Geographies of un⁄settlement:
Unsettling Europe from the Black Mediterranean

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Abstract

This article questions the meaning and scope of "settling" in the context of racial capitalism and its structural displacements, from a perspective situated in the mobile and trans-border geographies of labour and inhabitation that are proliferating at the crossroads of old and new Southern Questions, between Southern Europe and Northern Africa. With an epistemic focus on what scholars have started to address as the Black Mediterranean and an empirical focus on Italy's agro-industrial encampments —emerging at the nexus between the EU border regime and the exploitation of agricultural labour and migrants' lives through gang-mastering— the article explores the emergence of a *geography of unsettlement* at the core of Europe. This condition, it argues, renders migrant spaces largely uninhabitable and highlights how borders impact not only labour regimes but also the politics of dwelling. At the same time, the article employs the notion of "unsettling" to invoke alternative notions of place that can overcome the necropolitics of the hold. While drawing new connections among cutting-edge debates that are reassessing Europeanness, trans-Mediterranean movement, and the labour-migration nexus, the article ultimately theorizes *un⁄settlement* as a spatial poiesis of social life in the Black Mediterranean, that is absorbed by and yet also manages to contravene the dualities of temporariness/permanence, formality/informality, mobile/anchored, and settled/unsettled at the heart of the modern idea of Europe.

Introduction

Tripoli, March 2011. An undocumented vessel carrying seventy-two passengers leaves the coast of Libya in the direction of Sicily. As reconstructed by researchers Pezzani and Heller through the Forensic Oceanography project (Forensic Architecture, 2014), the first distress signals are sent out after 15-18 hours of navigation but receive no response. Meanwhile, Italian, EU, and NATO institutions share the boat's location, thus testifying to an awareness of its position. A military helicopter flies by. So do fishing boats. A second military helicopter. No assistance. After running out of fuel, the vessel eventually starts to drift. It drifts for as long as a week, back to Libya. Suddenly, a military ship crosses its path, lingers, leaves. The boat continues to drift. Then, two weeks after departure, it reaches Zlitan almost collapsed under the gravity of the sea, the gravity of non-assistance. Only nine passengers survived to tell the vessel's story, the story now known as that of "the left-to-die-boat" (*ibidem*).

Nardò, province of Lecce, August 2011. The provincial road leading into the Southern Italian town is blocked by about fifty people. Traffic is interrupted. A strike is underway. With few exceptions —e.g., San Nicola Varno in 2006, Rosarno in 2008 and 2010, and Castel Volturno in 2010— this is the first of its kind (La Repubblica, 2011; Corrado, 2011; Perrotta and Sacchetto, 2014). The Cameroonian Yvan Sagnet, twenty-six years old, engineering student turned tomato-picker, is leading the strike. And to strike are those who until that moment had barely been visible, let alone listened to: the seasonal migrant *braccianti* (agriculture labourers) of Southern Europe and the global South. Those thanks to whom the "Made in Italy" olives, tomatoes, and other agricultural produce are harvested, produced and shipped by the global capitalist supply chain to every corner of the world.

What connects the Nardò strike with the unrescued boat that departed from Libya just a few months before? And why are these connections significant to appreciate the emergence of new geographies —that in this article I tentatively term *geographies of unsettlement*— in Europe and at Europe's borders? To approach these questions, the article starts from the advantageous standpoint of Southern Italy and its changing rural-urban geography of inhabitation, that is increasingly more fluid, precarious, and inhabited by highly mobile labourers. In interrogating the nexus between European spaces of migration, agriculture and dwelling, this article approaches it from a dual Southern perspective. On the one hand, it centres Italy's and Europe's long-standing Southern Question (Gramsci, 1926|2014; Moe, 2002). On the other hand, it connects the latter with the emerging Black Mediterranean question (Di Maio, 2012; Smythe, 2018; Proglio, 2019; Proglio et al., 2021; Hawthorne, 2021) and the living (and lived) political economy of racial capitalism (Robinson, 1983).

If "the South" is a relation, as numerous postcolonial scholars have argued, then the modern relation subsisting between Northern and Southern Italy, Northern and Southern Europe, and between Europe and Africa has been one shaped by uneven development, subalternity, racialisation, and colonisation. It is through the Western Eurocentric gaze that "the South" was constituted. In Italy, in particular, since unification in 1861, the *Mezzogiorno* has embodied all sorts of negative characteristics (laziness, underdevelopment, clientelism, criminality, barbarism, etc.) opposed, in a binary system, to the developed, industrialised and advanced North of Italy. As Antonio Gramsci (1926|2014; see also: Conelli, 2020: 241) presciently noticed, this uneven relation has been pervasively permeated by a racialised understanding of "Southern backwardness," that has been applied more generally to the whole Mediterranean (Cassano, 1996|2005: xxiii). Yet, if we look at the most recent history

of the Mediterranean and the South of Italy, with a particular focus on African migrations through the Mediterranean Sea, the Southern Question has now expanded and there are multiple and overlapping trajectories of racialisation and subalternity at play.[1]

At the crossroads of these multiple Souths and questions of racialisation and coloniality, we find today Nardò, Cerignola, Rosarno, Cassibile, Eboli, Castel Volturno and other Italian spaces at the frontier between urbanisation and agricultural production. While recognising them as spaces of "hold" (that is of containment, violent regulation and marginalisation; see: Sharpe, 2016), in this article, I also want to interrogate them as places: relational sites from where collective futures can be contested, especially as migrant and non-migrant scholars, activists, progressive organisations, and other social actors work together to cultivate geographical imaginaries of Europe otherwise, that is to forge "new understandings of space and the undoing of violent practices of geographic organization" (McKittrick, 2006: xiv). Ultimately, this article asks: how can we theorise these growing spaces of inhabitation at the crossroads of multiple Southern Questions, in order to rethink Europe?

To untangle this question, the article starts by figuring the Mediterranean as a transnational and *Southern* space that connects the politics of sea, land, labour, migration, nature, and place between Africa and Europe. From this perspective, the analytical framework of the Black Mediterranean (Di Maio, 2012; Proglio et al., 2021), that I introduce in the next section, simultaneously stems from and defies, first, the location of Europe vis-à-vis its Souths and, second, the racial codifications attached to those Souths. To sustain this claim, the first section brings into conversation debates in critical migration studies with race studies and Black geographies, reflecting on how contemporary borders impact not only labour markets but also spaces and politics of dwelling and emplacement. The second section examines the becoming of Southern Italy's lived spaces of migration, labour and dwelling —informal and ephemeral encampments, squatted farms, migration centres— and suggests the existence of a whole *geography of unsettlement* at the core of Europe based upon sustained forms of labour-dwelling (and, as such, also existential) precarity that inhibit the capacity of migrants to ever settle. Finally, by reflecting debates in Black geographies onto the enquiry of the politics of place, borders and labour in Europe, the third section concludes by interrogating the potential of this emerging geography to also *unsettle* (the idea and coloniality of) Europe, starting from the new spaces of inhabitation that have emerged on the traces of the Black Mediterranean.

1. The South within: Italy and the Black Mediterranean question

In 1860, at the dawn of Italy's unification, Luigi Carlo Farini, the chief administrator in Southern Italy at the beginning of Northern (Piedmontese) colonisation there, wrote to Cavour:

> "My friend, what lands are these … What barbarism! *This is not Italy! This is Africa:* compared to these peasants the Bedouins are the pinnacle of civilization."
> (in Moe, 2002: 165; my emphasis)

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[1] For example, despite not engaging with Southern theory, scholars like Woods and Saucier (2015) have adopted the term "slavery's afterlives" to describe the contemporary "deathscape" (De Genova, 2017) of the Mediterranean Sea, thus creating a parallel with the trans-Atlantic history of enslavement.

In Farini's letter, we can find the essence of the long-standing Southern Question of Italy, whereby the South was indelibly marked as the immanent Other, comparable only to Africa (Europe's absolute Other); a land of barbarism opposed to the alleged civilisation of the North. As scholars have noted (Teti, 1993, 2013; Pesarini, 2021), this comparison was not only geographical —due to the proximity of South Italy to North Africa— but also constructed on racial grounds. For example, the father of modern criminology, Cesare Lombroso, believed that "race shapes criminal organisations" (Lombroso, 1876; in Pesarini, 2021: 37). In his own words:

> "Both Bedouins and Gypsies can be considered races of organized criminals. The same seems to apply to Negroes in the United States … and to Albanians, Greeks and sometimes the indigenous people of southern Italy" (*ibidem*).

In the 1920s, this Southern Question gained greater visibility. As Antonio Gramsci (1926|2014) remarks, in the aftermath of the Italian unification the Southern Question had emerged as a political, economic, social, cultural, and ethical problem that was national rather than merely a problem of the Mezzogiorno (South Italy).

While the Southern Question reappeared in Italy's intellectual circles and politics in the 1950s, after the end of Fascism, it was not until the 1960s and 1970s that it became entangled with the migration question. Giglioli (2017) shows how such an entanglement initially appeared in Sicily, where the first Tunisian migrants arrived to work, seasonally, in fishing and agriculture. However, those first migrations were seen as economic and political opportunities rather than a threat (*ibidem*: 415). It would be only in the mid-1990s that trans-Mediterranean migrations from the African continent started to be conceived of as an immigration problem by the Italian State. This gave a whole new meaning to the interrelation between the Southern Question and national (as well as EU-ropean) borders, and it re-shaped the political geography of the Mediterranean Sea.

Consequently, scholars started to critically review the geography of the Mediterranean Sea to interrogate its location at the crossroads of contemporary questions of human mobilities, racial continuums, colonial pasts, and abolitionist futures. Over the last decade, the Mediterranean has been studied as a postcolonial archive (Chambers, 2008, 2020; Giaccaria and Minca, 2010; Proglio, 2019), a relational space (Raeymaekers, 2014), a contested geography of European identity and citizenship (Hawthorne, 2021), a hybrid space of literary, artistic and cultural exchange (Di Maio, 2012), a political geography of contested inhabitation (Raeymaekers, 2021), and at once a symbolic space of Black resistance (Smythe, 2018) and structural racism (Woods and Saucier, 2015). The term "Mediterraneo Nero" (Black Mediterranean) was first coined by Alessandra Di Maio (2012), who creates a parallel with the work of Paul Gilroy on the "Black Atlantic" (1993) to indicate, simultaneously, the proximity that has always existed between Italy and Africa and the ongoing forms of racialised violence in the Mediterranean "deathscape" (De Genova, 2017).

However, over three decades earlier, Cedric Robinson (1983) was already referring to the Mediterranean Sea as the precursor of the Atlantic Ocean in articulating geographies of racialisation and Black political subjectivity. Robinson's pioneering view on the Mediterranean enabled him to recognise it as the *centre* of Europe's project of modernity, coloniality and racial capitalism much before the advent of trans-Atlantic slavery. In his own words:

> "From the thirteenth century to the beginnings of the fifteenth century … the most precious cargo of the Mediterranean tradesmen was slaves. … the primary function of these predominantly European slaves in the economics of southern Europe was domestic service. Nevertheless … both European and African slaves [were used] in agriculture on sugar plantations, in industry, and for work in mines. This variety of uses to which slaves were put illustrates clearly the degree to which medieval colonial slavery served as a model for Atlantic colonial slavery. … The only important change was that the white victims of slavery were replaced by a much greater number of African Negroes" (*ibidem:*16).

In that historical context, Robinson maintains, racialism was ever-present as a differentiating mechanism within society. As such, to him, racialism has not been a consequence of capitalism and its need for cheap labour; rather, it anticipated the rise of capitalism, insinuating medieval and feudal political economies before that. From here, Robinson refers to capitalism as, inherently, "racial capitalism" (Robinson, 1983): a socio-economic system structurally rooted in the logics of racism rather than incidentally racial in some of its formulations; a system in which it is racial difference to shape the difference between classes, not vice versa.

As racialism continues to influence the inward and outward socio-spatial differentiation of Europe vis-à-vis its many Others, the Black Mediterranean emerges as a geographical border that simultaneously stems from and defies the racial order of (Western) Europe's predatory modernity over its many Souths. Consequently, in this article, I seek to interrogate the Black Mediterranean question alongside Europe's longstanding Southern Question. And, as Piero Bevilacqua (1996) puts it, the Southern Question is an Italian speciality.

Yet, the Southern Question has not been limited to a national problem for Italy: Northern European countries have marked South Europe as backward since the mid-eighteenth century. In "The view from Vesuvius: Italian culture and the Southern Question," Nelson Moe recounts how, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Italian Mezzogiorno was constructed as an "imaginative geography" (Saïd, 1979) of inferiority, thus becoming "the South" not only of Italy but of modern Europe as a whole (Moe, 2002). For Northern Europeans, the South was "both 'Africa' and *terra vergine*, a reservoir of feudal residues, sloth, and squalor on the one hand and of quaint peasants, rustic traditions, and exotica on the other" (*ibidem*: 3). At the same time, Moe clarifies that the progressive Southernisation that started in the mid-eighteenth century involved not only the Mezzogiorno but Italy *in toto*. Inversely, England, France and Germany were "increasingly identified as leading the way of progress" in a modern Europe of growing Eurocentrism, colonialism, nationalism, and bourgeoisification, yet far from being homogeneous and consistent (*ibidem*: 2). We can therefore see how the internal colonialism of the North of Italy over the South (Gramsci, 1926|2014) originated over a century before, in North-Western Europe.

These socio-spatial dynamics of Southernisation started to change, at least partly, with the creation of the EU in 1993, the Schengen elimination of internal borders in 1995, and a series of anti-immigration laws during the 1990s and early 2000s. As internal borders became, at least normatively, more porous and a sense of "Europeanness" tried to overcome the long-standing socio-spatial differentiation between North and South of Europe, external borders were strengthened, more policed and harder to penetrate (De Genova, 2017). Among the effects of the fortification of Europe's borders, new agreements were ratified between European states and North African states like Morocco, Tunisia and Libya to retain migrants,

surveil their coasts and repatriate their citizens, and new EU-ropean organisations were created to police Europe's borders, such as the highly debated Frontex (Mazzeo, 2021; Léonard and Kaunert, 2022).

Moving towards more complex understandings of temporality that overcome a simplistic paradigm of "crisis" as exceptionalism, critical migration scholars like Nicholas De Genova have stressed how Europe is currently faced with a crisis of the legitimacy of its borders and "of the entire fabric of the European social order" (De Genova, 2017: 17), more so than the "migration crisis" that media and politicians often evoke. "The borders of Europe are never … immutable, integral, internally consistent or objective boundaries," De Genova writes, "nor can these borders be apprehensible as simply the outwards projections of a stable and coherent centre" (*ibidem*: 20). Indeed, modern Europe never configured itself as a coherent and homogenous unity, especially as its Southern Question has continued to construct the geographies of Italy and the Mezzogiorno as the immanent subaltern. Nonetheless, the anti-immigration politics in the Mediterranean, to which even Southern states like Italy subscribe (BBC, 2018; The Guardian, 2019), fortifies the imaginary of Europe as "Fortress:" a spatial formation that is erected upon a social differentiation marked by the racialised imaginary of Africa. However, the risk of conceptualising Europe as Fortress, in connection to the harshening of its border regime, is to enforce the idea that the last decade is an exception to Europe's democratic "normality," perhaps one driven by the rise of right-wing populist sentiments across Europe.

Instead, I find a more convincing narrative in Cristina Lombardi-Diop's suggestion that borders like the Black Mediterranean are not a state of exception but the way in which racial capitalism usually works and thanks to which it becomes visible (Lombardi-Diop, 2021: 3-4). We could then assert that the Southern border is not peripheral to Europe's geography but central to its understanding. From this perspective, the Black Mediterranean appears not only as a "deathscape" (De Genova, 2017) but also as a porous, permeable border that challenges the legitimacy of Europe's "imaginative geography" (Saïd, 1979) by proposing new revisions informed by a critical approach to race, mobility, capitalism, and coloniality. As such, an analysis that starts from the Black Mediterranean can engender a new appraisal not only of the Southern Question but of Europe as a whole in at least two ways. First, by locating "questions of race and Blackness at the center of the region typically understood to be the 'cradle' of European civilization" (Proglio *et al.,* 2021: 15). Second, by showing "how the lives of [racialised] subjects demonstrate that 'common-sense' workings of modernity and citizenship are worked out, and normalized, through geographies of exclusion" (McKittrick and Woods, 2007) or, as this article illustrates in the next sections, through *geographies of unsettlement*.

How, therefore, is the Black Mediterranean located vis-à-vis Europe's and Italy's evolving Southern Question? On the one hand, we can see how Italy's prolonged imbalance between North and South, which has been especially visible in the agricultural system (Gramsci, 1926|2014), has a global side to it (Colloca and Corrado, 2015; Hazard, 2013; Ferrando, 2021). Colloca and Corrado (2015), in particular, talk about the "*globalizazzione delle campagne*" (globalisation of the countryside) to link South Italy's changing agro-industrial dynamics and spatial production to the workings of global capitalism, including those related to the increase of international migratory fluxes. On the other hand, the analytical framework of the Black Mediterranean allows us to see the new spaces of inhabitation that are emerging with the re-arranging of labour conditions in the agricultural supply chain not as singularities but as a structural spatial manifestation of the workings of racial capitalism.

While drawing connections between this cutting-edge and interdisciplinary scholarship that has started to lay the foundations of a critical review of Europeanness, Mediterranean migrations and local-global labour regimes, in the following sections I want to bring the attention to an underexplored dimension of debates on the Black Mediterranean and the Southern Question: their spaces and politics of inhabitation.

2. Unsettlement as precarity

At the center of Europe's changing geography of inhabitation, labor, and borders are makeshift and marginalized spaces of inhabitation made of cardboard, asbestos, plastic and metal scraps, and lacking the most basic services such as proper toilets, showers, and refrigeration for conserving perishable food, where migrant workers from North and sub-Saharan Africa, India (especially Punjab; see: Omizzolo 2019), and Eastern Europe (especially Bulgaria and Romania; see Sagnet and Palmisano 2015) live, often seasonally yet increasingly more permanently.[2] These spaces are usually called *ghetti* (ghettoes), *baraccopoli* (shantytowns), *tendopoli* (tent cities), *bidonvilles*, slums, or shacks. Non-place is also a favorite term among Italian journalists, stressing the impossibility of settling in such dwellings.[3] Left-wing papers and politicians as much as the political affiliates and sympathizers of the right-wing Northern League party have portrayed these spaces as incursions of the global South into the socio-spatial order of the global North (not rarely, for instance, they have been described with the Brazilian term *favelas*). According to such views these spaces are an invasion of informality into the imagined order of European planning.

While acknowledging the common use of these terms to describe Italy's migration-related, changing geography of inhabitation, in this article I choose to draw on Irene Peano's (2021) use of the term "encampment archipelago." Peano elaborates this notion starting from Michel Agier's (2013) acceptation of encampment to best account for the structural similarities of the new Italian and European camps as *loci* of refuge, relegation and survival, while still accounting for the diversity of their formal and subjective differences and their inherently mobile character (Peano, 2021: 212). As Peano stresses, these spaces are not only spaces of "refuge… asylum… and imprisonment" (*ibidem*), as Agier claims, but also spaces of migration control and globalised labour, especially in Southern Europe's agro-industrial sector (*ibidem).*

In Italy, for example, some of these spaces have become more symbolic than others in representing the nexus between the exploitation of the transnational workforce and the political economy of Europe's migration governance. First above all we find the Capitanata, in the province of Foggia (Apulia), where the 40% of the entire production of Italian tomatoes takes place, and the Plain of Gioia Tauro, in Calabria, which is known for the production of olives and citrus fruits. The former is one of the most discussed spaces of gang-mastering (known in Italy as *caporalato*)[2], by journalists, academics, NGOs, militants, and unions alike. This is partly due to the attention drawn by the so-called Gran Ghetto, an encampment that was described as a "small town" in and of itself (Gambino, 2017: 258) and considered to be the largest shantytown in Europe until its 2017 demise, through a combination of mafia arsons and state bulldozers (Raeymaekers, 2021: 136). As

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[2] See for example the agro-industrial landscape of the Sele Plain, in Campania (Avallone, 2013: 82).
[3] Drawing on Black geographies, in the next sections I problematize the epistemic violence and racial undertones of the term non-place in relation to spaces that are largely inhabited by African migrants.

Raeymaekers indicates, however, the eviction was temporary: with the new agricultural season, the *caporali* (gang-masters) re-appropriated the space between San Severo and Rignano and the worker-dwellers re-inhabited it with mobile homes, caravans, tents, and other improvised shelters (Raeymaekers, 2021: 137). "The shacks can be built and unbuilt in less than one hour, leaving almost no trace," Sagnet and Palmisano recount in their South-to-North report on *caporalato*, "a hundred of these shacks make a ghetto, a diffused slum distributed over two provinces and inhabited by a thousand of immigrants" (Sagnet and Palmisano, 2015: 53). Not unlike other encampments of its kind, the Gran Ghetto thus reproduces itself over and over, irreverent to the State's evictions, moving between Rignano Garganico, San Severo and Foggia.

Some 500 kilometres southward, we find the encampment of Rosarno, in the Plain of Gioia Tauro (Calabria), where the first African riot (Corrado, 2011) exploded in 2010. That was no coincidence, as in Gioia Tauro the working conditions are some of the harshest and African workers make approximately 20 euros every ten hours of work (Sagnet and Palmisano, 2015: 19). Rosarno is one of the most thriving agricultural districts of Europe yet one of the most exploitative of migrant labour (*ibidem*: 106). A mattress on the floor costs 40 euros per month in an abandoned factory close to the fields, transportation to the fields 5 euros each way, food prices are 30% higher than at market, and transportation to hospital is charged extra and is usually prohibitive, so the only medical cures come from volunteers who routinely visit the camps (Oxfam and Terra, 2018). The pattern and tempo of Apulia's labour and living conditions repeat themselves in Calabria, albeit with some variations due to the extension of the agricultural estates and number of landowners, regional agricultural politics, and the presence (or lack thereof) of the local administration, among other factors.

In these Southern regions, the spectral architectures of the encampments appear and disappear cyclically, their shacks being often set on fire at the end of every season to erase any trace of permanence. Vasudevan's (2015) notion of the "make-shift" seems apt here to outline the spatial politics of these informal settlements marked by "the constantly changing role of materials and resources in the making of spaces" (*ibidem*: 355): an incessant "making+shifting" of spaces, livelihoods, materials, social networks, and exchanges of multiple kinds, in the interpretation that Simone and Pieterse (2017) give of the making of contemporary urban worlds in the global South. Importantly, this perspective can not only serve to locate Southern Italy's growing makeshift architectures within broader debates and theorisations on Southern urbanism and informality (Simone, 2004; Roy, 2006, 2016; Pieterse, 2014) but also to call attention to the agency and spatial imagination of their inhabitants who, instead, are often portrayed by both sociological research and journalism as victims without agency.

As migrant dwellers are usually forced to move from one region to another to follow the temporalities of different harvests —from the tomatoes and watermelons of Apulia to the olives and citrus fruits of Calabria and Sicily— their informal dwellings move with them. Inherently, this means that the circulatory displacement of global capitalism that pushes many African migrants to cross the Mediterranean Sea does not end with their arrival in Europe. Season after season, the carefully organised system of gang-mastering (Leogrande, 2008; Omizzolo, 2019) captures the migrant labour force, capitalises upon their structural precarity and prolongs their unsettlement within Europe, reproducing the same tempo and spatial pattern (Amnesty International, 2012; Perrotta and Sacchetto, 2014; Perrotta, 2015; Sagnet and Palmisano, 2015; Omizzolo, 2019). In fact, scholars and unionists have often stressed that the *braccianti*'s exploitability is directly connected to the governance of migration in

Italy and the EU, due to the "highly obscure … extremely precarious, flexible and unstable [categories]" of migration bureaucracy (Giudici, 2013: 62).[3]

In this context, it seems relevant to draw attention to Vasudevan's observations on the term "precarious," which he traces back to the Latin *precarius*: "depending on the favour of another," hence uncertain, insecure (Vasudevan, 2015: 351). In the agro-industrial encampments of Southern Italy, precarity stems not only from the abovementioned conditions of being relentlessly on the move, underpaid, unskilled, abused on the workplace, residentially segregated,[4] expulsed from the city by racism and high rents (Perrotta and Sacchetto, 2014; Sagnet and Palmisano, 2015), and living in a constant condition of "deportability" (De Genova, 2002) due to the lack of documents or the fear of losing them (Perrotta, 2015: 200). It also stems from the insecurity of depending on the provisions supplied by the gang-masters, whose power and profit lie precisely in the biopolitical control of migrant labourers.

In fact, gang masters provide goods of different kinds or liaise with entrusted local brokers who supply drinking water, hot water for showers, food, rudimental sleeping facilities, alcohol, cigarettes, drugs, sex, clothes, hairdressing and mechanics services, and sometimes even limited forms of entertainment, while keeping an eye on who talks to whom and driving away curious intruders (Sagnet and Palmisano, 2015). Everything that is sold to the worker-dwellers is overcharged by at least 20-30% on the market price. This creates a side economy of almost twenty-five billion euros per year: over a third of all irregular work in Italy (Sagnet and Palmisano, 2015; Placido Rizzotto Observatory, 2016). All in all, gang-masters are not rarely portrayed as "necessary" intermediary figures (Perrotta, 2015: 199; Perrotta and Sacchetto, 2014; Grimaldi, 2022) on whose role both the unsettlement and precarity of migrant worker-dwellers but also, often, their capacity to work at all in Italy hinge. Such insecurity seems irreconcilable with the possibility of a stable settlement. The encampments, whether diffused (like in the Sele Plain) or concentrated (like the "ghettoes" of the Foggiano), provide exactly such a space within which the disposable migrant workforce (Colloca and Corrado, 2013) of global capitalism can move. The workers living in the makeshift encampments nearby the fields can be easily controlled by the *caporali*, who often detain their identity cards to ensure that they are not employable anywhere else (Sagnet and Palmisano, 2015). The worker-dwellers' livelihood is therefore entirely dependent upon the gangmasters, hence *precarius*.

Drawing on the works of Christina Sharpe (2016) and Katherine McKittrick (2006, 2011), and in particular on the idea of an "economy of race, and thus capitalism, wherein the process of uneven development calcifies the … links between blackness, underdevelopment, poverty, and place" (McKittrick, 2011: 951), I want to make the point that Europe's geography of unsettlement is not a singularity but a spatial manifestation of the global workings of racial capitalism. By virtue of its systematic nature, therefore, we could contend that it also

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[4] In the case of Italy, Giudici emphasises how "Irregular conditions and illegitimate practices characterise the whole process [of applying to and obtaining documents]" (Giudici, 2013: 62). In particular, migration laws like the 2002 Bossi-Fini and the 2009 "Security Package" sanctioned the exploitability of migrant labour by making it impossible for undocumented migrants to access regulated working conditions without a *permesso di soggiorno* (residence visa). At the same time, like in a vicious circle, they can't renew a *permesso di soggiorno* without a long-term work contract, that the *caporalato* system —by working mostly "*in nero*" (without formal employment)— does not concede (Amnesty International, 2012).

[4] Perrotta and Sacchetto discuss this form of containment by asserting that, while "not technically lack[ing] the right to spatial liberty as they are not prevented from moving away, … effectively [they] are trapped" (Perrotta and Sacchetto, 2014: 78).

encompasses spaces of institutional bordering, such as Italy's hotspots (equipped landing places for emergency rescue), CAS's (extraordinary reception centers), CPR's (repatriation centres), and CARA's (reception centres for asylum seekers). The latter, in particular, often act as bridges between the institutional regulation of migration and irregular labour exploitation, by providing a virtually perpetual flow of migrant labour for the gang-masters. For example, this is what happens in the encampment of Borgo Mezzanone (also known as *La Pista*), not far from the Gran Ghetto, where the physical barrier between this and the local CARA was cut open to let people flow in and out, under the gaze of the police officers that patrol the centre (Campesi *et al.,* 2016).

Furthermore, this geography of unsettlement is not made of solely ephemeral dwellings and mobile encampments. There are also spaces of re-inhabitation of ruined towns, such as the African (especially Nigerian) tenements in the town of Castel Volturno (Caruso, 2013), as well as squatted spaces in occupied buildings in Italy's main cities (Grazioli, 2017; Annunziata, 2020), among other dwelling typologies. In all cases, this is a geography inhabited by those who embody what Picozza calls "self-in-transit" — a succession of states of displacement that make real life feel "always postponed" (Picozza, 2017: 245): transnational asylum-seekers who managed to escape war and conflict, but also precarious workers who routinely move between jobs in agriculture, restoration, logistics, and construction.

Through legal migration control and the illegal ordering of the agro-industrial encampments, a whole geography of unsettlement has been set in place at the heart of Europe, from which migrant workers' capacity to "settle down" is constantly suspended and life is made precarious, in order for the cheaper marketisation of European food to be sustained. However, to limit the account of these spaces to the impossibility to ever settle and the condemnation to a bare life is also inadequate. In the next and final section, I draw on the idea of Europe's geography of unsettlement to interrogate its potential to also unsettle (the idea and coloniality of) Europe, starting from the new spaces of inhabitation that have emerged on the traces of the Black Mediterranean.

4. Unsettling as emplacement

To reflect debates in critical race studies and Black geographies onto the enquiry of the politics of space, place, migration, and labour in Southern Italy means not only to problematise the widely employed conceptual framework of the "ghetto" in the analysis and description of Europe's emerging geography of (inhabitation as) unsettlement. It also means to view in a different light the question posed at the beginning of this article: how can we theorise these growing spaces of inhabitation at the crossroads of multiple Southern Questions, in order to rethink Europe?

If Europe's Mediterranean question cannot be separated from structural racism (Woods and Saucier, 2015), then it is not enough to look at the "encampment archipelago" (Peano, 2021) as contingent waste of the neoliberal capitalist accumulation. Rather, I suggested that we regard these spaces and their politics as a geography of unsettlement: a structural feature of modern Europe's socio-spatial relations and contemporary geography, based on the insecurity, uprootedness and disposability of Europe's racialised Southerners and Southern spaces. Such geography is both "imaginative," in Edward Saïd's sense, insofar as Whiteness equals settlement and Blackness unsettlement in Europe's modern imagination, but it is also

based upon violence that takes very material forms, such as the psychological, physical and health problems that stem from dehumanising working and living conditions under gang-mastering (MSF, 2008).

However, forms of resistance, organisation, refusal, or ordinary emplacement, sometimes even public denunciation, do exist. As such, to think about unsettlement merely in terms of the spatialisation of bare life would preclude any possibility for a different kind of gaze and praxis to inform alternative projects of Europe. Here, in particular, I am interested in thinking about *unsettling* as the nemesis of (the normalisation of racialised) *unsettlement:* a disruption of the racial-capitalist order of modernity founded upon the normalisation of the territorial "settled status" promoted by the nation-state.

Let us look, for example, at the African riot (Corrado, 2011) against racism[5] that started in Rosarno in January 2010 and followed a previous uprising of African citrus pickers in 2008. This event is a prominent example of how organised social action against racialism and labour exploitation can gain prominent national attention and, if momentarily, disrupt the racial capitalist order of the agro-industry. A similar example of this unsettling is the anti-slavery strike of the African *braccianti* of Nardó in July-August 2011 (Nigro *et al.*, 2011), when "a group of about forty workers of various nationalities refused to continue harvesting tomatoes" (Perrotta and Sacchetto, 2014: 91). Importantly, Perrotta and Sacchetto observe that the Nardò strike would not have been such a large-scale development had it not been for the specific dwelling conditions of the strikers: not a segregated "ghetto" or CARA (migration centre), as it often happens, but a "tent city" (*tendopoli*) where migrants could access more easily the support of local social organisations and volunteers, even of the council, and with whom they organised. According to the authors, it was precisely this spatial relationality between migrant labourers and local groups that managed to break down the segregation imposed by the farm owners and the gang-masters and that offered a way out of their exploitative regime.

However, organised social movements are not the only way in which patterns of seclusion can be disrupted. Small subversive acts, such as the refusal to get a certain job done, happen the whole time. For example, Perrotta and Sacchetto (2014: 89-90) expose how simple but repetitive choices operated by agricultural labourers —such as picking up unripe, green, tomatoes and hiding them under the ripe, red, tomatoes, in order to go faster and thus increase their daily salary— can affect the quality of a whole harvest. A very compelling example is also the mundane enterprise called Radio Ghetto: a participatory radio project that operated between 2012 and 2019 in the Gran Ghetto of Rignano Garganico, broadcasting music and news from the "ghettoes" of the Capitanata, creating a connection between Africa and Southern Europe. It was born of a collaboration between the volunteers and militants of the social organisation Campagne in Lotta and the African *braccianti* of the Gran Ghetto. According to their own description, Radio Ghetto

> "seeks to be a multifaceted space, a *place* to create moments of confrontation on the working and living conditions of migrants in Italy, thus becoming an information and reporting tool from which Ghetto migrants can turn to all of Italy

[5] Especially against the racism of the agro-mafias, as reported by Alessandra Corrado's interlocutors: an "unprecedented ultra-racist violence", an "atmosphere of fear" that "prevent[ed] them from finding accommodation in rented houses and forc[ed] them to live in 'ghettos' without water or electricity" (Corrado, 2011: 198), but also formulated in forms of extreme racial violence such as "'hitting the niggers' as an 'initiation rite' for young people aspiring to become members of the 'Ndrangheta [mafia]" (*ibidem*).

and beyond. It also seeks to serve as a site for daily meetings and socialisation."
(source: Radio Ghetto Voci Libere; my emphasis).

In the tension between unsettlement and unsettling to be found around Southern Italy's encampments, a fundamental question opens up: the possibility of creating a (sense of) place in such a context. According to Paul Virilio's theory of "global de-localisation," place has become irrelevant and "deportation … our daily bread" (Virilio, 1990: 93; in Escobar, 2003: 162) under global capitalism. However, looking at the examples outlined above, it seems that claiming the right to (have a) place is exactly what these subversive practices are about. It is problematic in more than one way to see "global de-localisation" (such as the one undergone by Northern and sub-Saharian African migrants across the continent, then across the Mediterranean Sea, and finally across Europe and Southern Italy; but also the one endured for generations by Southern Italians forced to flee to seek jobs in the industrial cities of Northern Italy, the United States, and the rest of the world) in mere terms of placelessness.

Similar accounts are to be found in many journalistic reports, where the encampments (that are largely inhabited by African migrants) are routinely constructed as "non-places" by both right-wing and left-wing newspapers. The construction of Black spaces as placeless is not new nor it is a prerogative of Italy, despite being particularly well documented by scholarship in the United States (see, among many others: Wacquant, 2002; Domosh, 2007; Gilmore, 2007; McKittrick and Woods, 2007; McKittrick, 2011; Hawthorne, 2019) and far less so in Europe. Indeed, Black geographers have stressed on several occasions that deliberate "practices of place annihilation" (McKittrick, 2011) are the basis of capitalist modernity across time and place. However, they also emphasise that Black life cannot be reduced to racialised dispossession. Among the key contributors, Katherine McKittrick calls for a political and poetic act to re-conceptualise "geographies of dispossession and racial violence not through the comfortable lenses of insides/outsides or us/them... but as sites through which 'co-operative human efforts' can take place and have a place" (McKittrick; 2011: 960). The examples detailed above testify to the importance of looking for "the often complex forms of deliberation, calculation, and engagement through which residents try to do more than simply register the factualness of a bare existence" (Simone, 2010: 333).

It is in this sense that I suggest that Europe's geography of unsettlement is far from static, fixed and condemned. Rather, it both encompasses and contravenes the dualities of temporariness/permanence, formality/informality, mobile/anchored, and settled/unsettled that characterise the making of space (and place) in Western Europe. If the Black Mediterranean represents both the limit and the horizon of Europe's democracy and citizenship, both Europe's colonial archive and neocolonial present, then I want to suggest that to rethink Europe from its multiple Souths could mean not only to call attention to the violence of *unsettlement* operated on racialised bodies, spaces and epistemes, but also to point out the counter-politics of *unsettling.* This is activated by migrant agency, co-operative resistance (that transcends race, nationality, religion, culture) and everyday relationality among the multiple "wretched" of Europe's Souths — from the Southern Italians colonised in the nineteenth century by the North's (Piedmont's) Unification to today's African migrants arriving to Europe via the Mediterranean Sea.

This relationality could even be seen, from a Mediterranean epistemology, as a tool to shift current geographical imaginations and "reform our gaze" (Cassano [1996] 2005: xxiii) by re-thinking the Mediterranean as a connection and a horizon rather than a limit and a periphery;

one that becomes central in the re-definition of Europe, "redeeming [it] from its Euro-centrism" (xxv).

Conclusion

Starting from the double anecdote of the drifting Libyan boat and the agricultural strike led by African migrants, in this article I explored how new spaces of inhabitation have emerged at the crossroads of border (e.g., the "left-to-die boat") and labor (e.g., the Nardò strike) regimes. I asked, how can we theorise these growing spaces of inhabitation at the crossroads of multiple Southern questions, in order to rethink Europe? One of the key arguments running through the article is that an analysis that starts from the Black Mediterranean as a Southern geography can engender a new appraisal not only of Europe's Southern question but of the region as a whole. A clear concern of this argument was to unveil the racial dynamics, on the one hand, and the politics of emplacement, on the other hand, that remain often concealed in both critical migration and political economy readings of global capitalism. In particular, this entailed highlighting the underlying structural racism of (Fortress) Europe by regarding the precarious and often segregated spaces of inhabitation emerging from border-labor regimes not as singularities but as a spatial manifestation of the global workings of racial capitalism.

It is through engagement with this concern that I started to draw connections between studies on the Black Mediterranean, critical migration, and Europe's and Italy's long-standing Southern Question. In doing so, my objective was to highlight the multiple racial codifications attached to today's Central Mediterranean geographies and Europe's immanent South. I then turned to an analysis of the border-labour nexus under global capitalism to stress the importance of a place-informed approach that focusses on Southern Europe's emerging spaces of inhabitation to understand how the governing of migration through borders affects not only the politics of labour but also of dwelling. In examining some concrete examples, from Rignano Garganico to Nardò, I sketched a portrait of South Italy's "encampment archipelago" and other emerging spaces of designed precarity, from the perspective of a geography of unsettlement. By mobilising the notion of unsettlement, I reflected on the increasingly more pervasive (rather than exceptional) nature of these spaces and their politics of inhabitation, which often concern mobile, informal and makeshift encampments that are endlessly made and remade.

Beyond seeing them as spaces of hold, I concluded by interrogating them as places: sites that possess a potential for contestation over collective futures, especially as scholars, activists, progressive organisations, and other social actors work together to cultivate spatial imaginaries of Europe otherwise. To this end, I drew on Black geographies in order to bring to the fore collective forms of resistance, organization, refusal, and ordinary emplacement that constitute fissures in Europe's border-labor-dwelling regime. Such a relationality— between migrant laborers and Southern Italian NGOs, militants, scholars, residents, and sometimes even local governments, or between transitory migrant spaces and impoverished Southern Italian towns—would deserve more space than what this article can afford. More space would also serve a discussion on how the geography of the Italian South can dialogue with other Southern geographies of the world; how it is located in the broader frame of critical Southern scholarship. Similarly, here I did not have the chance to expand on how the border-labor-dwelling nexus and the emergence of the migrant encampments are blurring the modern dualism between "urban" and "rural" geographies, by constituting "extended" (Lefebvre [1970] 2003) and "extensive" (Simone 2019) processes of urbanisation.

However, for the sake of this article, I will limit my conclusion to the following: that un/settlement emerges as a spatial *poiesis* of social life in the Black Mediterranean. Sometimes it is absorbed by and sometimes it manages to contravene the dualities of temporariness/permanence, formality/informality, mobile/anchored, and settled/unsettled at the heart of the modern idea of Europe. As such, it can be (and, in this article, was) understood not only as the ongoing spatial deployment of structural displaceability but also as a tool for unsettling the normalcy of racial capitalism, the nation-state, and the whole socio-spatial and political-technological apparatus of the modern, settled way of life.

In conclusion, to connect Gramsci's remarks to a broader Southern Question, it is relevant to ask, paraphrasing Walter Mignolo (2000): what can thinking *from* these borders —rather than about them, as mere margins— engender, in terms of alternative visions of collective futures? While this article's scope is too limited to do fully justice to the question above, it tentatively proposed that the study of Europe's multiple and interlinked Souths and of its geography of unsettlement can provide important insights into alternative spatial imaginaries animated by an open determination against racial capitalism, to re-imagine (and unsettle) "Europe" from the Black Mediterraneann.

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