

UiT

THE ARCTIC
UNIVERSITY
OF NORWAY

Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education

MATER OMNIUM

A study of belonging, care and social change in superdiverse Italy

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Master thesis in Visual Cultural Studies, SVF-3901 -Spring 2017

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Acknowledgements

First of all, I want to thank my informant, Angela. Thank you for your patience, openness and support, but most of all for your friendship.

Thanks to the Vittorio's inhabitants, for letting me get a glimpse of your world.

My gratitude goes also to the all the members of Affabulazione, Il Teatro del Lido, Efo&Awa and all the students of the Master in Cultural Mediation. In particular, I want to thank Filippo and Leandro, for your unconditional support and continuous encouragement. Meeting you, for the first time after years, I really felt Ostia as my home.

I want to thank my supervisor Trond Waage, for his guidance and infinite patience, as well as the all the VCS staff for this opportunity. Thank you for the unremitting encouragements, and your faith in me despite my chaotic nature.

I would like to express my special gratitude and thanks to my classmates, in particular Kostas Athanasios, for making me feel better when I felt lost. It was a pleasure meeting you all.

Special thanks to my ever-supportive family and friends. Especially to my brother Luca for being there for me whenever I needed.

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Abstract

Crisis can be considered a context in the modern European narrative, as economy, mass-migrations and environmental factors create a superdiverse, ever shifting social and cultural pavement. Set in Ostia, a suburban area of Rome, under the spotlight due to the influence of organized crime and the raising conflicts between socio political realities, this paper investigate how solidarity and belonging are created in a superdiverse liquid modern context. It follows Angela, an Italian woman that has been living and protecting a squat hosting more than 150 migrants for more than 25 years. It uses a biographic approach to social navigation and visual research methods to examine past and present conflicts and social fields, focusing on her role as a cultural entrepreneur, a mediator and as an agent of change.

To my family.

1. Introduction

“There is nothing there. Nothing at all.”

She says, fumbling with a small Bialetti moka pot and an obstinate pack of coffee powder. Monica is 24, Italian, emigrant for little more than a year, living in one of the many fringes of the urban muddle that it is now London. Her words are familiar. I must have heard them hundreds of times, in Italy, of course, but also in the many expat groups in Bolivia, France, Norway, England. We like to aggregate, we Italians, create our little pouches of existence within the foreign host, a safe space made of nostalgia, melancholia and resistance against bastardized recipes. Some (including myself) left seeking venture, many more because the situation back home became *“unlivable”*

When I ask why, Monica and many others tell me of a country that bewitch and abandon, that promise but does not provide. They moan about a shattered nation, plagued by corruption, senseless bureaucracy and misinformation. That the problem is the government, Mediaset, the immigrants, the Roma community, CasaPound, the public debt, Angela Merkel, Pasta Barilla, extreme liberalism, third wave feminism, the end of an era, Silvio Berlusconi. The problem is everywhere and nowhere. On one thing, everybody agrees: Italy is a country in crisis.

1.1 Crisis as a context

The Oxford dictionary defines it as “a time of intense difficulty or danger”. While not inherently wrong, this definition hardly has a general affection. It emphasizes its temporary nature, intending crisis as a momentary abnormality in the social fabric, a sudden state of agitation between a pre and a post characterized by serenity, stability and consistency (Vigh, 2008). Acknowledging this definition means understanding history as a linear path of sameness, now and then interrupted by momentary waves of chaos, before coming back to its natural somewhat static course. This is, of course, not the case as every historical moment is not only punctuated with multiple crisis discourses, but also characterized by a continuous evolution of social patterns.

The word stems from the Greek word κρίσις (krisis) that had a slightly different nuance of meaning. It translates as “judgement”, “turning point”, “break”. In this acception, Vigh writes, crisis is not momentary rupture, but fragmentation. It is a state of somatic, social or existential incoherence (Vigh, 2008) that push the collectivity to questioning the past, present, and the future; the “common sense” (Geertz 1992; Gramsci 1992) of everyday structures and practices.

Identifying the root of the *crisis* mentioned by Monica is hard, if not impossible.

Italy has been victim not only of the economic fallout of 2007 or ever-growing migrant’s emergency. Other of boasting an extremely political instability, the country as whole was caught in the fight with organized crime and was divided by a localist culture. The crisis is not a sudden peak, but the climax of a crescendo, the intensification of existing predicaments (Sigona, 2016) and their infiltration in the everyday of previously unscathed demographic groups.

While theoretically it is possible to discuss boundaries and dimensions of crises, on a personal level there is in fact no clear border between the consequences of the financial crisis, the refugee crisis, the political crisis, the social crisis. They melt into one big scapegoat, a boogeyman to lament and fear, to indicate as the source of each different, deeply personal, crisis state. For the oppressed ‘the state of emergency’ in which we live is not the exception but the rule (Benjamin, 1999). As the rules that govern collective life no longer function, fear and hostility are intensified (Nyers, 2006), fueled by the rhetoric of the “state of emergency” that call for finding a solution in order to regain an ideal of stability attributed to the past. Recognizing the chronicity of the crisis does not aim to devaluate its impact. While not necessary “objectively” real, perception is none the less a key element in constructing society, as people will interact with their environment based on their assumptions (Kang, 2015) changing their behavior in anticipation for the future (Castoriadis 1997; Goankar 2002; Taylor 2002; Vigh 2006 a, as reported by Vigh, 2008).

As for Vigh, Zygmunt Bauman suggests that the idea of crisis is experiential instead of universal, fitting it inside his narrative of modernity. He saw modern society as liquid and ambivalent, characterized by the need for an absolute rational order overthrown by constant mobility and change. In fact, in liquid modernity “all that is solid melts into air” (Marx, Hegel, 1998), and so it is, as “traditions” are continuously created and overthrown, social norms agglomerate and dissipate, pillars of society (both physical and abstract) are erected and demolished. This “liquid “condition can be correlated with Turner’s concept of liminality,

that saw individuals or entities as “*neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremony*” (1996).

1.2 Planning my research

It was that *potential* perked my interest, the capability of the elements to recombine in “*any and every possible pattern, however weird*” (1989).

I was drawn to it by the same curiosity that drive a chemist in front of an explosion. I could see the reaction, look at the burst, heed its majestic proportion, but in that ever-changing mush of heat, density, colors, I had no real clue of what was going on.

I knew I had to start from the particles causing the burst. I needed to explore how individuals reacted in time of uncertainty, how they navigated within a shifting social pavement and how they picked their allegiances.

During the preparatory phases of my fieldwork, I hypothesized that the clash could be reconnected to a “come back” of the *amoral familism* described by Edward C. Banfield in the *Moral Basis of a Backward Society* (1958), that saw an extremized conception of nuclear family ties as damaging the capability to associate for the collective interest, as the members of the community tended to favor immediate group-specific rewards over the bigger picture. The derived web of loyalties, friendships and obligations is in fact challenged daily by restless migratory fluxes, gender equality movements and technological development, as the advent of a new ethnic scenery reignite never settled skirmishes and drag pre-existing forgotten problems back in the spotlight.

I expected an “introverted” society, constructed by parallel separated entities curled inwards their own boundaries. Ethnicity, blood bounds and beliefs, especially political and religious, acting as insurmountable walls.

To explore these dynamics, I decided to start with the concrete as, in my eyes, it was the less unpredictable thing in the cityscape. I planned to involve the local community in the process of research, production and discovery through a Visual Communication course. I held a similar project in Bolivia in 2014, as part of a 4-month long photography workshops focused on community, street photography and human rights. I worked with more than 50 girls aged between 5 and 21 part of Child Fund’s development program, teaching the basis of photography and visual communication, equipping them with disposable cameras and guiding

them through the streets of La Paz. Other than producing a speckled and effective portrait of the experience womanhood and coming of age in a country in unrest, the visual and somehow indirect nature of the project allowed to touch more complex and delicate narratives, including internalized machismo, abuse, human trafficking, veiled acts resistance and coveted social change. At the time, I did not have any anthropological training. Being now more familiar with notions of shared and applied anthropology, inspired by milestone works such as Rouch's *Chronicle of a summer* (1961), Oppenheimer's *The Act of Killing* (2014), MacDougall's *Doon School Chronicles* (2000), I wanted to explore the "urban tribes" using the camera as to give material dimension to the different practices of citizenship that construct the urban fabric and as a catalyst (Rouch, 1974), an agent provocateur, to create contact between closed off groups. Starting from the physicality of the location and the practicality of filmmaking, I hoped to dig into familiarities, understanding and meaning making processes, exploring the experience of community as a physical and social space.

2. The Field

2.1 Coming home

I find Rome is in a visible undeniable state of degradation. The administrative issues in managing the city are obvious to the eye. The streets are infested by rats, banqueting in the overflowing garbage¹ (Trocchia, 2016). It stinks in the warm Spring air.

"Defend Rome", "Immigration IS Invasion" are just some of the statement on the political posters that mangle the historical walls. They double with the incoming elections.

Poverty has never been so obvious, as the sign of homelessness peers out under every crane, bridge and roof of the Eternal City. It is impossible to walk more than 100 meters in the city center without being



Figure 1 Political poster stating "Immigration is Invasion" (2016)

¹ The waste crisis in Rome was caused by the blockade of a plant where the Ama (the main operator dealing with the management of environmental services in Rome and Italy) carried 300 tonnes per day.

continuously, and sometimes forcefully, hassled by swarms of “*vucumpra*”². Rome is showing all the consequences of years of ruthless exploitation, recently brought to the light with the scandal of Mafia Capitale, in which alleged crime syndicates misappropriated money destined for city services (Rainews, 2016).

It is undeniable that immigration, or better the problems in managing it, deeply shaped the face of the city. When I arrived, Rome was in fact struggling to handle the relentless influx of “transiting migrants”. Between 300 and 500 people outside of the assistance circuit for asylum seekers arrived in the city every day (Putigano & Mastrandrea, 2017), aiming to push forwards their travel towards northern Europe. With the borders closed, many ended up trapped for lengthy periods in an unwanted, unwelcoming city, often ending up in the hands of traffickers and of the organized crime. Many of the migrants refused to go through administrative channels, preferring informal and temporary solutions to avoid being registered, as many do not have the pre-requisite to ask for asylum and others are afraid of incurring in the ‘first country of asylum’ principle³. While many humanitarian organizations were active in the area, the attempts of setting up a haven for the transiting migrants were often repressed by the local administration. An example, often in the middle of the mediatic storm, is the case of the Baobab Experience⁴, a self-managed center (Pistilli&Camilli, 2016) opened to give temporary shelters for the passing migrants. The building “*represented the awakening of the collective consciousness. The answer of the civil society of Rome in front of the arrival of the refugees and the*

demonstration that hosting without speculation is possible” (Brigida, 2015). The structure, already overcrowded despite the endless efforts of volunteers and local association, ended up being cleared out, to give the structure “back to legitimate owners”.



Figure 2 Migrants in front of the Baobab Experience (Oltremedianews,2016)

² Literally meaning “do you want to buy” in a mocking African accent, the term refers to illegal (but tolerated) street vendors of any nationality selling various types of products.

³ Meaning that a country can reject a person’s asylum application if they have already been granted protection by another country.

⁴ <https://baobabexperience.org/>

While the Municipality promised to find a solution, an alternative was not offered and more than 200 people were left in the streets (DellaPasqua, 2016).

The construction remained empty, abandoned and unused, while the residents were forced to live in an improvised *tendopoli* (tent city) behind Tiburtina train station. Deprived of the most basic services, the community lasted for about a year thanks to the contributions of associations and individuals. The state was of dismayed as the facilities to give even the most basic hygiene were lacking, the clothes could not be washed and had to be burnt and scabies started spreading. The rapid decay of the condition fueled trafficking and nourished the local crime scene.

The fraction of Ostia, where I am going to work, is not any better. At the contrary. The first thing I learn is that the whole place is under high commission for “the *interference of Organized Crime on the Administration*” (Costantini, 2016). Many of the local beach sites have been closed down for collaborating with money laundering and mafia related activities. Even *Libera*, the beach site that was taken away by the organized crime grasp, has been taken. Now it’s barren land. There is literally a Mafia war going on in the streets, I learn, while my brother drives me to meet Filippo, my contact within *Affabulazione*. “*What a shit place*” he comments while we drive on the seaside street “*Are you sure you want to go there?*”. I ask him why, of course. “*Those are the Case Rosse⁵, don’t you know. The council houses. People go here for drugs, for the heavy stuff, not just the weed, like the Vittorio. It’s where the Spada (local mafia family) kept their torture garage (Filippone, 2016). There was dude infected with HIV that spat at people, if they did not pay. They arrested him last week, didn’t you hear?*”

We are a bit early. We stop in front of the Vittorio Emanuele, sit down on the beach for a coffee. My brother is still nervous. I am surprised. It really doesn’t look like a crack den, especially the gracious beach side Café’ where we are sipping our Espressos. Luca shook his head, pointing to a man sitting next to a flower pot. He bends over the grass, observing the yellow little flower shining in the morning air. After a couple minutes, he extracts a transparent plastic bag, obviously containing drugs, and better place it within the plants. My brother kicks me under the table and gestures me to look away.

(Extract from my field notes, 29/04/16)

⁵ Red Houses

2.2 Peripheries

The Roman suburbs have often been at the center of social change narratives. Starting with the neo-realist films of Visconti, Germi and De Sica, De Santis, passing through the studies of Ferrarotti and Maciotti, the descriptions of the great Roman writers as Moravia and Elsa Morante and the prophetic genius of Pasolini, the roman periphery was source of artistic and academic fascination for almost a century. Often born spontaneously and unofficially, the first *borgate* – small agglomerates of houses outside of the historical walls – used to group the outcasts of modernization (Scandurra, 2015).

The parliamentary inquiry of 1951-52 on poverty in Italy recorded 93,054 people living in improper housing in Rome. In addition to the barracks, caves and ruins, many buildings of the Regime were used and occupied. Between 1948 and 1954 there were on average 40,000 people arriving in Rome each year, the figure reached 62,600 units between 1955 and 1961 and 78,000 between 1962 and 1968, and then sharply decreased over the years (Ferrarotti, 2014).

This influx caused an extreme housing emergency, especially due to the scarcity of a real estate supply for the lower social strata. During those years, urbanized farmers mixed with evicted artisans and migrants from the South, creating a new complex social texture.

Even if characterized by abandon and structural backwardness, the historical suburbs were not place of desperation and disenchantment; at the contrary, they were places full of hope, solidarity and ingenuity. The traditional *borgata* is long gone: in the eighties, modernization and consumerism reached and assimilated the outskirts, giving back the suburb to the city and the city to the suburb, “bourgeoisising” its inhabitants and breaking the old ties of trust and solidarity.

It is easy to draw a parallelism between the golden era of the *borgate* and the modern condition. In the 1960s, the mass influx of immigrants from the central and southern regions of the country - whose rural economies are progressively dissolving - results in very significant effects on the local political system. While the migratory fluxes now come from behind the channel, they are still causing emergence of a new class structure within which new forms of 'exclusion' and 'marginalization' are developing. As well, the housing emergency for people with lower incomes is still an extremely hot topic. Part of the involvement of the organized crime in “the red houses” stream exactly from this problem. It is

interesting to notice how the one of the main political parties fighting immigration (the Northern League) was previously advocating secessionism as the only solution for the north/south divide. Due to these similarities, after years of “fragmentary researches” (Ferrarotti, 2008), the periphery is once again in the spotlight as the new fulcrum of transformation.



Figure 3 Ostia on the map (Google Maps, 2017)

2.3 Ostia

Ostia was never an official “Borgata”. The neighborhood was founded in 1884 near the remains of Ostia Antica, the port city of ancient Rome. It started its development the Fascist regime, part of Mussolini’s plan to create “The third Rome” and was thought as an elegant and sunny “garden city”. It reached its grandeur in the 60’s thanks to a massive modernization process (mostly in the residential area), becoming the main balneal center of the capital and a full out status symbol for the times.

Ostia is now far from its golden age and its now part of the abandoned limbs of the Ancient City. While hardly the most attractive shore of the Italian coast, it is still a lively and diverse area. It is one of the biggest

fractions of the city, with around 95.000 citizens. It is divided in two districts, Ostia Ponente (Eastern) and Ostia Levante. The touristic area is situated in the center and is associated with well-being and social normality. The apex of degradation and decay is situated in the Eastern Side, where “red houses” stand as the front

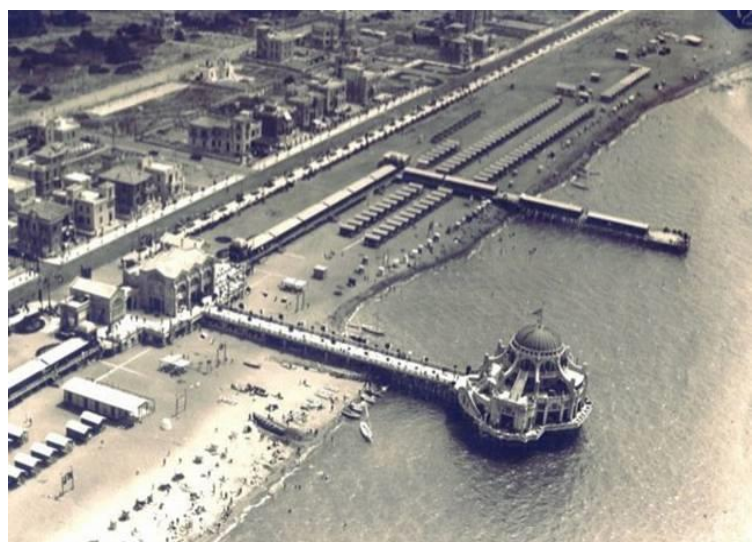


Figure 4 Aerial Picture (cira 1950s) From: facebook.com/romasparita.

door. This is a very partial representation, as the two realities seep into each other. The center is still an active tribute to summer and entertainment, hosting shops, squares, pubs, bars, theatres and events, neglect and carelessness are impossible to cover up. The sea is majestic and dark for the grey ferrous sand, the relentless pollution, and the coastline is hard to grasp behind the over (and often illegally) grown structures of fancy private beaches resorts: the free access/no facilities ones are rare, swarmed with bodies, unkempt and mostly far out from the center. In the nearby umbrella pine woods families and children relax under the sun, careful not to venture too far in its shadows, now hosting drugs, homelessness and exploitative prostitution. The streets are broken and dusty, mangled by the roots of the ever-present pines decorating every roadside. Many of the pre-war have been converted into libraries, cinemas, apartments blocks and schools, but the majority is literally falling to pieces due to the lack of maintenance. As already said, the local community is speckled and dynamic. Squares, football fields, beaches, bar and pubs are just some of the main gathering areas



Figure 5 Ostia from the pier (2016)

2.4 Entering the Field

Admittedly, coming back home was not exactly my first choice. As many other in the field, I entertained the fantasy of exploring an “*exotic other*”. I had plenty of choice, even within my own city, as in Rome each district, neighborhood and municipality is characterized by its own specific subculture. It is interesting how, when abroad, it happens from time to time to find the eventual doodle on the wall stating Rebibbia Rules. Not Italy. Not Rome. *Rebibbia*. A very specific district of the capital, a “*string of paradise clutched between Tiburtina and Nomentana. Land of mammoths, shiny tracksuits, imprisoned bodies, and big hearts*”, as written on a mural by local artist ZeroCalacare. Same for Ostia, San Basilio, Primavalle, Tor Bella Monaca, Pigneto⁶. Each chunk of urbanities tends to consider themselves as entities removed and somewhat abandoned by *Mamma Roma*⁷.

To implement my, admittedly, over-ambitious plan, I needed support. Finding in a very short time a group of people diverse in age, ethnicity, political and religious beliefs with an interest in visual art and willing to work with me for an extensive period wasn't an easy task.

Therefore, I contacted all the cultural associations in the area that I could find an email for. I should have not been surprised when the only positive response I got was from the Socio Cultural Polyvalent⁸ Center Affabulazione. Born in 1992, it served as aggregation point for “*all categories of people: young people, immigrants, the disabled, the elderly, the minors and the adults*” (Affabulazione, 2014). It is constituted by several local realities that, with the method of co-management, deal with the maintenance and improvement of the area and its cultural bloom. It offers a huge variety of services, including courses (art, languages and technical skills), clubs and counselling.

Even with Affabulazione's support my plan failed miserably.

While the programme was well received from both individuals and local institutions, I had trouble finding participants available in the required timeframe. Partly, it was the summer. Even when working, people's minds detached, focused on the heat, the sea, the sun. On

⁶ Historical Rome's neighbourhoods

⁷ Mother Rome

⁸ intended as multi purposes, with a wide spectrum of interests

another hand, it was my slanted assumptions: I expected to find the rich, sundry scene of my teenage years, but I found myself sourly disappointed.

There were no more teens with mismatched hair, painted nails and clashing socks to do back and forth from the double glass doors. The majority of Affabulazione's members seems to be well over forty. I spend my first day shaking hands, chatting around. The atmosphere matches the deject of the town. I am genuinely surprised. I speak with Leandro, the founder of Efo&Awa⁹, Cristiano, the organizer of Affabulazione, Katia, his younger partner. They all seem a scared and a bit lost. They smile nostalgically when they tell me the story of center birth by the will to fight and the love of the arts, but you can tell they feel quite tired. (Extracts from my fieldnotes, 04/05/2016)

I was not the only one suffering from a lack of participation: as already mentioned, many other organizations stagnated, struggling with the lack of hands, energy and will necessary to push their activities forward. As I would discover soon after, the scene of my adolescence faded with the time. A generational gap, looking more and more like a canyon, left a tired lead of forty-something contrasted by a small wave of short-lived movements, led by a new youth with a very different approach to social struggle, impact and change.¹⁰

On hindsight, it might have been one of the reasons I was welcomed so warmly. I was not an outsider, but a prodigal child. Filippo, one of the most active members and organizer of the self-managed theatre *Il Teatro del Lido*¹¹, introduced me to everybody as “a visual anthropologist”, causing me to blush, and squirm, and add the eventual “in training” after every awkward encounter. In a time plagued by brain drain and demotivation, I was a success story. The fifteen-year-old with the bad dye job that “made it”.

After coming to terms with the poor outcome of my recruitment attempts, I realized that if they could not get them join me, my best chance was to join them. I dived, nose first, in the

⁹ Local NGO that collaborates with developing countries, especially Senegal, to enable national and international cooperation <http://www.efoewaonlus.org>

¹⁰ It is important to precise that there are indeed other younger social movements active in the area. Those observation are specific to my informant's associations. The topic of the generational difference in approaching social change would need more specific research.

¹¹ Translated as “The Theater of the Seaside”, it is located in the former Vittorio Emanuele III, sharing the space with the Socio-residential center (here referred as “Vittorio”)

life of the area, taking part in any possible activity or event.

Between urban cleaning operations, public concerts, political rallies, art exhibitions and social panels, I got involved with founder of Efo & Awa Onlus Leandro Marzullo and cultural anthropologist Amedeo Pistolese, responsible of the Master in Intercultural Mediation held in collaboration with La Sapienza University, and Filippo Lange, coordinator of *Il Teatro del Lido*, in the project aimed to facilitate the “rehabilitation” of the socio-residential center in the former marine colony Vittorio Emanuele III, recently brought back in the eye of the media and in middle of the pre-election political storm.

2.5 Vittorio Occupato

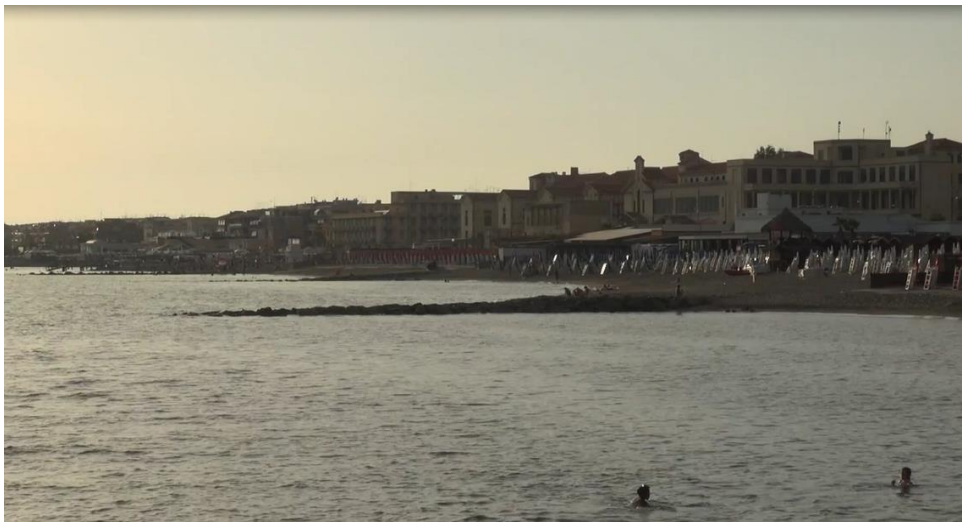


Figure 6 Vittorio from the Pier (2016)

The Vittorio Emanuele is an encumbering presence. It stands tall, in the middle of Ostia, extending for a good chunk of the seaside. It almost as big as a small neighborhood, its tiny green windows held shut against the flaying yellowish walls. They are all dissimilar, sign of uneven restructuration, representing different ages, different times. It gives it an inconsistent look, that somehow fit its jerrybuilt nature. Hosting a large variety of facilities (a mosque, a church, *Il Teatro del Lido*, The Youth Hostel Litus, the library Elsa Morante, the local junction of the Caritas Internationalis as well as the socio-residential center) it is the gold hearted monster of a liquid modern age.

From now on, I will refer to the socio-residential center simply as “Vittorio”, as it is addressed in this fashion by most the inhabitants. When referring to another reality within the building, I will specify which one.

2.5.1 History

The first half of the 20th century saw a dramatic increase in cases of tuberculosis. Marine colonies were facilities built next to the sea, meant to host children and teenager during the summer months, to contrast the epidemic and, during the fascist regime, to contribute to the education of future fascist citizens (*balilla*).

The Vittorio Emanuele III was the first marine colony of Ostia and was designed by architect Marcello Piacentini in 1916. The inauguration of the building took place on January 24, 1932, in the presence of Queen Elena, on the occasion of the twenty-fifth year of Vittorio Emanuele III's reign, so it was titled after the sovereign. Everything was located on an area of approximately 16,000 square meters and divided into two distinct sections. To facilitate the movement of the children up to the sea, a still existing underpass was built, leading them directly to the beach. The complex was destroyed by the Germans in 1943 and remained inactive until the renovation was made in the early 1950s. From then on until 1983 he was employed as a boarding school to accommodate the children of the needy Roman families, before being, once again, abandoned.



Figure 7 Vittorio in the Past.

Photos from Coppola F., Fausti G. Romualdi T. *La città interrotta*, Sinesi, Lido di Roma 1994

In the early nineties, a group of Somalian families, displaced by the civil war, was evicted from a residence in the proximity of Ostia and left to wander around in the streets. A group of young radical left wing activist, part of the *Coordinamento Cittadino di Lotta per la Casa*¹², fighting for the right to housing, opened the abandoned church of Vittorio Emanuele to give them temporary shelter. There were initially about 80 people living there, but thanks to the word of mouth they were soon joined by many others plagued by similar kind of trouble. As the population grew, the occupation started taking over other part of the building, making a point in providing shelter for whoever was in need. The official recognition and the allocation of space as a socio-residential center came about after a long negotiation process, while the inhabitants of the center, with the help of external facilitators, formed the cultural association Shaka Zulu. This was the first experiment in Italy where the custody of a public space was entrusted to a community featuring 13 different ethnic groups. Not without difficulties, this organization provided some sort of self-management, coordinating the efforts and the exchanges with external and internal realities. This worked well, thanks as well to the effort of the local association Affabulazione and the *Teatro del Lido*, helped to organize many cultural and artistic initiatives in collaboration with the area. With the economic crisis, everything changed, as the need of emergency housing grew led to the occupation of the shared spaces, bars and offices of the center, quickly setting into chaos the already unstable management hold by Shaka Zulu. As a more hostile city administration closed two of the biggest youth points of referral within the building, the *Teatro del Lido* and the social center within the church, the lack of "external" points of reference, coupled with the deep socio-political unrest and the departure of Luca, one of the pillars of Shaka Zulu, turned the Vittorio in an isolated chaotic body.

2.5.2 Modern Times

As migratory fluxes increased, more and more people came in looking for shelter, many of which unwilling or unable to fill up the paperwork to become an "official" residents. This caused the flourishing of an occupation within the former occupation. The lack of paperwork also prevented the migrants access regular jobs, contributing to the growth of small rackets, generating a "bed market" as well as encouraging drug dealing and "illicit business. In the

¹² Litterally translated Citizens's Coordination For The fight For the House

summer, especially, friends, relatives and acquaintance of the resident peddlers temporarily move in to take advantage of the close by crowded beach, feeding in the already mentioned phenomenon of the “*Vucumprà*”. While only a minority of the sellers lives within the building, the so called “*pannocchiarì*” (corn sellers) occasionally put their carts in the courtyard of the Vittorio. They are not residents, but a good exchange of money, a small necessary tax, can cover the unauthorized rent of a public space.

The lack of policing also provided fertile ground for criminal activities. Drug dealing and drug abuse are painful realities, and while they mostly related to the distribution and the consummation of “soft” substances (weed and smoke), the degradation of the area attracts many external sellers. During my time in the field even one of the biggest supplier of heroin of the City (usually based in other districts) moved in for a short period of time.

This caused understandable tensions with Ostia’s residents. In fact, “*the middle-class person looks upon the slum district as a formidable mass of confusion, a social chaos*” (Foote Whyte, 1955) and regards it with a mixture of fear and morbid curiosity.

While we play with the children, I am painfully aware that we are being watched. The people that pass from the other side of the wall crane their neck to peer inside the wall. It’s not an easy task: the tall bars are built in a way that makes it impossible to pry unobserved, as finding the right angle is indeed incredibly hard. It feels like being in a zoo.

(Excerpt from my field notes, 31/05/16)

Many of the inhabitants also reported different episodes of power abuse from the local authorities and complained about the armed military patrol often stationed just outside of the entrance. There also have been act of outright aggression from right-wing extremists, requiring the residents to take turns guarding the gate. The place is also at center of political and mediatic attention, as the elections approach and the Vittorio became an obvious target for many campaigners.

For example, in May, Matteo Salvini, leader of the Northern League, enter the building and film a video stuffed with untrue and misleading information (ex. he states that the full building is occupied, while it is only a small part).

We are checking Ostia, that of course full of good people, not only mafia. Here we are going to witness a shame, an entire building, took by hundreds of Rome and migrants. Here, let’s start from the Mosque. I wonder where are the Institutions that kick out Italian citizens that

cannot pay the rent. Here.

We are in Italy, but the images we are going to see have nothing of regular and Italian. (..) Look, it's like a small city. There should be something of public order, like a University. This is like a neighborhood, not an apartment building. And check, occupied building in front of the sea. Look what an amazing view. The hundreds and hundreds of people have a fantastic view.

There is almost nobody, they must be out of work. Because they work, gather iron. Yes, sure, they totally pay taxes, right. They are filling up their 730 now.

Here, look, in your face, that pay taxes, utilities.

And look at the sea. I am so jealous. I would love to live in such a place.

(Originally filmed by Matteo Salvini, published by Ostia News Go, 2016)

Other attacks come from the right-wing movement Casapound, whose representative states “Former colony Vittorio Emanuele is a structure that should be the flagship of Ostia but for years have been left in an unacceptable state of degradation. They have been here for twenty years, and all the administrations not only did nothing to send them away, they kept paying their utilities with taxpayer’s money. CasaPound will take only two weeks to give back the building to the Romans.” (*Il Corriere dell’Citta’*, 2016)

With the battle cry “Italy to the Italians” nationalist’s groups clamor for national citizenship, with its implied set of duties and privileges, to be the primary criteria to establish who has the *right* to the city and, in this specific case, to the Vittorio. This is what Pfaff-Czarnecka refers as “regimes of belonging” – the price to pay for belonging together. Regarding national citizenship for example, civic duties, especially paying taxes, are considered the “right” form of reciprocation. The failure – or



Figure 8 Poster advertising a protest in favour of the eviction of the Vittorio's inhabitants (2017)

the choice no to – do so can bring serious consequences for the individual, pushing him in a fringe of precariat.

The inhabitants of the Vittorio represent for many Ostia's residents the epitome of "Otherness". Associated with crime, disruption and chaos, similarly to the people of Cornerville described by Foote Whyte (1950), they find themselves clinging to their already fragile identity landmarks. As insecurity is the only certainty, groupism and aggression arise. Conflict is always behind the corner as the Vittorio's inhabitants fight each other over resources (as for example space, bedding, selling areas) and believes.

To contrast administrative and social rejection, Affabulazione, Efo&Awa, Amedeo Pistolese and the students of the Master in Cultural Mediation trying to act as facilitator in the creation of another organization, a New Shaka Zulu, able to recreate the social intercultural safe place the Vittorio had been. It was during one of those meeting that I met Angela.

3. Angela

3.1 Gaining Access

She is a small woman. At the beginning, you wouldn't tell. She fills the space. Maybe it's the way she moves, with a smooth sort of confidence that would fit a much bigger body. The self-assurance of a predator, I notice. Uncaring of her size, she stands like she has nothing to fear, like if she owns the place. I saw her in very different circumstances. As a spectator at theatre, at the port sipping a coffee, in Affabulazione, talking conceitedly with Filippo, in the middle of heated fight right in the middle of the Vittorio. I observed her from afar, unable to pinpoint her role. She never changed stance. She felt home everywhere.

It struck me.

(Extract from my field notes; 17/06/16)

We started to chat idly during one of the events organized by the Master in Cultural Mediation. Around us, the kids were running around like frenzied firecrackers.

I am an artist, she said. She showed me the picture of the swimming suites she made, painting on them with oil colors and some of her paintings. *I studied art here, a La Sapienza, but also Paris. My stuff ended up on fashion magazines, as well.*

When I first approached, her I did not know she lived in the socio-residential center. I assumed, wrongly, that she was just another member of Affabulazione. She did not match with the other residents I met. She was a woman, she was Italian, she was educated, she dressed simply, but with a youthful and elegant style. Her hair was short, platinum blond, cut in a fashionable and modern way that gave away nothing, apart from a not uncommon an anarcho-chic vibe. Even her speech was changeable: she switched between the jokingly vulgar register characteristic of the Roman dialect and a high end formal vocabulary without blinking an eye. She did not bear any of the sign I expected as a result of a difficult, unstable life.

At the beginning, she did not like me. I was too polite, too soft, too open.

“Did you know him?” “No.” “Then don’t do it.” “Do what?” “Don’t smile, don’t say hi. If you do it, you are inviting them in, giving them certain liberties. If you are not sure they deserve it, don’t.”

(Extract from my field notes; 04/07/16)

She pushed me away. Her mood changed like the weather in a spring day. Her edges were rough and she did not have much patience for any sort of tentativeness, treating formality with suspicion and mistrust. She kept testing my limits. I didn’t budge. I took any reproach with a laugh and shrug. I did not let her shock me. I made a point out of it. The more the time passed, the more I felt confident. I started to know how to take her, adapting to her tone and her mannerism, so typical of the Roman suburbanity. She was amused by my modern use of the dialect, often incomprehensible for the older generations.

I also managed to fit in well with her friends. I opened for whoever she introduced me, took whatever she threw me. I let her see, little by little, that I was not that fragile.



Figure 9 Angela (2016)

After a while she started to warm up to me. Not only her, but also the inhabitants of the area. As people started recognizing me as an ally, one of Angela’s, the tightly shut door of an entire subculture started to open. Many residents of the Vittorio started to wave at me from the other side of the street, stopping to chat when they came or left for work. The fruit sellers right next to the entrance of the

center made a point in feeding me basically at any hour, while the shop owners in the area became a little more generous.

My presence stopped being questioned, at least by the insiders.

I was glad to be liked. Angela started showing me off, sharing her spotlight, including me in her constantly jokingly bickering. If somebody felt like having stepped over the line, she intervened saying somethings on the line of “Nono, she is like this, for real. She is always ‘scialla’ (modern dialect expression used in different contexts meaning “everything it’s all right” “Chill” “it’s not a problem”)” She always smiled a bit when she said that. I like to think she was a bit proud.

Angela was the perfect informant. She was open, curious and generally happy to have me around. Of course, she also enjoyed the attention. Her artistic character, groomed through a life gravitating towards art and theatre, did not shy away from the spotlight. She knew she had a story to tell and she was happy to do so.

3.2 A life’s story

She is driving. She is always driving. She never stays still, and I am happy to follow. It’s dark outside and I genuinely enjoy the air of the night. We just brought home one of her friends, after a night in one of the fancy seaside bars, nursing the disappointment of Italy losing the Europeans football match with a Mojito.

You know, I didn’t want to be born. When my mum said: “I had nine hours of labor!” I always answered: “Did I ask you? Did I?”

Her laugh is rich and hearty.

Angela was not born in precariat. At the contrary. She is not fussed, when explains “*When I was young, I had everything. Not the excess. Really, I had a very good childhood*”.

Other than a good childhood, she had access to a privileged educational path, with the possibility to study in University, both in Rome and abroad. She specialized in fashion and design and she was quite successful in the field. She show me the label she made for beer brand, the costumes she made for theatrical plays and explains that her models had also been featured in specialized fashion publication.

Angela herself interpret her own life as a process of transformation and she embraces it.

“I tried everything. In a period of my life, crime and rackets were a daily occurrence. You have to know how to behave, how to act. I found myself in terrible situations. Like very bad. There was this friend of mine, I had to bring her away in my arms. There was all the chance to get killed. But I managed. And I even saved people. I realized that this is a wolf’s world.

You have to wake up. Otherwise they are going to eat you alive. Some people know that Gianni is in jail. How are you, they ask? But they say that in that ambiguous manner. People like that, that think that if you are alone you are done, they always take advantage. But even if I was to go by myself as I did in the past... I am not taking any shit. You are not getting near to me, that’s it.

The art, the work, the street, the drugs, the prison, the resistance, the good life. Angela is the prototype of Bauman’s “liquid modern” man. She flows through life shifting from one social position to another. She talks about class wars while sipping Cabernet Sauvignon, she gets her nails made, painted in bright colors, and she examine them while talking about private vendettas and micro -ethnic war exploding just a few meters from her door handle. She talks about freedom and she reminiscence about her time in jail. Her speech is as fluid as her memory. She jumps from a topic to the other, from the past to the future, mixing drama with jokes and deep cultural insights with half smiled generalization. She sees herself as far from complete, yet, so she is not scared of transformation, even a physical one. She adapts, both socially than physically, arriving to the point of altering her appearance in order to better navigate her environment

Once they mugged me and Gianni. I had very long hair, up to my waist, and this guy grabbed them and started pulling. Since then, I cut them off. I looked like a boy.

So why she is living a situation of precariat? When I asked her, during one of our meeting on my grandmother’s house balcony, she stopped a second to look at me over the brim of her wine glass.

It’s because I am like this. I am thirsty, for knowledge. Doing always the same thing, how boring would it be, don’t you think, Valenti’?

It was her way of moving through life that fascinated me. Her capability to accept uncertainty and take advantage of it, instead of struggling against the tide or seeking refuge in pointless nostalgia. Her attitude really stood out in the ocean of catastrophic perspectives I met up to that moment. In that moment, I knew she was the perfect informant.

4.Theoretical Framework

4.1 Initial Approach

Not only my project was unable to start, but I also realized that my initial assumptions were completely wrong. The concept of *amoral familism* was developed within an isolated immobile community, with a strict social hierarchy and a defined demography (Banfield, 1950). Ostia, Rome, Italy, on the other hand, are swarmed by “nomads” of the body and the soul. The migrants inhabiting the Vittorio, for example, are forced to live in a fringe of uncertainty, an existence of the shadow, as they are often unable to obtain permission to live and work regularly within the country, often due to the fact that they do not own any document, and are not able to access to basic civil rights. The local business owners, like Linda (Angela’s hairdresser) or Carmen (the owner of the watermelon stand nearby the Vittorio) struggle with the crumbling economy and are unable to plan in the long run. The unemployed members of the Bahia’s group, instead, found their skills unwanted and redundant, and even the ones with a job struggle in finding purpose. The modern landscape seems to be constructed on wavering identity marker, rooted deep in precariat, instability and constantly changing places, jobs, spouses, values and even political and sexual orientation. This continuous process causes people to be “tourists” (Bauman,2006) in their own life, unable to orientate themselves even within what is supposed to be a familiar background, as everything change all the time, including themselves.

Not even the concrete, is able to resist the continuous overthrowing of perception. Ostia’s walls, in fact, change drastically in the space of just a few days, as political poster, graffiti, murals, improvised art, symbols and necrologies piles up and get torn down. Private beaches, bars, building of any kind are opened, closed, removed from the end of an alleged criminal, given to another, abandoned, rebuilt, exploited, destroyed, burnt down, occupied, freed, stolen again and again.

The Vittorio itself could be read as the “living” representation of the failure of modernity’s need to categorize and domesticate, a monument to the reality of liquid modernity. The building, born in an era characterized by an extremist and fanatic yearn for order, with a single perfunctory function, became an uncontrollable hydra of contrasting purposes, an incoherent uncontrollable ever-changing patchwork that pulse in the heart of Ostia. Each new structure which replaces the previous one as soon as it is declared old-fashioned and past its use-by date is only another momentary settlement – acknowledged as temporary and ‘*until further notice*’ (Bauman, 2006).

As for the wall, new elements pile up on people’s lives every day, over and over: new governments, new believes, new products, new people. The inhabitants are forced to drown or to adapt and are stuck in a crazed carousel of reinvention This continuous process causes people to be “tourists” (Bauman,2006) in their own life, unable to orientate themselves even within what is supposed to be a familiar background, as everything change all the time, including themselves.

4.2 Belonging

I had to reroute, necessarily. The inclusion of multiple narratives, reaching beyond not only national and ethnic boundaries but also classes, social status, profession religion, political belief, also call for a new theoretical framework to explore the forces beyond social cohesion. To do so, I intend to borrow the recent analytical redefinition of the concept of “belonging” recently developed within Migration Studies. Used mainly in pertinence with integration practices and power negotiation between “host” and “guest”, belonging is a “thick” and dynamic process, *constructed and negotiated along multiple axes of difference*, that highlights commonness but not necessarily sameness. (Youkhana, 2016).

Joana Pfaff-Czarnecka defines belonging as “an emotionally charged social location that combines (1) perceptions and performance of commonality; (2) a sense of mutuality and more or less formalized modalities of collective allegiance, (3) material and immaterial attachments that often result in a sense of entitlement (Pfaff-Czarnecka, 2011) , making it the ideal framework to understand not only the condition of the Vittorio, but also the interplay between individual and collective practice, including positional movements and social boundary-work. As highlighted by Pfaff-Czarnecka in her article *Multiple belonging and the challenges to biographic navigation*, a ethnographic biographical approach is optimal to capture the

multilayered nature of belonging. She advocates the necessity of the study of individual pathways of life against the backdrop of collective dynamics, feeding into the “*recent efforts to challenge groupist assumptions while doing justice both to individualization as well as to the dynamic processes of collective boundary-drawing and communitarian positioning*” (Pfaff-Czarnecka, 2013). This is necessary because the concept of belonging is inherently embedded within a deeply emotional discourse. Attachment stands at its very core, as it “*links people to material and immaterial worlds*” (Pfaff-Czarnecka, 2011). For the same reason, the arena plays an extremely important role, as it is not possible to achieve a sense of belonging without engaging with the space both as a social and physical entity. The anthropic *landscape* in fact is not a simple containing physical space but it is an unremitting construction site, with complex internal and external relations. This perspective is made more evident in the corresponding English term, which combines the word land with a verb of Germanic origin, *scapjan / shaffen* meaning transforming, modeling (Ceccarini, 2009).

4.3 Social Fields

Considering the anthropic landscape as a historical, non-homogeneous socio-space makes necessary the explorations of the aggregate of social relationships that it encompasses. Those “bounded system of interconnection” are referred by Grønhaug, elaborating on (1978) as social fields. Grønhaug says that the field can be read as a social market in which actors have the possibility to make use of their capital. This also include power relationships in the discourse, as people with more capital have access to more possibilities and can successfully navigate multiple social field. The capital can be economic, social or cultural. While not limited to, generally the economic capital refers to financial resources, the social to the networks accessible to the agent and cultural encompasses predisposition acquired through experience (Borideau, 1986). Each field has its own currency of favor and “exchange rate”, established trough sets of nomos that extend through that specific field (for example the aesthetic field that values cultural capital and in some sense, discourages economic capital etc.) Fields are continuously constructed and established, can be either autonomous or interrelated, overlap and have a hierarchical structure (Bourdieu, 1990).

Italy, for example, can be considered as macro social field, encompassing its administrative and cultural aspects. The administrative social field overlap with the concept of *de jure* citizenship, offering services and rights as resources in exchange of financial and cultural

capital (ex. Taxes and respect of the law). The cultural field may overlap with the administrative one, but its *nomos* is more concerned with the sets of tacit knowledge associated with the idea of Italianness (ex. Verbal and body language, but as well small things like boiling the water before putting the pasta in the pot). There are infinite micro fields that go from a regional scale to purely individual ones, as it can be discussed that as little as two people are enough to build their own social field. None the less, the fields are hierarchical and the rules that affects the higher-ranking one's transfer to the smaller. For convenience, I will refer to the fusion of the administrative and cultural fields forming the Italian one as “center” or dominant fields. It is necessary to notice how this hierarchy is all but set in stones, as in a liquid modern context is characterized by continuous change of allegiances (Bauman, 2006).

5. Methodology

5.1 Biographic Navigation

While focusing on a single informant was far from my initial choice, I was brought by the circumstance to drop my other informants. I do not regret it as, not having to divide the already limited time of my fieldwork, I had the possibility to focus, passing through the subjective, on the emotional and the temporal aspects of social navigation.

Biographic navigation is an analytical tool introduced by Pfaff-Czarnecka that adopt the study of “individual pathways leading out of collective confinement in marginalized social positions” to examine social mobility and boundary-making (2013). It is especially relevant in liquid, superdiverse environments, as it permits to the transformation of the predicaments of belonging during a timespan span, whereas the role of the memory is particularly relevant in its construction. Memory is in fact one of the ways in which *‘the self-attempts to anchor itself in this changing world of people and things’* (Prager, 1998: 125), that is, to achieve a sense of belonging. Nostalgia, in particular, plays an important role as act as a ‘defense mechanism’ in the face of change because it can help *‘maintain a stable identity by providing continuity’*, thus offering protection *‘against the feeling that time passes quickly, leaving no trace’* (Niemeyer, 2014).

5.2 Participant Observation

My primary method of investigation was participant observation. The method helped me to gain a nuanced understanding of context, making contact with the social agents influencing the field (Bourdieu, 1986) and challenging my initial assumptions. It was also useful to find and select the informants.

While I used a mixture of structured—recording of physical and verbal behaviors of subject – and unstructured-- observing and active listening to complete immersion in the group – participant observation, I maintained an open approach to field discovery.

Using what MacDougall refers to as “deep reflexivity”, intended as the act of continuously reflecting upon, reevaluating and revising his own positioning within the field (1998), was necessary to navigate a fragile reality like the Vittorio’s, where a moment of insensitivity could have resulted in the endangerment of my protagonist’s – and my own – personal safety, as well as a disruptive force within the field.

For example, issues arose when I befriended a young girl whose parents were in deep contrast with Angela. Her father was also known for episodes of violence. They soon began questioning my relationship with Angela, badmouthing her in any possible occasion and digging out old grudges. I found myself in a difficult position and, not wanting to take any sides, I decided to interrupt my involvement with the family after the adults attempted an aggression against Angela during the night. Their attempt was unsuccessful, as many other residents stood up in Angela’s defense. While I was not directly involved in the episode, I still decided to back out to avoid aggravating any further balance issue.

I also needed to be aware of my position as a young woman in an environment constituted by a majority of lonely marginalized men. Angela herself warned me, at the very beginning, but she was not the only one. I was aware of episodes of rape that happened in the past within the Vittorio’s premises, that pushed the inhabitants to resort to their form of private justice and fueled internal division and further violence.

Even the interviews are more akin to very long conversations between friends or a stream of consciousness. I actively encouraged the digression, more than constructing or even trying to keep on a specific track, causing the text to be fragmented, disconnected, somehow jumpy, as descriptions of dramatic situations are interrupted by idyllic chitchats about movies, books and

general knowledge trivia. While this approach made data extraction somewhat harder, I still believe it was invaluable for the success of the research as it produced an extremely complex and rich text. As Sarah Pink writes, "research practices are also influenced by (...) new understandings of what might constitute an ethnographic 'field'" (2011). The line between "ethnography" and "vacation picture", idle chat and core information gets thinner and thinner, as the richness of the material lays in its spontaneity, in how its apparent chaos that reflect its context. Past and present, hopes and fears, imaginary and reality entangle in words as much as in the images, in the nuances of behavior.

5.3 The Visual Way

A visual approach was vital for this research. It would have been almost impossible without, due to the already mentioned erratic distribution of information. The possibility to re-examine the material post field proved vital in order to extract and pierce together the piece of the puzzle, often lost in the heat of the interaction.

Is interesting to notice how, even when filming, it was impossible for me to "unengage" from my environment. Angela, as many others, had the tendency to interact with me more than with the camera: they reached out for physical contact, moved around a lot, dragged me along in the vortex of their daily life. The easy movement of the camera was crucial. . The convenience of a handheld device allowed me to carry it along wherever, including the many brisk walks around Ostia or the improvised trips around the city. While this "spontaneity" may have somehow problematic for the aesthetic form of the filmic document, it was optimal to record information. Me taking notes, in fact, would have heavily slowed down the flow of information, maybe even controlled and pandered it, while in this way they kept flowing naturally and limiting the manipulation of the same from the subject.

This level of extemporaneity surprised me. I expected the mechanical eye, in all his technological inhumanity, to put more pressure than the researcher's gaze and produce a much more Brechtian material. With this, I don't want to advance the pretense that I could have recorded my subjects in their "natural state". As Sarah Pink writes "people in a video are always 'people in a video' (2006). While the researcher can be momentarily forgotten, it is much more difficult to hide the intent of the mechanical eye of the camera, as "it is usually impossible or inappropriate to video-record people or culture 'undisturbed". The filmmaker

cannot escape the attention and thus eliciting a “polluted” reaction. After all in front of the lenses, the subject had the certainty to be watched, not the panoptical suspicion.

The power of the visual research does not lay in absolutism, truth or even possible ethical sterility. The cinematic eye was no more a way to see the reality, but as a way to create a new particular truth. While not “pure” or completely spontaneous, the act of self-representation brings a valuable flow of information about the individual, the context, his experience. The performance is nevertheless “real”, and thus meaningful. The critique, in terms of ethnographic knowledge, centered about the difficulty of distinguish when someone is “acting” versus “being” in the same space as a camera

The camera had also an important role in instigating the unfolding of the action. The catalyst role of the filmic text manifested through the need for an aesthetic product, as it “forced” us to travel to the physical location. The confrontation with the physical generated a different emotional response compared to a structured interview.

Important to notice how the device also caused quite a ruckus, as it was not small or discrete enough to go unnoticed. The tension of the socio-political climate within the heavily affected my fieldwork. The camera and especially the backpack turned out to be extremely limiting not only regarding my movement within the Vittorio, but also in the “main” society. The suspicion towards the media seems to have grown exponentially, as the question “Are you a journalist?” was usually asked with the same tone most people would say “Is that a maggot?”. Also, due to the recent terrorism threat the bag started drawing the attention of the police and the military troops stationed around town. Whenever I wore it I ended up stopped by the police whenever I was in proximity of a public transport, usually for several times, as they checked the content and the authenticity of each equipment piece. Due to my southern Mediterranean somatic trait, I was as well asked for documents and questioned about my nationality. The abundance of armed forces in the street turned out to be a problem as well, as whenever they suspected to be filmed they promptly asked me to delete the material. I am still not entirely sure if it could count towards power abuse, as I could not find any specific law referring to the forbiddance of capturing the images of the police or other on duty armed forces. The situation improved drastically when I started to use my DSLR camera’s backpack, more compact and less obvious, sacrificing part of the equipment in favor of a much higher mobility. While troubling and annoying on the moment, the reactions to me and my instruments ended up being revealing symptoms of the climate of unrest and the lack of trust people felt even towards any mediatic source.

5.4 Reflexivity

An anthropology of one's own people is the most arduous, but also the most valuable achievement of a fieldworker", wrote Malinowski in 1939. In fact, if the researcher come too close to what he is studying, he incurs in the risk of "going native", risking to fall in a partial understanding of his own predicament.

None the less, as Schiarato very clearly explain in *Understanding the Visual* (2004) our vision is never unbiased. And it is not due to the means be it film, writing, recording or just the raw unfiltered looking. Through a system of inclusion and exclusion, hierarchies of meaning and specific cultural imaginary associated with the signs, to produce meaning we enact an active form of editing while reading the sensory items that surround us. This sensory selection is far from monolithic as it varies from individual to individual. Cristina Grasseni define "looking is a technique of the body, culturally inculcated and socially performed" and that "any schooling of the eye result in a sensibility." (2007) An individual way of seeing, for Grasseni, is based on the different set of skills we acquired during our life through a process of apprenticeship that results in what she defines as "skilled vision", intended as an additional meaning making process coming from specific training and aimed formation. The specific number and the quality change from person to person, depending on how many exposures they have. They manifest as tacit knowledge and are gained through training, exercise, context, peer review, repetition. Through seeing and unseeing, looking and interpreting, we are shaping our unique understanding of the world. Ethnography can thus be interpreted as a process of creating and representing knowledge (about society, culture and individuals) that is based on ethnographers' own experiences (Pink, 2011).

I started to notice things. It's funny, how I never realized how distant my parent's home is from Ostia, how isolated we are. I always considered myself a city girl, but as the lenses take in sunflower fields, the edge of the pine wood and the old corpse of a farm, I start to question it. It staggers me, how the different areas of the X Municipality are. detached, almost segregated, from each other. The landscape I was so used to when I was a teen, feel hybrid and alien through the mechanical eye.

Using a visual approach also allowed me to put the necessary distance between myself and the field, necessary in order to observe something meaningful. (Willerslev, 2000).

6. Before

6.1 Ostia

We are sitting in her room. It's one of the first time I enter the building. I am tense. Outside there is a storm, making the air electric. The room is not small, but it's messy, cluttered, stuffed with clothes, paintings, colorful memorabilia. Il Biondo, an old Pitbull with a light fur and big soft eyes, is sitting at the feet of Angela's bed, his tail lazily hitting the floor with broken rhythm. The walls are colorful, painted with sunflowers and waterweed. The old window creak and moan, abused by the wind. There are motifs of faces all around. Masks, painting, shirts, even fridge magnets.

It fits. It is a suitable room for somebody that lived, *three four lives*.

She sits at the table, making space for me and the camera. She offers me a sandwich and a cup of wine, that I accept gladly. Hopefully it will bring some heat in my bones.

We chat while eating. I am holding the camera next to my chest, I film the whole time. She does not seem upset. At the contrary. I can tell she is enjoying her time. After all, she has a story to tell.

When we arrived, it was the beginning of the nineties, I think, Ostia ended here. There was everything. They shot somebody there, on the walking path. It happened a lot. They found a girl from Netherlands as well, dead on the beach, and we saw the scuba divers and the police, bringing away the corpse. You know that ballad, that went like Do you remember Lella, the rich girl? (It was about Ostia. You couldn't come here alone. It was not safe. Now, compared to then, it's a flower.

When there was the first rave here, at the Idroscalo I was around. They were organized by SpazioKamino, have you ever been there in the nineties?

ME: I am from 1992.

ANGELA: You were just born then. There were so many occupations then. There was this huge one at San Giovanni, I remember. Here the strongest here in Ostia were us, the Vittorio, and SpazioKamino. It was more underground, based on the word of mouth. We had so many initiatives, we were brought together.

In an article by local newspaper *Dagospia*, Matteo Meloni, in art Swaitz, describe 1990's Ostia in a similar fashion. *"In the beginning of the 90s the air was terrible. There were waterfalls of heroine, many did not go to school, everybody stole at least a scooter. The legality did not arrive to Piazza Gasparri, box ring for Fascists "baldies" and communist "ticks". Places like SpazioKamino, situated in the ex-general markets (now transformed in a children play space), were hotspot of the rave culture. Once we attached an old Fiat Panda to the ceiling, with the wheels up. We dyed it blue, like the police's car, and we wrote at "pigs" on the side .A party lasted days, everybody was involved. Punk, coatti¹³, even the kids of the Roma Bene ¹⁴We felt united, it was our Golden Age. We were a mess but we were a new generation, out of certain categories."*



Figure 10 SpazioKamino. Photo from <https://noisy.vice.com/it/article/spazi-di-comunione-spaziokamino>

¹³ Coatto is a regional term from the Romanesque dialect, with joking and sometimes irrational use, to indicate a rude, arrogant individual, vulgar and unguarded, living in peripheral, suburban areas in the boroughs.

¹⁴ High-middle class families, coming from the expression "nato bene" – meaning "well born", of "good birth".

6.2 The Social Centers

6.2.1 History

The occupation movement for housing purposes was a phenomenon that also affected, albeit with specific aspects, many European countries, to a greater extent Germany, Great Britain and the Netherlands since the seventies. What made the Italian experience unique and different from the others was, first and foremost, the political connotation that provided an ideological basis for the movement. Even the protagonists were different: if in the rest of Europe occupation was a practice generated mainly by younger generations, driven by the desire to emancipate from a traditional family environment, in Italy the first occupations served to answer at first a housing demand of workers' families and, only later, in order to create participatory self-management experiences.

It is important to clarify the concept of “*centro sociale autogestito*” (Self managed Social Center). It generally refers to a structure, previously abandoned and sequentially seized by collectives and non-profit associations. Usually, it is run by a collective of people who meet regularly at public assemblies to discuss and decide on the management of spaces, themes and projects proposed. It focusses on offering social, cultural, recreational and sometimes residential services. While their presence is irregular and illegal, they are mostly tolerated by the state. Usually the conflict is resolved through the legal recognition and the legalization of the place or, eventually, with the eviction.

The social centers are generally linked to a countercultural (radical left, extra-parlamentar left, anarchists) discourse, in Italian denominated as *antagonista*, but in recent year there has been a rise in *right wing social centres*, especially around the capital's area. They can be classified in *Centri sociali Autogestiti*¹⁵(CSA), *Centri Sociali Occupati Autogestiti* (CSOA) when referred to places run by left wing activists, and like in the case of the network related to CasaPound Italia, *Occupazioni Non Conformi* (ONC) e *Occupazioni a Scopo Abitativo* (OSA). The divide is extremely important, as while being somewhat similar in structure and even share some common causes (ex. Cleaning up the area, helping people in need), they come from polar political creeds. Over the forty years, self-management experiences have multiplied throughout the country: many centers have contributed to the revitalization of

¹⁵ *Self-Managed Social Centers, Occupied Self-Managed Social Centers, Not Conformed Occupations, Occupation finalized to Housing*

“dorm neighborhoods” (housing only) by offering different types of services or by engaging in cultural and artistic activities. While chaotic and not deprived of extreme situations, including crime and drug abuse, the occupation of the 90s had an extremely interesting aggregational character.

6.2.2 Insurgent Citizenship

The Social Centers play an extremely important role in my fieldwork, starting from Affabulazione and the Vittorio itself, as a “liberated space” taken by the collective *Coordinamento Cittadino di Lotta per La Casa*.

One of the leader of the movement, Luca Fagiano, said in one interview:

“In the fight I discovered a new way to imagine this area and my life. We occupy the houses to free our time. Our life from precariat. To reclaim a piece of life. I am an educator; I make 900 euro per months. If I paid rent, I would have the life of a slave. I wouldn’t have time to read, for culture, for politics and family. At the same way, we are against for example the TAV project¹⁶ as in that case, the state is imposing to the area a project that the area does not want. The city is ours, we are going to take it back, and with it a better life”

Occupation (and relatively trespassing) is one of the most obvious act of insurgent citizenship, as described by Holston (2009), and the most obvious actors of the process of auto construction of the city. Contesting space-specific cultural codes in fact produces a confrontation between two citizenships, one insurgent and the other entrenched (Holston, 2008). It is as well closely tied with the narrative of the protest, occupied building also become urban protest actors, as the protesters are space producers, able to manipulate places, produce new one and assigning new meaning to them, as their status of “liberated spaces” makes them, in this case, inherently political and contrasting the dominant organizational logics (Piazza 2012). Occupancy is undoubtedly part of the auto construction process of urban peripheries, (Holston, 2008). The protest itself is an emotionally *intense and cognitively innovative events that can contribute to construct the “sense of place”* as well as a sense of collective purpose, attachment and identity.

¹⁶ Treno Alta Velocità SpA (or TAV) is special purpose entity owned by RFI (itself owned by Ferrovie dello Stato) for the planning and construction of a high-speed rail network in Italy.

6.3 Vittorio Occupato

Angela was proud, almost bragging when she stated:

For me, the Vittorio is an open book. Just think, me and Gianni we went until the end of the Vittorio passing from roof to terrace. Not even the people that have been living here for 20 years know it as I do. When we took this place, it was untouched. Gianni and I entered from the first window and we found everything from the Institute. Even if it had already been pillaged, we found beds, gym equipment, dishes, cutlery, glasses. Gianni, went here when it was an Institute, didn't I tell you? He always tells me how the nuns abused them. I know both the roofs and the basements. Everything is interconnected, even if they (who) built new walls with the time. When the Ufficio Tecnico¹⁷ came here and needed to do something, they asked us how to reach a certain space. They are technicians, they did not know. That's why we had a good relationship, I always helped them. Even now, you know, the toilets have been acting up, both here and in the hostel next door. But they don't know how to fix it. The catch basins of the hostels, some of them are here, not in the hostel area. They don't know that.

The sense of ownership seeps through Angela's words. With her knowledge, she makes a declaration of tenure, demands her "Finders Keepers" legitimacy by appealing to her intimacy



Figure 11 Vittorio as a social center (early 2000)

with the building, denying at the same time the one of the State. It's also interesting to notice how Angela, when talking about the place, often uses a very technical, almost archaic vocabulary, casually, referring to the various parts. She uses her deep knowledge like a weapon. Anybody, with less of an understanding, is not a valuable source and cannot, in her eyes, contest her

claim. Her entitlement seems almost righteous, when compared with the administration clumsiness in understanding and consequently handling the Vittorio's issue. Thus, also show

¹⁷ Government branch responsible for the planning, construction and maintenance of the building property of the Municipality.

the detachment of the administration, the issue in effectively creating an arenas where “government-initiated participatory politics aim to reduce the distance between politics and citizen” (Lebuhn, 2015), widening the gap between de jure citizenship and de facto citizenship. Angela’ expertise put her on a practical level in a higher hierarchical position, as she considers herself almost a benevolent guide. It can also be considered as another way to exert her claim, her right to the city and to the space, in exchange of her services.

6.4 Building an Identity

The kids of the area entered where we were. It was dangerous, it was all old rusty metal. We always went to take them back. We always warned. We have always been protective with the kids. That’s why, even now, if I find one of those kids they would go “Angela and Gianni, Angela and Gianni...” We were an institution for them. Us, personally, because we knew how to move around. And if we saw that you were getting hurt, we went to take you back. Just think that once we were sleeping there, and it was all on in the open, and there was this kid that guarded us all evening. When I woke up I was like “What are you doing?” and he said “I was checking that nobody hurt you.” It was nice that way.

Then in the 2000 the building was restructured, in occasion of the Giubelem. They passed the concrete, from this room, exactly. So, it happened that they asked us to go away...well, not really asked, they just told us to go. But we didn’t. So, to not be sent away, we remained on the construction site, moving around as they went on with the works. We said “You can do this part” and the moved all in another. And then another. And then another. So we have been a bit everywhere, and wherever we went, we had to fix. It was a disaster, the pigeons ruined everything....

We had different things. We had a bar, an office, a dining room, huge kitchens. We also claimed a part of the beach. Other people of the social centers, like the ones in Casal Bernocchi,¹⁸ working with people with Down Syndrome, came here and we stayed all together, coming here for dinner or lunch. Once we also had a 10-day summer camp with the International Service. That part was a working site for the building of the port. They left in a terrible state. We took ages to remove all those damn rocks.

¹⁸ Area of the X Municipality

Entering, encroaching and finally lodging in the Vittorio, representing in its abandonment an institutional taxidermy, both Angela, the *Coordinamento Cittadino di Lotta per La Casa* and the kids of the area endowed the “*space with an amalgam of different meanings and values*” (Routledge, 1996). While moved by different reason, the shared experience of occupation and protest, allowed the creation of a complex landscape, intending the latter as a process of flows, “*where combinations of memory, action and meaning are complex and performed together*” (Dorrian and Rose,2003). For Gianni, for example, taking back the place that reminded him of sad traumatic time, when he was at the bottom of a highly hierarchical power structure is a exertation of power. Reshaping the space, by moving the rocks for example, but also just by the act of *being* there, caused a physical and emotional investment. In this case in fact the performativity(Butler, 2014) is inherent in the material quality of the bodies, as it does not only allow the creation of solidarity, but it also play a key part in its consolidation through external validation. For example, refusing to leave when ordered by the State, the occupants forced the administrative forces to build around them, thus recognizing and consequently legitimizing their *de facto* presence.

It would be limiting to attribute the solidarity between the inhabitants of the Vittorio only to a localist factor. Many of the elements included in its narrative, in fact, shared a degree of precariat, being it economic, social or of political nature. For example, a good number of the first occupation were displaced Somalian families and other migrants, that lacked social and political recognition, encompassing access to basic services and access to regular jobs, condition shared by the poor/homeless Italians that ended up living in the premises. Angela’s (and all the others radical left activists) do not necessarily share the same issues of the migrants or the needy, but their antagonist ant-structural approach led them to willingly participate into the precariat. Angela, for example, recalls “*Me and Gianni were some of the few active Italians in here. We were active part of the old Shaka Zulu. Everything started from us, the cleaning, the protests. There were others, but many were just using the place to sleep. Many left. We went to Ponte Galleria, to protest the permanence centers, where they kept the migrants that could not ask for asylum and had to be sent back. They called them permanence, but it was more like detention in the facts. They came to take them here, sometimes, and they bring them there. That’s why we fought. And we got it all...tear gas, beatings, everything.*” While not necessarily economical, the risk of being imprisoned due to their subversive behavior was perpetual.

Solidarity in this case “represents the main social and economic strategy to cope with rapid transformation and insecurity” (Trefon, 2007). Angela recalls: “Our concept was the one of a family. I worked for three years at the Cecchignola (ndA local military base), coordinating the canteen of the non commissioned officers. We had those giant pots of food, and I always brought the leftovers home, so we could have a dinner, all together. My coworkers knew, at the military base, and always saved stuff for me to bring home. And it wasn’t only me. You know, some shop throw away their food after a certain hour, so we got organized and we went to take it. And not only food, even concrete in case something broke, or paint or other things. We found a way.”

Mutuality, and subsequently attachment, is enacted through the division of responsibilities as the group relied on the contribution, while not necessarily equal or structured but based on the individual’s capacity. In this case this form of *organic solidarity* (Durkhem, 1964) allowed the inhabitants not only to connect effectively between each other, but as well with other realities of the area.

6.5 The Antagonist “Us”

Social movements, and thus their manifestation in the form of protest, can be understood as ritualistic practices, as the aim to bring society through a process of transformation. In Turner’s anthropology of the ritual process, the liminal is the second phase of a three-stage ritual process, where the participants no longer hold their pre-ritual status but have not yet begun the transition to the status they will hold when the ritual is complete. As the statuses are yet to be defined, it is characterized by ambiguity and consequently by freedom, egalitarianism, communion, creativity and more importantly *potential*. In this key, modernity can be understood as perpetual state of liminality, for example, as it is not moving towards a *fine ultimo*.

While not necessarily effective, the participants of take up the role of the disciple, pass through the phase of liminality, suspending their individual identity to complete the ritual, creating this way the social space of *communitas*, an organizational structure characterized by homogeneity, equality, lack of status, and anonymity (in direct opposition with society, characterized by heterogeneity, inequality, status differentiation, and nomenclature).

It’s exactly thus state of *becoming* that permits favor the formation of an ideal state of equality, characterized by egalitarianism but not necessarily sameness. While there were significant difference among Social Centers (political, organizational, regional, cultural), even

within the same squat, it did not” *prevent sharing collective identity and solidarity, and therefore adherence to the movement* “(Piazza, 2011). The harmonization of diversity happens through a practice aimed to the minimization of power structures (Boni, 2006). This heterogeneous collectivity, “defined by shared action and behaviors, coordinated and finalized” (Boni, 2006) manifest through the use of an undefined “We”, entrenched in the speech of the protagonists. Angela, Swaitz and Luca. While their path crossed as some point, they are extremely different individuals, but while discussing they almost never refer to a specific “I” but settle to an ambiguous, indefinite “We”. This “we” is at the core of the antagonist narrative. It indicates a pluralist subjectivity, a sense of active belonging, it leaves space to many interpretation of where to write down the boundary between insider and outside. It diverge from “normality” through the modality of socialization, the rejection of the wage culture, the political dimension. The subversion needs to be found in the interaction between this attitudes and the value they express. Only a factor won’t be enough to define the “us”, only in their composition it will create a coherent identity The multiple elements characterize a diversified belonging and open to multiple solutions. Sharing is none the less a main value in the daily; life of the Us. It’s a spontaneous sharing, not authoritarian, external to institution and outside hierarchical structure.

6.6 The Fall of the “Us”

Piazza (2011) places the first signs of the coming undone of the social centers as a movement at the beginning of the 1990s, as the debate on the role of the social centers and, more importantly, their relationship with national and local authorities started to rise. Some accepted political mediation with public institutions, in order to receive legal recognition, while other opposed any such contact considering it “*not in agreement with the principle and practice of self-management*” (Piazza, 2011).

While some resisted, many of the centers got reabsorbed in the institutional fabric. This was the case of both Affabulazione and the Vittorio, that was assigned to the actual residents in the early 2000s. But it wasn’t only the building to be regularized, but the same activist. Angela smiles, as she comments on how “*We were like loose dogs. And now it’s weird, you see many of them working in the government, wearing a suit. The movement does not exist anymore. Now, I think that the social centers went out of fashion. It was considered hip, to be part of a certain political side. Radical chic, that’s what they called them. They evicted and cleared out what was left*”.

The ritual came to an end and the initiand are re-incorporated into society with as a “new” being (Szakolczai, 2009)

7. Now

7.1 Human Entropy

Vittorio’s case is slightly different. The fragmentation was only partially caused by the breakage within the movement. While it could have affected the estrangement of the members collective *Coordinamento Cittadino di lotta per la casa*¹⁹ the antagonist us was drowned by entropy. While the organization started to fade, the number of people seeking shelter did not. More and more human bodies started looking for a place to rest away from the eye of the law, not guided by collective purposes, but individual necessity. Slowly, the building was taken over, the area previously adhibited to associational spaces – like the canteen, the bar, the Italian School, the Office -- became temporary dorms. During the summer months, the situation is particularly tense as the Vittorio experience a dramatic demographic increase.²⁰

“There is all the new people, they are more and more, while people living here full time get less and less. In winter there are like four people that sell on the beach. Before there was the coconut, now is the cob. Now there are like twelve” says Miliana, one of the old-time resident of the place. *“They work all day and they just come here to sleep, then go away during winter. They make 5000 euro and then they go back to Ardea, Torvaianica...”*

Due to the influx of people, the Vittorio’s inhabitants are characterized by an enormous stratification. The residents have different legal statuses, different language, different rights, different purposes, ages, affiliation. The many narratives enfolding in the premise lead to a “*diversification of diversity*” (Vertovec, 2007), encompassing classes, social status, professional status, religion, political belief, not only between ethnic minority groups, but also within them, creating myriads of separated and often conflicting social fields. The

¹⁹ It does not even figure in their websites, while their involvement within the Vittorio has been confirmed by multiple sources

marginalized position of the inhabitants stops them from integrating subscribing to the dominant social field and the superdiverse character of the place hinder the creation of a defined hierarchy. The complex interweaving of old and new constantly question the attitudes towards already-existing ones, fueling new forms of discrimination (Sigona, 2016) and firing up conflicts.

7.2 Recreating the “Us”

While New Shaka Zulu could represent the much needed dominant field, able to unite through its universal *nomos* the contrasting social landscape, every establishing attempt is disrupted by suspicion and mistrust. Ethnic differences and old grudges fire up, as the need to find a president becomes more pressing. Many seems to believe that there will be money involved somehow and every ethnic group, religious minority, group of friends, want to place on the throne one of their own in order to increase their personal capital. Some of the Vittorio’s inhabitants also do not have permission to live and the premises and are part of the “occupation” and feel their position (and with it their livelihood) threatened. Others “*just can’t be bothered*”. As Miliana points out “*The people from the outside see what happens in here. I heard them, they say “It’s better if they evict them, if they give it to us that we are Italians.” We can’t even claim our own rights or disturb them in any way.*”

As they lack the inherent capital necessary to enter the conversation, in this case represented by legal rights (on an administrative level) and whiteness (on a local level), the only way they have to be able to compete for the specific benefits associated to it is joining together to raise their value as a collective. Even cats, as one of the residents points out, have more rights. “*On the news, they said that a cat that’s born in a certain place, even the strays, cannot be moved.*”

His affirmation leaves a “so, why should we?” lingering in the air.

He is immediately corrected by Claudio Rossi, professor of Migration Sociology, that came to the assembly to give an opinion as an external expert. His words are harsh.

“*They were talking about cats, not you. Tomorrow, if the Municipality decide, you have to go. You need to get back in contact with the administration to recontract. I repeat, contract. You cannot demand anything. What they can answer is, aren’t you happy that we did not bother you up to now? You even ask for things? You have to come forward with a proposal*”

Angela nods, before suggesting” *We can make classes, parties. Things to be noticed. We can*

clean the square, this one close by. It's a mess. Why don't we make an intervention? The guys from the DnA Project offered to do some street art. The Bahia offered their gardeners to cut the grass"

The proposal would not only show a form of “good will”, a promise of mutuality, but also help to dissipate the image of the Vittorio as a chaotic no-men land. It also highlights the need to reconstruct a sense of community, using the physical (in this case like a cleaning or a reevaluation of the area) to force the creation of a new social field able to include Ostia and the Vittorio as an entity. In the end Angela is elected. They trust her as “*she is not an external Italian character from the outside, but a resident, that's been living together with them for 25 years, different from everybody else.*”

7.2.1 Angela's memory

Angela, none the less, still carry the narrative the antagonist us. It is difficult, in conversation, to distinguish who is included in her “we”. Is it her and Gianni? The Vittorio as a collective entity? The one in the past or the one in the present?

Present- past relations are one of the core feature of the construction of a personal sense of belonging (Armstrong, 2004), as memory is not an objective background truth, but a deeply subjective factor necessary to the creation of identity and personality able to affect the individual and the group's circumstances and meaning making processes. Nora, in 1989, wrote:

Memory is life . . . It remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived.

While the Vittorio as a collective may be suffering of amnesia, causing a struggle in the construction of a coherent collective identity, it is still present in Angela's and many other inhabitants. Angela's individual actions in fact are still guided by the narrative of the antagonist Us:

Even now, that's what we do. Gianni is in jail. Five months, just for a bit of smoke. They came here, with all the fanfare, the masks, the suits. We have to make a census, they said. How? Why? We have the permission to stay here. We are not illegal. I don't care if the mayor of the time was corrupted or anything. We can stay here. It's a fact. An you, Police of Rome, should know. I have been here twenty years, so what, you wake up now? Then I realized that this is

one of the few migrant's occupations still standing in Rome. That one the cleared, the other was set on fire... and then you come here and there are two Italian assholes covering for everybody. Because if you send me away, you have to tell me why and where. I am going to fight you. If you take the African guy, he is so scared that he won't say anything. And you can do anything to him.

While performing certain act, she is performing the same ritual of commonality that characterized the movement. The memory is also divulged through talking, making this way narrative, which is a particularly rich form of talk, a social action able to carry cultural patterning. (Paxson, 2005)

People like Mariano, Silver, they remember me. When we speak it's great. They remember certain things, I remember others. And there is always somebody that was not around at the time, that is surprised of how much we achieved. We were like a family, we have that sort of a big family, like living in a very big house. We still are. Adamo, that live next door, always asks me if I ate.

With her action, Angela is contributing in recreating the social memory and carrying on its social purpose. In this case, memory is also deeply entrenched with the physical factor of the place, as the space it's a product, a testimony of the actions narrated.

7. 2.2 Vittorio as a Social Agent

This “spreading of belonging” in association to the physical space can be seen in one of the first episodes I had the chance to witness during my time in the Vittorio.

I am scared. Personally, I am in a situation where I need the place. I think everybody is. We need to use this fear to make us work on the concrete things, to save our ass. We need to make them understand. Because the Vittorio gave them and now it's their turn to give to the Vittorio.

The space, in this case, gain “an experienced representational value, standing as reminders of past places, people, or cultural values” (Altman & Low, 1992). For Angela, it embodies what is left of the Antagonist Us, a fortress “against the system”, but its meaning is different for every social agent, depending on the amalgam of present and past social fields that shape his identity. Is possible to argue that the Vittorio become a social agent itself. While an agent by

definition an independent entity with the ability to pursue a goal (and of course a building per se is neither independent nor able to have any objective), through projection and meaning attribution it is able to join the narrative of belonging, “performing” commonality by offering shelter and utilities. Of course, this is a bit of a stretch, but I believe it is necessary to refer to the emotional component inscribed in the narrative of belonging.

We call it as if it was a person, not a building. An individual with its own character, a somehow sentient entity. With familiarity, respect and what I can swear is a dash of affection.

(Extract from my field notes; 11/05/16)

7.3 Case Study : The Roma Family

To give an example of Angela’s relationship with the inhabitants of the Vittorio, I will use her connection with the Roma family.

I am early that day. When I arrive to the Vittorio, I found a police car stationed in front of the entrance, the lights flashing. A bored looking officer stand near the door. He stares at me with suspicion, alerted by my camera equipment. He signals me to go away. I sit on top of one of the walls in front of the beach and patiently wait.

Angela arrive after an hour. She is fuming.

It was a kid, she explains, he came here with the police and said “It was the gypsies, gli zingari, that stole my car”.

I hate it when people just come in and do gratuitous accusation. If I accuse or insult somebody, is because I can, I know them, I have foundations.

But you can’t make stuff up like this, in front of a public officer as well... It was not the Rom family. They don’t do car jobs and they were not even in at the time. Well, apart from Mauro, but he is under house arrest. So I went to the police officer and I told him, excuse me, I am from the Vittorio. He replied “Yes, I know.”

They see me every morning going in and out. They know they can ask, I can tell you that one does that, the other one is there. So I told the officers, no, it can’t be the gypsies. And the guy replied, well, maybe I did not mean these gypsies. But you are here, inside here, you are not

talking about the ones in Tor Bella Monaca. It's the Vittorio's gypsies you are accusing. I knew it was not possible it was them. Then I realized. It was the people from Chile. The guy just saw a bunch of brownish people and immediately accused the gypsies. So I told them.

As already mentioned, a widely distributed narrative that associate migrants with crime, foray and a general feel of unsafety is already vivid in the collective imaginary, fueled by the narrative of “the state of emergency” and right wing propaganda. It is also noticeable as many studies on trust, often taken as an indicator for measuring social cohesion (Demireva, 2015), show that ethnic diversity had a negative impact on trust (Harell and Stolle, 2010; Sturgis, 2010) Additionally, as Hooghe argue, “threats arising from immigration are also often based on cultural identity and the perceived cultural distance between immigration groups and majority cultures” (Hooghe et al. 2008). This is even more valid for the members of Roma community, referred in Italian as “*zingari*”. The term come with a negative connotation, as recent study conducted by the Extraordinary Commission for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights found that 80% of the participants saw the Roma people as “*thieves, dirty, disrespectful of our laws*” (2011), matching often the dialectic of the incarnation of evil. The Vittorio itself has been referred as “*a gypsy hideout*” both in online comments and in Salvini's propagandistic video (Ostia News Go, 2016), revealing in both cases a skewed narrative of misconception.

There is in fact only one Roma family living in the premises, but both the Vittorio and the Roma culture share a closed off, inaccessible status, that encourages the creation of an exotic, belligerent Other, a dehumanized scapegoat to bring down in order to achieve a nostalgic (and illusory) ideal of order. As Angela's points out, the accusation is not towards any other Rom, but the Vittorio's Rom. The narrative of the building and the one of the ethnic group entrench, as both represent an unforgivable sin, a painfully obvious rupture urban fabric.

Angela's reaction, as well, place in the spatiality, in the physicality of the place, the first sprout of solidarity/ allegiance. In fact, she defends her own, the Vittorio's, while she has no problem in helping the law to identify the actual culprit even if it belonged to another migrant subgroup.

The episode also showcase Angela's position as a “cultural broker”, as she intervenes “for reducing conflict” by “mediating between groups or persons of differing cultural backgrounds” (Jezewski & Sotnik, 2001) and belonging to radically disconnected social

fields. In this case she is able to draw from both her social capital – the acquaintance and the recognition (Bourdieu, 1992) given to her by the authorities and her status of Italian citizen -- and from her cultural capital -- the knowledge of the area and its dynamics, as well as her “whiteness” (Dolby, 2000). It is interesting, how the police, representing the State, the legal force, the administration, still recognize her influence as a social agent and recognize her capital– thus legitimizing – Angela’s informal role. This opens a grey area, a meeting point, between *de jure* and *de facto* citizenship (Holston, 2009), a liminal space where different practices of belonging can interconnect and thrive.

Another day, I found her already outside, smoking next the beach’s wall. She seems tense, her body language stiffer and more to the point than usual.

Let’s get going, let’s get something to drink. I had a rough day.

She says. Soon after we drive to my place, where I offer her a cup of white wine.

I have been in the hospital all day. They called me, yesterday night. Mauro, the gypsy guy at the house arrests, cut his arm open. I am not sure, don’t know the details, but there was a fight and he hurt himself. We had to bring him to the hospital.

His mum asked me to come today, as well, to talk with the doctor. When I arrived, they told me he was going crazy. He woke up at 3 pm and started resisting, saying they were going to inoculate him and kill him. I asked if he was high, but he said no. It was a lie, I don’t know if she knew or not. I saw that on the analysis report, it said he had coke and amphetamines, in his blood. I guess it makes sense. Because it hurts, when you cut yourself. But if you are high, it hurts tomorrow.

Trust is in fact “essential for individual and social flourishing” (Shionoya, Yagi & Leopold-Wildburger, 2001). The majority of studies on the topic, the most eminent of which is by Robert Putnam (2007), find that diversity is detrimental to trust, both across and within ethnic boundaries. This statement does not keep in account a super diverse narrative, where diversification is taking a vertical stance, more than horizontal *in short, they are inequalities* (Mintchev & Moore, 2016).

As recent research shows, one of the many detrimental effects of income inequality is that it creates social distance and lack of empathy (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2010; Dorling, 2014) and

social inequality do indeed transcend ethnic diversity, that only appears to be problematic *for majority white cohorts who grew up with less direct and indirect contact with ethnic minority groups*. In this specific case, both Angela and the Roma family share the same uncertain landscape, and need to rely on each other for an effective ‘social navigation’, concept that Henrik Vigh’s presented as an efficient way to understand how people “*act in difficult and uncertain circumstances and (...) how they disentangle themselves from confining structures, plot their escape and move towards better positions*” (2006).

Therefore, they called Angela, asked for her help, relied on her social and cultural capital for the interaction with the administration, the normal society, the outside world. While being not completely honest about the drug use, they still allowed and encouraged her to read the report and liaise with the doctors. The reaction of the individual show fear and paranoia for the administrative side, that while it may have been drug induced, it may also come from another source. After all Mauro had the possibility to get acquainted with the darker part of administration, spending more than some time in prison before being promoted to house arrest.

After another wine sip and a casual selfie, she shows me a picture of a newborn, his small little hand tightly holding a finger. I recognize her bright nail polish.

This is Zarfa’s baby. Look at him, it’s super cute. This is the first finger he grasps, for the first time ever. Zarfa is the sister of the young man, the one that split his wrist today. Theirs is a complicated culture. They are calm with me, not everybody. At the contrary. They recognize my role. If they don’t, you can do whatever, but they won’t. But they respect me. They came when Zarfa was like six. Now she is twenty eight. She was always following me around, I remember. She was always asking, can I come? Can I come? And I was like, yes, you can come, but let me go now. Zarfa always says: “Angela is like a mother for me”. I guess, I am, a bit. When she was young she spent more time with me than her mother. So she took up some of my way of thinking. She think in a different way from the others. She has a way to see, a way to analyze...

The guy that is in house arrest, I am one of the few that can talk to him, calm him down when he has a fit. They also have other three young boys.. I saw them grow. One, in particular was always ashamed of being a gipsy. The other did not care, but at beginning we went to the

Caritas to get the clothes, and he was like let's hide, there are my schoolmates.

The father is Rom guy, born in Italy. That time that the guy accused me of stealing money, the husband of the drunkhard, I don't know how but he was immediately next to me (unclear sentence). I don't know how or why, he did not know me at the time, because he was in jail. So he just arrived. But they talked to him about me, so it's like he always knew me. So he protects me, now that Gianni was not around. He came down immediately, so fast, and helped me out.

The relationship between Angela and the Roma family started at on purely physical level, as they shared the same space. Living together, little by little, their narrative mixed, mashed and influenced each other, transforming their relationships and creating a strong emotional network. With time and the creation of a shared experiential memory, their relationship gradually extended over the boundary of the individual, entrenching with the family dynamics, establishing trust, solidarity and ultimately belonging. This phenomenon is especially tangible in Angela's relationship with Zarfa, as it evolved from neighbor, to friend, to kin, with the epitome being the welcoming a new member of the family in the world, honor usually reserved to members of the family.

As their social and economic capital is extremely limited, the Roma family act as a group, limited, pulling together their resources to navigate multiple hostile social fields. The protective act perpetrated by a member she did not personally know, can be seen as a trading in the social market, with the Roma family ensuring their access to Angela's "cultural brokerage" in exchanging for what they can offer in the form of embodied cultural capital – physical protection.

This exchange establish mutuality through *more or less formalized modalities of collective allegiance* (Pfaff-Czarnecka, 2011,)—see the exchange brokerage/protection -- rooted in the daily performance commonality, subsequently generating attachment – both material and immaterial (the place/the people), forming ties of *organic form of solidarity* (Durkheim, 1964) as well as a sense of belonging (Holston, 2007).

While this is a specific case, during my fieldwork I had the possibility to see many different individuals and groups sharing the same attitude towards her. This, is no means, an exceptional or isolated case.

7.4 Beyond the wall

Angela does not live a marginal existence. At the contrary. As already mentioned, her social and cultural capital are outstanding, making her able to subscribe to multiple social fields. Within what Roberts refers to as “*the center* (meant as the adjoining overlapping social fields of various scale that extend within the narrative of national/legal/*de jure* citizenship), she even receives a special treatment, related to her informal *de facto* role. For example, at the local touristic port, locus of expensive shopping, modernist fashion and polished twilight aperitifs, every store clerk greet her with more than a perfunctory smile, they talk about their children and their day, with familiarity, trust, before giving her a new swimsuit to try on another special product they saved “*just for her*”.

7.4.1 Case Study : Bahia

The Bahia, formerly called La Buca (the Hole), is a small little private beach straight in front of the Vittorio. Swarms of vendors slide in the crack between the bodies, offering small pieces of coconuts, roasted corn, cobs, hats, massages and colorful bracelets. In the water the kids yell and howl, jumping between the rocks from the top of the broken pier. The statue is still there, steady and colorful. In the darkness, it really looks like a person standing in the shadows.

(Extract from my field notes, 05/07/16)

The Bahia is a convergence point. Bordering with a small stripe of *spiaggia libera* (free beach), favorite choices for migrants and the Vittorio’s residents, it keeps its distances thanks to a hip appearance and matching sets of umbrellas and chairs. None the less, under the agonizing August’s sun, the differences fade, lost in the swarm of tangled bodies, sweaty



Figure 11 View from Bahia Beach (2016)

limbs and puffy hair. It's a mash, a pulp, impossible to say where and who starts or ends. Only the sellers stick out, their stock colorful, their clothes thicker. They are so common, so persistent, that are considered almost part of the scenery.

Angela goes to the Bahia, on the private side. She spends her 6 euro to get a bright red plastic beach chair, to stick next to the ones of her crew. The core of the group is mainly composed by Italians, all living more or less in proximity to Vittorio, some even coming from the infamous *Case Rosse*. They're a flamboyant bunch, diverse and creative. It's hard to pin them together, the gap in age, genders, interests, extremely wide. There is Domenico, that likes to dress up as a woman, the fame hungry Presidente, Sandra, the petite nymph with the jealous boyfriend and the hoopla hoop, Franchinino, born with a rare malformation and a great sense of humor and Alessandra, the strong guard with a cracked confidence and a fierce smile. The group is loud, almost obnoxious, always concurring to push the boundaries, a little bit further, a little bit more. They dress up with colorful wigs, sparkly clothes. They mimic and mock, nothing sacred, nothing safe, exaggerating femininity and ethnicity in their improvised plays. They gather the attention, jump to the eye, while cheerfully pushing each other on the coast and dragging both adults and children in their unusual charade. And if somebody is unhappy, bad for him. They just laugh and tease harder, with an almost malicious sense of satisfaction. *Strafottenza*, they call it here. More than a word is a concept, impossible to translate literally, that include a mixture of playful and cheeky arrogance, a sort of self-aware sense entitlement, traditionally associated with the suburban Roman culture. This behavior reflects the group's outlook regarding rules and normativity of the dominant field. This attitude, I would discover later, is not bound only to the occasional summer prank, but imbued every aspect of their – and Angela's – ways of life, extending to touch darker issues like drug use and alcohol abuse. The beach goers join the game or quietly turn on their belly to work on their tan. In stark contrast with her life in the Vittorio, Angela and her group of friend enjoy a comfy lifestyle where the aperitif ²¹at the kiosk after the end of the day it's a more of a ceremonial than a casual occurrence.

The beach, in Italy, is not only a place, but a full-fledged ritual. Bathing in fact was a practice that developed at the beginning of the 1900, representing the shaping of a new social model,

²¹ In Italian, *aperitivo*. It's food ritual with social connotations propaedeutical to the dinner. It usually involves the consummation of light snack, wine and/or cocktails in company of friends.

as *Stabilimenti*²² and promenades start to pop out on the shoreline, transforming *la balneazione*²³ in an elitist form of free time (Storia della balneazione e nascita degli stabilimenti, n.d). While at the time it was strictly connected with social statuses, the connotation persists, giving every specific beach site its own personality and subsequently its own specific crowd (also due to the differences in price/facilities). The choice of the beach determines your specific group and creates a multiplicity of interconnected “seasonal” social field, with flexible sets of *nomos* and years long networks of ties equiparable to full-fledged kinships.

In this specific case, the space is stuffed to the brink with different fields that overlap and affect each other, still constricted within a thick hierarchy, in this case based on seniority, frequency and participation. Many of the Bahia’s crew members have been coming to the place for “*more than ten years*”. Angela in particular, exerts her claim on the area as she has been there “*the longest*” and even contributed, in some way, to its development: “*this was a working site for the building of the port. They left in a terrible state. We took ages to remove all those damn rocks*”.

Her sense of attachment and belonging to the beach mirrors, both for narratives and dynamics her role within the Vittorio. For example, during one of the many aperitifs, for example, Sandrina stated that Angela, for her, is like a mother figure: “*I feel like I could tell her anything. Even if I did something awful, that I could not tell anybody, I know that with Angela it will be fine. Because, I feel like her love is mother like.*”

He is lying on the tanning bed. His feet are not bleeding, but the dark shape of the thorn is pulsing under the reddened skin. Franchino shrieks in pain when Sandra firmly grabs his feet to disinfect it. “The thorn is still there” points out Angela, peeking over her shoulder. “Do you have tweezers?” She asks to the small concerned audience that gathered around. I join the group in a small session of saddened shaking of heads. “Maybe, maybe...” says Angela before digging in her bag. She finds them, in the end, and joins Sandrina in her mission, not without ordering the lifeguard to bring her a bucket full of water. He immediately complies and a few minutes later to the side of the saddened men. Now and then people stops and

²² Private beach sites

²³ The social practice of bathing

keep him company through his suffering. Soon it becomes a joint mission, and while some removing the thorn by the back of the suffering men's feet.

While Franchino happened to be the unlucky protagonist of the torn episodes, I am quite sure that a similar scene would have occurred for whoever else (me included). In Bahia's case is harder to identify a specific modality of trade in the social market, as the exchange does not have a practical – or immediate—outcome and neither of the party *needs* to rely on the other for their own survival, as in the Vittorio's case. In the Bahia's social field, people looks “beyond themselves and engaging in supportive or helpful actions without expecting a reward” (Gaunlett, 2011). They are not only “knowing actors”, aware of the values of community and mutual support, but they are also connected by a deep sense of belonging. The spatial connection in this case mimic the case of the Vittorio's, as the sharing of space and daily practices contributed to gradually create a sense of community and belonging, manifested through the act of commonality and mutuality illustrated above as well as resulting in a sense of attachment and care.

8. Building the future

8.1 Bridging the gap

He is a cute child. The five-year-old boy looks like a big eyed Balotelli's (the football player? Which has a special position in Italy, being the first Black on the national team? Or?) miniature complete with mini Mohawk. He is adorable. He knows. She knows. He holds her hand while strolling down the wooden runway, toward the beach, with the flare of a star. He sings and dance along to the Spanish popular tunes, without missing a bit. The beach goers are all over them. “Who is he?” they ask. “He is one of ours. Not mine no. Not quite. From the Vittorio.” She smiles, she is proud. You see? Even in that mess, something nice can bloom. And it's also a bit about me, because he is not my son, not in my blood, but we are both part of the Vittorio and the Vittorio is part of us. (SS)

Omar lives in the overcrowded mess that is the Vittorio's third floor. There aren't many other children there, especially not in summer. The majority help their parents at work or roam around town in the chocking heat. Omar's mum is a hairdresser, somewhere in the city center, more than two hours away by bus, more sometimes, depending on the congested city traffic. In winter, he attends a school in the premises of his mother's workplace. In summer, he roams

in the third's floor corridors, under the not-so-attentive watch of his acquired uncles. Angela takes him, sometimes, bringing him along to the beach or to the children events at the theatre.

As already established, the Bahia is a somewhat neutral ground, theoretically open equally to the citizen of Ostia and the Vittorio's inhabitants, policemen and military members, drug dealers and potential customers. None the less, the "posh and stylish" set up and the outrageous prices draw an invisible line between different social statuses. Bringing Omar with her, showing him off with pride, Angela does not only openly manifest her allegiance to the Vittorio, actively contributing in piercing different social fabric together, but also puncture the neutrality of the Bahia as the owner, the staff members and the clients coo over the child and take in Angela's "version" of the Vittorio

It is important to specify that it was not just an isolated event. Another example is her birthday party. It was my last day in the field, my plane booked for the next morning and I felt like I was finally looking at the complete puzzle. Everybody was there. The Bahia's group, her hairdresser, the lady of the Chinese restaurant on the other side of the streets, Affabulazione's, some of the Vittorio's inhabitants. The barriers between the group faded, unidentifiable, barely perceptible. I am struck by the sense of community that's been created, the intensity of the collapse of parallel line of existence finally meeting.

The Last Supper. It looks like the painting. Angela sits at the center of the long table, spread out in the square of the Teatro del Lido. In front of her the leftover of a feast, a opened bottle of white wine, a small pile of gift left on the side. To her sides there is her court, mingling and chatting in the air that already smells like September. She sees me. She smiles. "Happy Birthday, Angela!"

(Excerpt from my field notes, 28/08/16)

Bourdieu writes that fields are characterized by their own sets of *nomos* and that "the boundaries of a field are demarcated by where its effects end"(1990). In this case, Angela is able to flex and extend the limit, introducing multiple new social agents and thus created a new social field, with its own sets of laws and meaning. Through her *habitus*, she does an "occupation" of the social field, prompting the other agents to acknowledge and renegotiate limits and boundaries.

8.2 Angela as a Cultural Entrepreneur

She is not only a cultural broker, advocating in behalf of another individual or group (Jezewski & Sotnik, 2001), but also a Cultural Entrepreneur, a “*cultural change agent and resourceful visionary who organize cultural, financial, social and human capital, to generate revenue from a cultural activity*” (Anheier, Cunningham, Isar & Paul, 2008), in this specific case with the revenue meaning the increase of the set of resources available to her subscribed fields.

She is also well aware of her position of power as an influencer. In fact, from a social and cultural perspective extremely wealthy. She is also perfectly aware of her capital. With her “thirst of knowledge” she refers to the antagonist tendency to favor cultural capital over economical, as well as the preference for a more diverse social one. She actively increases her social capital by offering her support and gaining legitimization/reputation from multiple social fields while the experiential feeds into her cultural wealth, allowing her to form an extremely strong *habitus*.

I won't change anything in my life. This is my experience, my baggage. If I didn't have it, I wouldn't be me.

When her power is not recognized, she can get extremely upset. While she embraces her peripheral position in the central social field (not paying rent, not being a tax payer), she considers her services to society to be as worthy as her paying taxes. I have seen her reacting badly in multiple, apparently trivial instances, as being asked to move away from the stairs during an event in Il Teatro del Lido, being treated coldly by a new cashier while purchasing a water bottle at kiosk in Bahia, getting denied access to the private parking lot at the port.

“Doesn't he know who am I?” she hisses, before talking her way in.

Similar displays happen in the Vittorio as well, as she confronts disruptive elements. For example, she had a fight with a drug dealer that bragged of “*having a house, a big Villa*” and “*coming to the Vittorio just to work*”.

When we talk about it, later that night, she says: “*Go sell crack in your Villa then. What are you coming for? Just making us look bad?*” she shakes her head. “*You have to respect the building. Because I took it, I feel like it's mine. I care. But they treat it like a prostitute. Everybody come here, do their filthy business and then leave. They can't do that.*”

While Angela holds a considerable power, she also has great stakes involved. In order to belong she had to pay a price, in the form of years of social, financial, cultural and emotional investment. The Vittorio in particular can be seen as the product of her efforts, constructed not only through the simple praxis of living (Holston, 2009), but also engaged finalized labor (in the form of activism).

8.3 Mater Omnium

It is important to underline the sense of nurture embedded in this discourse. Angela is in fact often referred to and looked upon as a *mother figure*, both within and outside the Vittorio. The imaginery of the Good Mother in Italy is often influenced by the deep Catholic background of the country. The archetype include «*what is benevolent, tolerant, that help the growth, the development*» (Nucci, 2016).. It is associated to love, care and selfless giving, embodied in the role of omniscient guide and emotional haven. It's welcoming, pure, self sacrificing, unconditional and resilient.

While quite adverse to biological motherhood as well as religious rhetoric, Angela fit this imaginery more than she would like to admit.

Care, in fact, is embedded in the very concept of belonging, as belonging itself is *an «emotional, felt, and affective phenomenon —at once intimate, social, and pregnant with « political potential»* (YuvalDavis, 2006).

Her peculiarly complex cultural capital, combined with her historical memory and a her highly critical character, allow her to offer an unique poignant perspective to her friends and acquaintances, thing that she doed promptly without expecting to receive something equal in exchange. This concept is at the core of Cultural Entrepreneurship, as providing guidance, Angela transforms her social capital into human capital, giving to the members of the field “*a secure sense of self-identity, confidence in expressing one's own opinions, and emotional intelligence*” (Gauntlett, 2011). In this way she contributes to the formation of social agents able to navigate and thrive in an superdiverse landscape, thus contributing to social change and enriching the newly created social fields.

There was an event that I found particularly evocative during my fieldwork, that partially guided my titling decision. Between the various work of an art project aimed to re-evaluate Affabulazione, the most interesting was probably the Welcoming Mother of Affabulazione. The sticker art depicted a traditional looking Virgin Mary, inspired to the classic painters as Raffaello and Tiziano, holding a group of babies with different ethnic



Figure 12 Vandalized Ex Voto (2016)

of discussions inside Affabulazione, as some thought that the depiction was overtly religious and not fitting for a laic center. It was interesting while even with its nontraditionally religious features it still attracted the attention of many local inhabitants, that were seen preying in its premises. It was a way to bring together two different aspects of the territory, including the deep religiosity of the elder inhabitants and to encourage dialogue between



Figure 13 Restructured Welcoming Mother (2016)

different aspects of sociality.

The art was soon vandalized black spray paint and racial slurs, just a day before the official inauguration of the project. Many were deeply saddened by the obscenity that replaced many of the beautifully crafted pieces. Affabulazione organized a manifestation where the slurs were cancelled. Eventually it was “restored”, black spray paint covering stands stark white, against a black background. It has no shape, no features, but her force still manages to open up the darkness.

I visited it with Angela, right before catching my plane.

She smiled before lighting up another cigarette. «*I like it more this way*”, she said.

9. Conclusion

I realized how limited my initial assumptions were, coming from my own experience with middle class Italian families, a very limited part of the inflated demography of the area. The concept of *amoral familism* just did not fit in the superdiverse *becoming* reality I confronted, as it called for an oversimplified understanding of group making dynamics and a strictly established, almost hegemonic, hierarchy of social fields, with blood relationships at the top. Instead I found a sludge of overlapping social fields, which a hierarchy was strictly situational and individual. While national citizenship and the correlated administrative social field are none the less still dominant, especially due to their undiscussed jurisdictional power (exercised through evictions, for example, regulating the access to healthcare), there are consistently undermined by the same social agents, that for personal convenience or solidarity are not hesitant to bend the rules. This undetermined status does generate conflict, as different social fields and their subscribed agents clash in the attempt to assert their supremacy within the dominant field. This conflict drags physical in the center of the action, as acts of art, vandalism, occupation and protest are the tools of urban warfare.

The “*betwixt and between*” character of the social landscape (meant, here, as the agglomerate of all the social fields without taking their hierarchical order in account) is where its strength lays, as it does not translate into paralysis, but raw *potential*.

In this setting, cultural entrepreneurship is a core concept, as it places individuals like Angela, visionary individuals, born and grown within a liquid modern environment and considering “*instability and chaos as the natural order of things*” are able to navigate such a context with their specific type of ingenuity (Merleau-Ponty, 1964) in a position of power, as (especially in areas with a distinct lack of economic capital) social and cultural assets constitutes the main currency of exchange.

While Angela's life story is particularistic and personal, it still offers an insight in the potential of Cultural Entrepreneurs, as well as placing social change and mediation in a deeply emotional backdrop. Cultural Entrepreneurs have the power to undo, redo, reconstruct the social pavement, but to do so they need to be embedded within it. As trusted, established members of all their social fields they are able not only to facilitate contact, but to involve fellow social agents in collective activities, breaking parallelism and generating new meanings for spaces, individuals and entities. As the social agents proceed with their claim, so does his physical and emotional investment, justifying his demand for a city “worth their

effort”, as well as contributing in the creation of a collective identity (built on memory and shared praxis). and solidarity. This brand of hyper-localism (Sigona, 2016) creates new disposition of organic solidarity, emotional connections, care and overall a sense of belonging.

The joyful ruckus of the children is filling the air.

The courtyard is stuffed. Many residents came down, but there is a lot of people from the premises, including a couple of local politicians.

The kids are busy making a flag with acrylic paint and white linens. It’s a messy job. They yell in every language and push each other craving for that color, that specific toy or just our attention. Everybody seems to have fun. While there are a lot of external guests today, including a local politician and her young children, as often happen the adult residents stand aside. Still, by the end of the day, the flag is finished and the atmosphere seems to have caught up almost everybody. Two young men take it up to the third floor and before anyone can notice they are walking on the tight cornice to put it up, uncaring of the strong wind whipping the place. I am tense, as I film. It’s a huge risk, the fall could easily kill them. But they keep going, and after fifteen minutes of fumbling, they out the flag.

It’s messy splattered thing, with a crooked “Vittorio” written on.

The courtyard explodes in an applause. They smile. They are proud.

And you know what? I am as well. Even if just a tiny bit, I feel like I belong.



Figure 13 The flag (2016)

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