

“Ritual activism and the contestation over urban space in the everyday”

Nicholas DeMaria Harney*

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(*) Prof. Nicholas DeMaria Harney
School of Social Sciences M257, Cassamarca Foundation
The University of Western Australia | 35 Stirling Highway, CRAWLEY WA 6009,
Australia; ph: +61 8 64882831; Email: nicholas.harney@uwa.edu.au

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Nicholas DeMaria Harney

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Title: Ritual activism and the contestation over urban space in the everyday¹

Abstract:

Naples, Italy offers a complex site for exploring the political agency of migrants in the making of 'home' in public spaces. Corruption, crime, exclusion, precarity and insecurity structure, in real and imagined ways, the everyday lives of migrants in southern Italy's largest city. In this paper, I explore what it is to be political in place - making for the migrants I encountered in Naples over the last decade 2004-2013 and the challenges they encountered in negotiating place in the city. This paper argues that the importance of migrant politics can better be understood through what I call their ritual activism. Drawing on anthropological engagements with ritual action, the everyday (Das) and the Deleuzian concept of habit, I explore migrant place-making in Naples. As the migrants I worked with speculated about their political and socio-economic futures, I began to see how their positioning could offer critical perspective on the politics of citizenship, integration, borders and urban space.

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Aristotle tells us that slaves understand language but don't possess it. This is what dissensus means. There is politics because speaking is not the same as speaking, because there is not even an agreement on what a sense means. Political dissensus is not a discussion between speaking people who would confront their interests and values. It is a conflict about who speaks and who does not speak, about what is heard as the voice of pain and what has to be heard as an argument on justice.

Jacques Rancière 2011:2

Politics? ... We are nothing more than dead goats here.

Mohammed (migrant, Côte D'Ivoire)

In and around Naples and agricultural areas further south connected to it through migrant networks, since at least 2008, as the uncertainties of life for migrants in Italy have been compounded by the politico-economic, financial crisis, there have been expressions of self-organized protest akin to recognizable forms of political activism. Some no doubt spurred by the return to Naples and the South of Italy by unemployed African migrants from northern Italy and Europe who had gained experience with unionism in their northern sojourns (see Sacchetto and Perrotta 2011; Perrotta 2014). In the summer of 2008, migrants held a sit-in at the Cathedral in Naples appealing for better housing conditions, with the simple hope, that at a minimum, they would not be evicted from their squats in dilapidated factories in Pianura on the city's periphery. Later in the fall, after the drive by shooting of six African migrants on their way home from work by Camorra gunmen, improvised barricades were set up by African migrants to block the streets and appeal for some justice. In 2010 and 2011 self-organized strikes by undocumented migrant farmworkers also occurred north of Naples in Castelvoturno and in Rosarno, Calabria

and parts of Apulia, all linked in migrant cognitive maps as spaces of work. These might even signal Isin's (2009) activist citizenship, an appeal he makes for a new vocabulary of citizenship to encompass the unnamed, abject, migrant and foreigner in an open, unbounded citizenship process for claims-making. Even so, the public comments on these events and my own fieldwork conversations reinforce a general discourse that posits that migrants, as legally precarious, are fortunate to be offered work. Their institutional supporters such as non-profits and voluntary associations tend to address their needs in a discourse that makes them passive, heavily invested as these groups are with Catholic themes of charity and care or, if secular, 'humanitarian' discourse (Fassin 2012; Redfield 2005).

In this paper, I am less interested in the overt politics of migration, the visible, easily recognizable forms of engagement with claims or claims making, or appeals for recognition, rights and representation. These are forms of social relations that require a self-determined individual or group to act to include or open up to others within a citizenship regime or a binary dynamic of exclusion and inclusion. DeGenova (2010) comes closer to the kind of politics I want to discuss in this paper with the intriguing idea of incorrigibility in the queering of migration activism reflected in the *Aqui! Estamos y No Nos Yamos!* mass protest mobilizations against proposed immigration changes in the United States. In these mass mobilizations, even as DeGenova might interpret the slogans he analyzes as asserting an *unintelligibility*, indicating a radical incorrigibility that rejects the politics of citizenship embedded in the language of the state, the acts and mobilizations themselves take quite traditional protest/political form. In fact, they operate in the predictable rhythms of a political calendar in response to legislation and insist, if you will, on being a voice that can be heard and thus enter the system of justice. Despite their contrarian language, one might still see their actions and words as part of the 'count' and the space of the police, rather than 'political' in Rancière's (2011) sense. Claims for recognition, rights and representation might be seen as incipient in the Neapolitan case as the few examples above suggest, but what interests me more is a politics that does not operate in, nor need to resort to,

recognition, rights or representation (that is an act of being represented in some imagined politico-juridical way in a putative political sphere). Moreover, the Neapolitan examples below are not necessarily about the desire or demand for formal citizenship but simply the legal right to remain in Italy in the first instance.

Instead, I want to discuss the habits, affects and ways of being and becoming that manifest politically in everyday spaces and interactions in the area by thinking about these everyday performative actions as what I call ritual activism. Ritual activism brings to the fore two of the central elements in ritual. While ritual has often been perceived to attain its powerful effect by repetition and formal rules, in fact all rituals are distinctive because they occur in specific places and times. They are never repetitions of past ritual performances nor replicable in the future (Howe 2000; Tambiah 1979; Strathern 1989). The ritualizing process thus contains risk in each new inscription. This is similar to how Deleuze (1994), following Hume, addresses a habit as something that is not yet formed, flexible, non-mechanical and within which radical change is possible. Repetition and difference are entangled, and it is from habit that difference enters into repetition, shifting and becoming with each new enactment. As a dynamic force it opens up possibilities about the future. Everyday ritual activism implies the processual and provocative. Rituals then invite risk in their inscription in everyday life in the streets. Das (2012) urges us to think of habits as more than mere mechanical actions, but as everyday moral actions, sites through which ethics can be located, and by extension politics can be traced. It is from this way of conceiving of habit and the ritual everyday actions of domesticating space in the city that I have begun to consider a politics, a form of ritual activism, that tends to be neglected as politics but one that matters as an effective way people begin to live with each other to shift the politics of migrant uncertainty in everyday ways.¹ I would argue that the potential in this politics is more transformative of the everyday social life of the city than that achieved through recognition, rights and representation, processes that in the end re-inscribe the inequality of someone or some group deciding to open up to the presence and claims of others. In that sense, recognition, rights and representation

lead us back to Rancière's category that evokes order, the 'count' and the police, and do not achieve the equality of his more rarely existing category, the political.² Through three examples drawn from my fieldwork below I want to explore what I term *ritual activism* by migrants in Naples. Not as romantic for the researcher as an overt claims-making protest, nor ethnographically easily delimited, entwined as they are with other ways of being and becoming, *ritual activism*, I think is potentially more unsettling. From three sites of migrant everyday living drawn from fieldwork in Naples, Italy (2004-2014) on transit, in neighborhoods and through precarious street trading, migrants intervene in the reigning order, 'speak' through their *ritual activism* as surplus subjects that undermine and shift the prevailing order. Before I turn to these examples, a brief description of migration in Italy and Naples is necessary.

Italy is host to over 5 million documented migrants and, perhaps as much as 20-30 per cent more undocumented, as a disinterested and preoccupied its state agencies, ministries and security services charged with coping with migration seem overmatched, unable or unwilling to monitor visa-over-stayers serves as an entry point into Europe. In 2008, Naples had over 48 per cent of the nearly 130,000 legal migrants in the region of Campania, which is 3.3 per cent of the national total and 39 per cent of all migrants in the Italian south (Caritas 2008: 407). It is estimated that Italy's informal economy represented 23-25% of its GDP and offers irregular migrants the principle space for income-making activities. Reducing irregular migration would necessitate a reduction in illegal employment, which would reduce the informal economy. Labour market controls in Italy are limited and Italian state administrative inefficiencies make it nearly impossible for labour inspectors to carry out those controls that do exist. It is into this context that irregular migrants come, settle, make do and add to the activities occurring outside what is known to authorities.

To engage with the politics around migration, migrants and difference in Naples is to first confront a city of hyper-signification. On the surface, Naples requires the anthropologist to navigate the thicket of politics and representations that too easily fold into enduring stereotypes about 'the south' and 'modernity': putatively all-

controlling organized crime (camorra), drifts of garbage piles, political corruption, patronage, informal economic activities, unemployment, and xenophobia (Pugliese 2007). The litany of issues steers encounters and conversations toward the evolutionary musings of Banfield (1958) or with slightly more subtlety, but still imprisoned in assumptions about one kind of 'modernity', Putnam's (1993) concern for civic-ness and associational life to explain the 'problems' of the Italian south (Griboaudi 1997; Dines 2012). Yet, it is not just academics that have to navigate these politics and representations, ordinary Neapolitans and migrants do as well, sifting through them as they negotiate their everyday experiences, assessing the usefulness of these frameworks for interpreting and negotiating the problems of everyday survival. Entangled with this over-determined signification, a kind of migrant politics on the ground often strikes me like a voice that cannot be heard, a sound that cannot be recognized, conjuring Lyotard's notion of differend in all-too-depressingly real and material ways. To be sure, uncertainty is a certainty for precarious migrants in Naples and *pace* Benjamin, Naples may be porous but that uncertainty changes and, as recent ethnographies suggest, instead of the caricature requiring remediation for its atavistic socio-political engagements, the social relations and politico-economics of the city indicate a place that might well be the laboratory for future social and economic relations of precarity (Dines 2012; Pine 2012; Lucht 2012; Petrillo 2013).

African migrants from French and English speaking sub-Saharan Africa have settled in Naples and more specifically around the Castelvoturno area to its north in the past two decades to seek work in the underground economy that thrives in the Naples region. Easy access to physically demanding work in construction and farming has made the area highly attractive as a transit point to make cash for an onward journey to Northern Italy and Europe, even so, a gradual permanent settlement of mostly Africans has developed. This onward migration has reduced as the crisis has wrought havoc with European economies, limited work opportunities and thus created for many of these people a kind of stasis in their migratory trajectories. Migrants tell me when they are released from Italian government holding centers in Sicily or Calabria after their Mediterranean crossings, Italian authorities themselves tell them

to go to Castelvolturno to find help from 'their own'. Official statistics may place the number at 3000 sub-Saharan Africans; local clergy and workers organizations working with migrants estimates that this number vastly underestimates the populations which maybe be as much a five thousand more not recorded, or simply lost in refugee-case backlog, trying to survive in various ways in the underground economy. It is these migrants and women from Eastern Europe, mostly Ukrainians, who arrive on short tourist visas and overstay and work in the vast informal care market that are the focus of the first example (see Näre 2012).

In the second example, I focus mostly on street traders from Bangladesh and Pakistan, two of the most visible – in terms of how they are identified and racialized as minorities by Neapolitans and in terms of numbers involved in street selling on the main commercial streets in the historic center along via Toledo and its adjacent streets – in Naples. In general, both groups buy from the over two dozen wholesale distributors, mostly of Bangladesh origin, who have set up near Piazza Mercato and Piazza Garibaldi. The migrants from Bangladesh and Pakistan I interviewed tended to be part of on-ward migration strategies and trajectories, many had some university, college or diploma experience but a portion end-up staying, awaiting documents, working to pay off debts and send remittances.

In third example, I drawn of the everyday use of neighborhood space by Sri Lankan migrants in the city center of Naples, and think through the politics of locality (Appadurai 1996) that adheres to their colonization of neighborhood space. Sri Lankan immigration to Italy began in the 1970s through Catholics missionaries and both male and female migrants arrived to work predominantly in the domestic service sector. The numbers grew through various Italian migration regimes via family reunification, sponsorship, smuggling or arrival from other Schengen countries. Unusually for Naples, it is well-settled migrant community with almost parity in genders and a dominant presence of Sinhalese as opposed to Tamils. They were the dominant migrant minority group in Naples until the 2000s when Ukrainian and Polish migrants arrived in significant numbers. Many also mixed their Catholicism and Buddhism. Various official estimates suggest around 3,000 in Naples but given the city's reputation for lax

enforcement of papers and my ethnographic experiences, I would suggest that number vastly underestimates the number which could be as much as three-fold more (9000).

Infrastructure, transiting migrants and ritual activism

As scholars intrigued by infrastructure have noted, these technical forms organize the circulation, separation, and exchanges of social life. Mundane but consequential for ordering the social, the transit line I studied offered an entry into the micro-politics of migrant presence, hope and opportunity in the distributive infrastructure of the city. I first turn therefore, to the example of an intercultural mediation program sponsored by a transit company, Caritas (the Catholic service agency) and a local non-profit (or, in Italian, an *organizzazione non lucrativa di utilità sociale*, acronym, ONLUS). This program was organized for one of the transit company's major extra-urban bus routes that connected the city center to a northern coastal area. Migrants had settled there because of the availability of inexpensive housing, built up decades earlier as cheap holiday housing for Neapolitans, but many left in disrepair. Although a transit point for many, the area has served as a major settlement area for irregular migrants, mostly from sub-Saharan West Africa but also with a minority presence of others such Romanian, Ukrainian, North Africans migrants and the occasional presence of Romany, etc.

The transit company management wanted to reduce petty crime – from ticket evasion to graffiti to the vandalism of buses. Management believed one crucial challenge their staff faced that compounded this petty crime concern was the considerable intercultural conflict and misapprehension between migrant, Neapolitan and company staff on the transit route. As a result, management turned to a Neapolitan ONLUS and Caritas-Napoli's Immigration office to devise a training program for intercultural mediation that would provide skills to a mixed group of transit company staff working in tandem with a select group of migrants, all African migrants but three (Palestinian, Ukrainian and Romany)³. It just so happened that one of those Africans selected had been a key organizer for the sit-in at the Neapolitan Cathedral (il

Duomo) and someone who had worked extensively as a picker in Italian agriculture throughout the south. As a formal, institutional engagement with difference, at first glance this program, which aimed to instruct migrants into the proper 'habits' of comportment on the transit service, could be interpreted as incorporating migrants within the order and including them as part of the 'count'. As the senior manager explained to me during the first iteration of the program, these goals were quite clear.

We have a profound problem with petty crime. By this I don't mean simply graffiti or damaging property, which happen, but in some ways more consequentially since our funding depends on this, fare-evasion. The mediators are not enforcement officers, but by checking for paid and validated tickets, they begin a conversation about what is expected, inform riders about how this service is for them ... the transit service represents their needs, and gradually we expect they will stop evading – whether they are migrants or Neapolitans. (Senior manager, Neapolitan Transit Company)

While management's agenda was clear, the responsibility for implementing its project fell to mixed teams of Neapolitan transit company staff and the contracted migrants who had been assembled as a group for training by Caritas and the ONLUS. The training facilitator approached her sessions through the pedagogical teachings of Paolo Friere. They were composed of role-playing games and scenarios revolved around the necessity for the intercultural mediators to open up substantive conversations with riders and develop a capacity for engaged listening. These intentions were strongly resisted by many of the transit company staff participating, which questioned their need to be trained in inter-subjective relations. Two weeks into the training as it neared the beginning of its implementation on the buses, one of the migrant mediators expressed frustration with the Neapolitan colleagues with whom he would shortly be working each day as a mediator. Her exasperation reinforced the inequality of recognition at play.

These guys are not ready. You can tell in our training sessions and conversations. They're really reluctant to surrender control, to talk with us, not to us. They want to go

out on the buses, but they still don't realize how closed they are, how condescending they are to us (migrants) and how intimidating they could be. Sure, they are friendly to those of us here and I think they are all decent people but they don't see how their view of migrants treats us as less than equal, especially Africans. (Mary, Ghana)

From this formal training though we moved to the actual practice that started me thinking about *ritual activism*. Each morning at 5:15am four or five of the migrant mediators and one or two of the transit staff would meet in Piazza Garibaldi in the heart of Naples to board the M1B bus at its origins to wind our way up to meet others at Villaggio Coppola to all in Castelvolturno. The expectation was that our mixed teams would engage with riders actively by making small talk in order to get to know the riders, asking about problems to determine why they were not buying tickets and attempt to transform the social 'atmosphere', especially during these very crowded rush hour trips to reduce tension and feelings of isolation. Immediately, the joint teams of migrant mediators and Neapolitan transit staff perceptibly upended preconceived notions about authority, hierarchy and identity for riders. 'In the field', the quotidian, ritual engagement with other migrants leveled and often reversed the authority of the mediators in the routine encounters and conversations with other migrants. Their own experiential knowledge as migrants, made them more easily approachable for those riding the bus and their cultural knowledge, provided them with authority in the improvisational engagements on the bus that the Neapolitan transit staff acknowledged. To some degree and with some participants both riders and workers these changes felt significant. That is not to suggest that the force of recognition and representational styles of engagement were not also at play, as these interactions were intensely engulfed in situations of inequality and uncertainty. The most frequent questions were still: 'Do you have work I could do?' 'Can you help me with my documents?' 'How can I get health care?' These questions were addressed at first to the Neapolitan mediators, but gradually this changed as the migrant mediators on the buses engaged in *ritual activism* on the buses by simply being there, asking and answering questions.

After a few weeks, two unexpected forms of knowledge and styles of interaction emerged. If there was a shift internally within the mediators as I noted above, this shift also brought about a change in the relations with migrant riders. Migrant intercultural mediators shifted each day within those first three weeks further away from a focus on ticket evasion, avoiding 'the count', and began to serve as sources of knowledge about survival in Naples. This shift occurred during each ascent into a bus overcrowded with migrants in the rush hour mornings and evenings. In the process, a radical break in inequality occurred, shifting from authority to conversation, *Maybe the company wants us to check tickets, and I'll do that indirectly because I want them (African migrants) to know that Italians are watching us closely so we cannot give them any excuse to criticize us. It is their country. But, really, there is so much pain out there. I'd rather just listen and give them advice from my experience. Help them think about a future beyond the search for work. How can they build something back home? Or here? They need to think of their future. (Omar, mediator Côte D'Ivoire)*

Who are these people? I see the Caritas bibs on them. Do they work for the bus company? But they are African, foreigners like us and they just talk with us. I've never seen that. (Mohammed, Burkina Faso)

At first puzzled and unsettled by the choice the migrant mediators were making, several Neapolitan mediators withdrew more fully into themselves but others began to change how they engaged with people on the bus,

I am asking this guy for his ticket and in the middle of my sentence I realize I should just leave it alone and talk about something else. He has no money and the cost of a ticket actually matters. Somehow we get into this discussion about fish and he knows quite a lot. Apparently he had been a fisherman back home. I felt much better after that and since then I see him every day, we greet each other and we talk about food. I have a cousin who knows a guy who works as fisherman in Pozzuoli. Next week I promised to bring some fish. (Antonio, Neapolitan transit staff/mediator)

Second, encounters produced knowledge about these migrants and their aspirations that dismissed the methodological localism of the project, extending the territorial space and rejecting the attempt at creating order. Very few were planning to stay in the Naples region and through the *ritual activism* of asking, listening, speaking with them, the project's premise to ensure these riders were invested in the service made little sense. Many had no documents. They were 'surplus subjects' outside the count and thus were the uncounted supplement, the political, that undermined Italian integration and territorial control.

We have been doing this project now three months. The faces keep changing. You realize that people are not staying here. Why would they even consider buying a monthly pass? We tell them its cheaper, but with no money, no jobs and plans to move elsewhere, what we're saying makes no sense to them (Salvatore, Neapolitan transit staff/mediator).

In the event, I saw emerge quite a different dynamic that lead me to this way of viewing the everyday politics of *ritual activism*, an engagement that was all the more powerful because of the way it refused the ordering and counting that the program intended. It unsettled the Neapolitan mediators, rendered problematic the parameters of the state, and instead forced awareness onto the Neapolitan mediators of alternative possibilities. This *ritual activism* furtively entered into the encounters and inter-subjective relations on the bus, shifting the atmosphere and reducing the atomization and the segmented racialization of the space. If only for the duration of the project and in small ways the *ritual activism*, created a visible example of migrants and Neapolitans jointly working together in conversation, in idle, and often lighthearted chatter, unsettling and reversing forms of authority. Combined this *ritual activism* offered glimpses of a shifting atmosphere on the bus and a different politics of migration in Naples.

The intercultural of the everyday and ritual activism

In the second example of *ritual activism*, I turn to the narrow streets of the historic center of Naples, that serve as a site for makeshift street stalls set up by itinerant and often irregular migrants. The ritual use of public space opens up a potential site for politics, because of constant shifting and becoming that constitutes social relations in place-making. I spent time with several groups of street traders but in the example here I will focus on one group that established their makeshift stands in the densely populated streets of the historic center, an area that also attracted many European tourists and a high concentration of University students frequenting the two major universities in the area, Federico II and the Istituto Orientale. The core group I conversed with was of Bangladeshi and Pakistani heritage but frequent conversations, interactions, and engagements with Senegalese, Chinese, North African, Ukrainian and Neapolitan ones revealed the open-ended nature of relations among many of the street traders with whom I worked. Once chatting with a friend from Bangladesh, he was approached by another person who it turned out was a migrant originally from Tunisia. They greeted each other warmly in a language I found incomprehensible. Introduced by my Bangladeshi friend Ahmed to Nasir, I asked what language they were speaking, laughing he responded,

That's the language of hanging out on the sidewalk in Naples, a mix of everything. You develop a bond no matter where you are from (Nasir).

The Graeco-Roman streets of the old town, offer a spatial intimacy, or some might say oppression, that allows for constant social contact. The traders I discuss here set up four or five small, independent stands, really just cardboard tables that fold up easily to be carried home at the end of the day or if unfriendly police come their way. Set up in front of storefronts, or in the jostle of asymmetry that mark the architectural sedimentation of 17th century palazzi surviving today in a modern city, these display tables offer passersby not just a range of goods from buttons, posters to jewelry, but also a glimpse of *ritual activism* as their use of space each day shifts expectations of all who use it about their place in Naples. Passing the nine to ten hours on the street in

conversation with customers, shopkeepers, and city workers, these migrants rework the space by their presence and sociality with Neapolitans and each other.

Those long days lead to a layering of conversations, encounters and engagements with each other and local Neapolitans across a range of topics from possible futures in work – opening up an international call center, a fast food generic ‘eastern kebab’ restaurant in northern Italy, buying an old car to make the circuit of all the key festivals, or establishing a transnational business with home. Conversation turns also to ways of tracking the renewal of documents, or exchanging views on the most profitable upcoming festivals, the most inexpensive way of getting there and which local Neapolitan store-keeper might help you fill out the necessary forms to get a temporary selling permit in the local municipality. Other street vendors enter in and out, of mixed origins – Senegalese, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, and Chinese – since this was one main route between Piazza Garibaldi, the wholesale stores and migrant housing areas near the train station and the main commercial street of Via Toledo. The latter street many street vendors switched to, for the potential profits associated with the crowds of Neapolitans out for their pre-dinner walks, even if police controls and harassment by Neapolitan teenagers was greater. Street vendors usually exchanged pleasantries, order an Italian coffee (espresso) from a local bar. They drank in the street together to watch their stands in case of a sale. The Ukrainian partner of one of the Pakistani traders who made his own jewelry often dropped by with sandwiches and supplies, sit at a stall and start shaping rings and bracelets herself as she joked in a smattering of Neapolitan, Urdu and English with the others. They exchanged views on how to avoid the Tax police and critiqued the Italian economy and politicians. Occasionally, a shopkeeper or a runner from a café came out to deliver *espressi* to other stores lingered and shared knowledge and assessed rumors with them, showed some curiosity about Pakistan or Bangladesh.

These everyday opportunities for exchange, communication and sociality about everyday issues was crucial for survival, and I began to see them as highly political for the way they instantiated the *ritual activism* of everyday life. Improving rapport, knowledge and familiarity with a local owner of salumeria (delicatessen) to offer

discount sandwiches or the Caffé owner to charge only 50 cents for an Italian coffee as opposed to 80 cents in exchange, revealed shifting relations and expectations about the legitimacy of their presence in the place. These relationships developed through observing, interacting and the ritual use of this place by setting up their stalls everyday.

Ifti is a good man (migrant from Pakistan who shares a jewelry stand with a Ukrainian partner, Maria). These guys are out there working 9 or 10 hours a day. They work hard. They make no trouble and I enjoy asking them about where they are from, their travels or whatever. I have been in this place my whole life but we Neapolitans have been everywhere so I like to hear about other places. People are all the same when you get to know them (Salvatore, Neapolitan, shop owner).

Through making their presence felt in the everyday, their way of moving, standing, and gestures in and between the street and stores signaled a confidence and an assertion of belonging. Friendly conversations with local storeowners shifted the otherness of these migrant street vendors as they began to constitute a part of the neighborhood's local distinctiveness. This shift through ritual encounters, conversations and belonging to the streets revealed a local knowledge of the place, its sociality and their place in it. I asked Ayub about this and he talked about the control of the place by the local police,

Nobody likes the Guardia Finanza (tax/customs police) not even Antonio or Salvatore (the owners of the café and butcher shop, respectively) but the vigili urbani (municipal police), know us, leave us alone, sometimes buy something or even that chubby one offers us coffee occasionally (Ayub, Bangladesh).

Their ritual presence thus altered how they engaged with authorities, and this could well mean that they were now part of the order, the count, but in Naples that order is ambiguous. Two of the five were irregular migrants. A third had been waiting

eight months to hear from the Immigration Office about his status. Technically, the other ones with city permits as itinerant traders should not have been stationary but selling their goods door-to-door. Instead, Ayub, Ifti and their colleagues asserted their presence and determination to stay in this profitable space between tourists, students and the crossroads of working Neapolitans. I would argue this assertion, or *ritual activism*, everyday repetition and difference offered a glimpse of the political as these surplus subjects altered and shifted this neighborhood towards becoming something new everyday. I think this is evident as well because their ritual presence was not a guarantee against their overall abject agency being the subject of attempted expulsion.

The police did give us trouble a few months back because some tourists were robbed and Neapolitan teenagers often try to grab our stuff. Around Christmas we get pushed out by Neapolitans who sell for the huge crowds that come to look at the Christmas figurines made here, but we just move over a bit, they are illegal too but the police do nothing with them. I have been watching.

Even with those asked to move along by police or organized crime at the Christmas season, conversations in street trader polyglot Italian, Urdu, Hindi, Bengali and English, insists upon a presence and assertion in the place of a different kind of politics. Aside from the exchange of local knowledge and speculations about future work, these street vendors displayed a remarkably cooperative work organization. The stands were spread over a 10-15-metre area on both sides of the cramped street. In the long hours of selling on the street, they shared the responsibilities for each other's stands in a remarkably fluid way even if at the end of day profits and sales were clearly distinguished and distributed accordingly. By no means would a street vendor necessarily have to attend his own stand for a customer. That is, as they talked, gossiped, drank coffee, and stood around during the day between the passing traffic of customers and the hazards of police, and Neapolitan adolescents, they shared sales duties at each other's stands, left their goods under each others' care while they went

to lunch, called family from nearby call centers, retrieved documents from the Immigration Office or were absent to buy new things for their stalls from the wholesale stores around the main train station near Piazza Garibaldi, or simply lazily relaxed against a stone wall by the stands. This shared activity was central to their *ritual activism*. Babu seemed to assert a kind of migrant exceptionalism, a counter assertion of abject agency in the face of overarching challenges faced by migrants and Neapolitans in the city.

Nick, you can see all the problems here. Look how hard we work, everyday. I am saving for something. All of us here have family or futures we are working for. Neapolitans don't seem to care about this place. Look at the garbage, the violence, the way they don't follow rules. They have so many problems, without us where would their economy be? (Babu, Bangladesh)

Sidewalks, cricket and the colonization of neighborhoods

In the third example, I turn to the ritual working over of space in the *centro storico* of Naples. Sri Lankan migrants in Naples have settled in several of the classical working-class neighborhoods of city, especially Montesanto and Sanità, in the last twenty-five years. A section of streets and alleys between these neighborhoods off Salvator Rosa, a main artery out of the city center and these neighborhoods into the elevated and breezier middle-class neighborhood of the Vomero, has become home for some Sri Lankans in what were the ground floor *bassi*, or apartments that spill onto the streets. Several intersections reveal a growing and thriving migrant settlement with a few small food stores, take-away eateries, call centers and 'English' schools catering to Sri Lankan families. Ethnic categorizations were frequently expressed in everyday conversations with my Neapolitan informants, these shorthand forms of communication were often accompanied by skepticism, irony and caveats, but they still were used. They were suffused with sexualized and racialized tones that recalled colonial relationships of inequality. Neapolitan stereotypes of Sri Lankan males who had found abundant work as domestic carers reproduced colonialist tropes about

them as sweet, gentle, quiet and submissive (see also Näre 2010). In the everyday hierarchy of migrant identities I began to learn in Naples, these putative 'ethnic qualities' were augmented by a view that the Sri Lankan 'community' as such was less threatening to Neapolitans in the comparative sense because of the everyday evidence of gender parity, growing young children in the schools. The syncretic or at least co-existing religiosity of Catholicism and Buddhism among a large number I encountered also appealed to Neapolitans who encountered them in local churches. One of the main churches in the city center, Chiesa del Gesù had some Sri Lankan clergy. As a result, ritual actions by Sri Lankans in the cityscape, often escaped notice or comment other than as a foil for other migrant groups that were perceived as more recalcitrant or truculent. Even so, I think this only provides a partial reading and I include them precisely because of the 'understated' notice they seemed to receive. The city center of Naples is one of the most densely populated areas in Europe. Sri Lankans, many housed in the first floor *bassi* apartments, which offered in expensive housing close to domestic workplaces but also were cramped, poorly ventilated and dark. As a result, Sri Lankan young men and women often spent their early evenings hanging out on the few public benches and leaning against railings on stairways and streetscapes.

Raju a migrant from just north of Colombo although training as a mechanic in Sri Lanka, decided to migrate to Italy to join his mother and cousins. He worked as a domestic for an elderly man in the Vomero, but with his cousin Sunil, he spent time almost every evening sitting on a railing greeting Sri Lankans and local Neapolitans along Salvator Rosa. Even as Neapolitans gradually returned home for dinner from their evening strolls or *passegiate*, Raju and his friends, only about half of the six or seven who gathered, had proper documents, continued to linger on the streets, tells jokes, gossip, exchange advice and dream about their futures. Sometimes one would bring a cricket bat and playfully knock a ball around with friends making short fielding plays on the stone sidewalks. The *bassi* were too hot and cramped and the streets a historically common place for the Neapolitan lower classes to occupy were gradually being colonized by these young Sri Lankans. Yet, it was on Sundays when they were free of domestic care when they would take the bus up to the Museum in

Capodimonte, an impressive former Palace for the Bourbon Kings, elevated above the city and with striking views of the Bay of Naples and Vesuvius. Behind the Museum was a large green space, one of the few in Naples and an area Raju and friends could play a more serious game of cricket while parents, wives, and children laid out picnic lunches. They had to compete with the Neapolitan youth playing improvised football (soccer) games and avoid the horse-mounted Italian police who rode by occasionally to break up football games since the grounds they said were for tourists and not sport. The Sri Lankan games were usually deeper into the green space, behind some trees and tended to avoid sensor, while the young Neapolitans and their parents badgered the beleaguered police about the general civic failure of creating a space for youth to play sports in Naples. The police tended to ignore the cricket matches. Raju attributed this to the reputation Sri Lankans had for politeness and the fact they accompanied by families clearly out for a picnic, but also that Neapolitans could not understand the game. My conversations with the police tended to lay credence to both claims. Generally, they were more frustrated by the combativeness of their 'own' Neapolitans than the 'well-behaved' Sri Lankans and did not see the sport as terribly physical or dangerous, despite the ball. These repetitive acts, ritual activities, were an exercise of power over limited and highly used public space, which had alternative claims to these streetscapes and park space.

Conclusions

In this paper I have drawn on three different examples from my fieldwork in Naples to explore a kind of migrant politics that does not receive enough attention, one that challenges how we live together in the ritual encounters of the everyday.

Anthropology's focus on the everyday habits, and not just the events that rupture the consensus, that makes ethnography well suited to explore politics. Anthropology's attention to the everyday grounds Rancière's (1998; 2011) provocative work on the political and the 'part with no part', which for me conjured up the conditions of migrants I observed in Naples. This everyday signaled for me how we might think if the everyday actions of claim space by migrants as a kind of ritual activism. It recalled for me Deleuze's conception of habit as joining both repetition and difference, to suggest

shifting, changing and becoming even in what we see as ordinary, quotidian actions and engagements (Das 2010). In the first example, migrant intercultural mediators and migrants themselves in the territories north of Naples, through the repetition and difference in the ritual engagements on a bus service, unsettled the normative intentions and expected outcomes of a project to control petty crime. The project opened a world of surplus subjects operating outside the count, state vision and framing, while the mediators attendant to their *ritual activism* refashioned their practices to engage with abject agents they encountered (Rancière 2011). A few of those on the buses, I would join as they descended into Naples to trade in pirated films and DVDs. These would take their place among the hundreds of others who used street trading as a way of making a living in the city. It was migrants that worked this way that offered a second perspective on the politics of *ritual activism*; an interethnic group of traders were through their long hours of work in a streetscape in central Naples reworking and shifting the place to assert their own presence in the city. In fact it was the conjoining of two of these field sites that I first began to think about politics in this different way. I had just finished a long morning shift with Mohammed, a migrant mediator, on the buses and we had returned to Naples at 11am wandering through the streets in search of a kebab to satisfy the hunger from an early start. Mohammed despaired over the recent shootings of African migrants, but with almost gallows humor and a bit of a chuckle turned to me and Omar, another mediator, and said

Politics? ... We are nothing more than dead goats here. (Mohammed, Côte d'Ivoire)

They were subjects that did not exist in the order but as I gradually observed as surplus subjects through their ritual activism they undermined the order and they asserted the power of their abjection, their non-existence. As Mohammed, Omar and I settled into our kebabs, Ahmed my street trader friend happened to enter we exchanged greetings, I introduced everyone, and Ahmed said,

See, Nick, we are from everywhere. Neapolitans don't know what to do with us.
(Ahmed, Bangladesh)

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¹ Matei Candea (2012) and his interlocutors address making space for the 'non-political' in our ethnographic work, encouraging us, if you will, to slow down the ethnographic moment, to linger over the phrasings of our informants and attune our ethnographic sensibilities to their ways of seeing. In the case here, my sense from fieldwork conversations with (il)legal and (ir)regular and documented migrants was that the space of the 'non-political' was contingent on the privilege of the powerful. Being a migrant in Italy was (is) not easy. Politics, however unformed, was embedded in the border regimes, material, juridical and social, that encumbered a migrant's everyday.

² One of the challenges of Rancière's (1998; 2011) highly evocative work is that the concept of the political only seems to emerge in the time of the 'event' and 'interrupts the temporality of consensus'. Thus I turn to Deleuze and anthropology's inclination to focus on habit to reveal the everyday material struggles and practices of the political subject. Those working in critical migration studies and activism can quite easily see (illegal) migrants as exemplars of the part with 'no part' in Rancière's work especially as it was published around the time of the *sans papier* movement.

³ The conflation of migrant 'difference' with Romani is common in Italy, part of this is due to the complexity of Romani presence which combines migrants, many entering from Romania as it gradually met the requirements for full EU entry in the last decade and the existing Italian communities of 'nomads' or 'gypsies'. This elision fits neatly into the normative order in which it is 'normal' Italians versus any kind of otherness.