during my interviews with operators who support migrant women, or who work towards the re-configuration and re-conceptualisation of "anti-exploitation" systems, shows that there are more invisible protagonists of Trieste's migrant geographies. It was outside of the scope of this thesis to research their experiences, but their presence, and the violence to which they are subjected remains key and remain to be discussed in future research. As Enzo, one of the founders of Linea d'Ombra once told me: "The nexus between racism and the patriarchy is complex, and it is impossible to deconstruct it in situations of transit" (Enzo, Trieste, 26th May 2023). The disentanglement of this nexus would require more research, especially with migrant research participants, language skills and a cultural sensibility to the context of origin that I do not have. While this thesis cannot delve into this issue, the field experiences made it clear that many other stories and interpretation of similar events are still to be shared/told.

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10. Annex 1: Periods of fieldwork

Period	Dates	Total days
1	23/06/2022 - 16/07/2022	16
2	23/07/2022 - 06/08/2022	15
3	18/11/2022 - 27/11/2022	10
4	08/01/2023 - 06/02/2023	30
5	14/04/2023 - 23/04/2023	10
6	17/05/2023 - 28/05/2023	12
7	10/08/2023 - 26/08/2023	18
TOTAL DAYS		111

11. Annex 2: List of interviews

Table I. Formal interviews

Number	Pseudonym	Self-described "role"	Date	Place	Duration
1	Melissa	LdO activist	12 January 2023	Trieste	00:55:83 h
2	Giuseppe	LdO activist	19 January 2023	Trieste	00:34:50 h
3	Hamza	Former person on the move	19 January 2023	Trieste	00:47:35 h
4	Ines	LdO activist	19 January 2023	Trieste	01:14:00 h
5	Marcello	Operator; activist	19 January 2023	Trieste	01:47:59 h
6	Gloria	LdO volunteer	20 January 2023	Trieste	00:51:35 h
7	Fadil	Volunteer; operator; former person on the move	20 January 2023	Trieste	00:39:01 h
8	Nicholas	Volunteer SoS Carso	25 January 2023	Trieste	00:21:06 h
9	Dragica	LdO volunteer	28 January 2023	Trieste	Not recorded
10	Caterina	Stella Polare operator	31 January 2023	Trieste	01:00:36 h
11	Ayub	Mediator; operator; former person on the move	18 April 2023 (Interviewed with Ophelia Nicole Berva).	Trieste	00:56:13 h
12	Amelia	Activist	19 April 2023	Trieste	00:51:35 h
13	Alina	Operator	21 April 2023 (Interviewed with Ophelia Nicole-Berva)	Rijeka	Not recorded

14	Matteo	LdO Activist	22 May 2023	Trieste	01:12:45 h
15	Simona	Mediator; operator	23 May 2023	Trieste	00:35:21 h
16	Fabrizio	Activist; operator	24 May 2023	Trieste	01:11:06 h
17	Max	Operator Centro Diurno	25 May 2023	Trieste	00:58:00 h
18	Enzo	LdO activist	26 May 2023	Trieste	01:08:18 h
19	Maurizio	ICS	26 May 2023	Trieste	Not recorded
20	Khaan	Person on the move	28 May 2023	Trieste	01:25:02 h
21	Luka	Functionary in the municipality bureau	11 August 2023	San Dorligo della Valle/Dolina	00:27:03 h
22	Daniele	Council member of the Dolina municipality	11 August 2023	San Dorligo della Valle/ Dolina	00:35:54 h
23	Michela	Social assistant from the Veneto region	14 August 2023	Trieste	Not recorded
24	Renato	LdO volunteer	21 August 2023	Trieste	00:43:10 h
25	Frida	Stella Polare operator	22 August 2023	Trieste	00:47:26 h
26	Alessio	Caritas operator	24 August 2023	Trieste	00:40:13 h
27	Martina	Italian school activist	24 August 2023	Trieste	00:24:51 h
28	Ilaria	Italian school activist	25 August 2023	Trieste	00:45:26 h
29	Maria	DONK volunteer	25 August 2023	Trieste	01:05:23 h
30	Federico	DONK Volunteer	25 August 2023	Trieste	01:12:04 h
			TOT TIME		25:14:49

Table II. Informal interviews

Number	Pseudonym	Self-described "role"	Date	Place
1	Ayub	Person in wait	August 2022	Trieste
2	Pasoon	Person in wait	August 2022	Trieste
3	Arjan	Person in wait	August 2022	Trieste
4	Nazir	Person in wait	November 2022	Trieste
5	Yassin	Person in wait	November 2022	Trieste
6	Amar	Person in wait	January 2023	Trieste
7	Zunair	Person in wait	January 2023	Trieste
8	Balach	Person in wait	January 2023	Trieste
9	Ameer	Person in wait	January 2023	Trieste
10	Asfand	Person in wait	January 2023	Trieste
11	Malik	Person in wait	January 2023	Trieste
12	Samir	Person in wait	April 2023	Trieste
13	Lmar	Person in wait	April 2023	Trieste
14	Waris	Person in wait	May 2023	Trieste
15	Abdul	Person in wait	May 2023	Trieste
16	Harman	Person in wait	Summer 2023	Trieste
17	Argun	Person in wait	Summer 2023	Trieste
18	Jamal	Person in wait	Summer 2023	Trieste
19	Nasir	Person in wait	Summer 2023	Trieste
20	Karim	Person in wait	Summer 2023	Trieste

12. Annex 3: Sample of interview questions

All interviews were conducted following a semi-structured or unstructured method. This list, therefore, does not replicate the script that I followed during the interviews, as I did not use one. Instead, it is a list, in no particular order, of questions that I asked often and that touched upon some of the main themes of this thesis. This list aims to serve as a navigation tool for the reader to understand the ways that I, as a researcher and a vernacular actor, intervened in the conversations and interviews that form the empirical material for this thesis.

- What have your experiences in Trieste been?
- Where does your everyday life unfold?
- What does it mean to be in solidarity with people on the move?
- Whose Square is this?
- What does the Square mean to you? Why do you like to go back there?
- Have there been times in which you have wanted to avoid going to these spaces (the Square, the Centre)? Or that you did not like that very much?
- What do you think about the tensions that have built up in these spaces? Who are these tensions between?
- Which parts of the city do you feel more comfortable in? Where do you like to spend time?
- How do you think the people in the city react to the presence of migrants in the Square?
- How is Trieste different from other places along the Balkan Route?
- If you had a piece of paper and I asked you to draw a map of the Square and how it connects to the rest of the city, what would you draw?
- What is the impact of people who come and go in and out of these spaces?