

## *A Botched Urban Change: A Case-Study from Central Naples<sup>1</sup>*

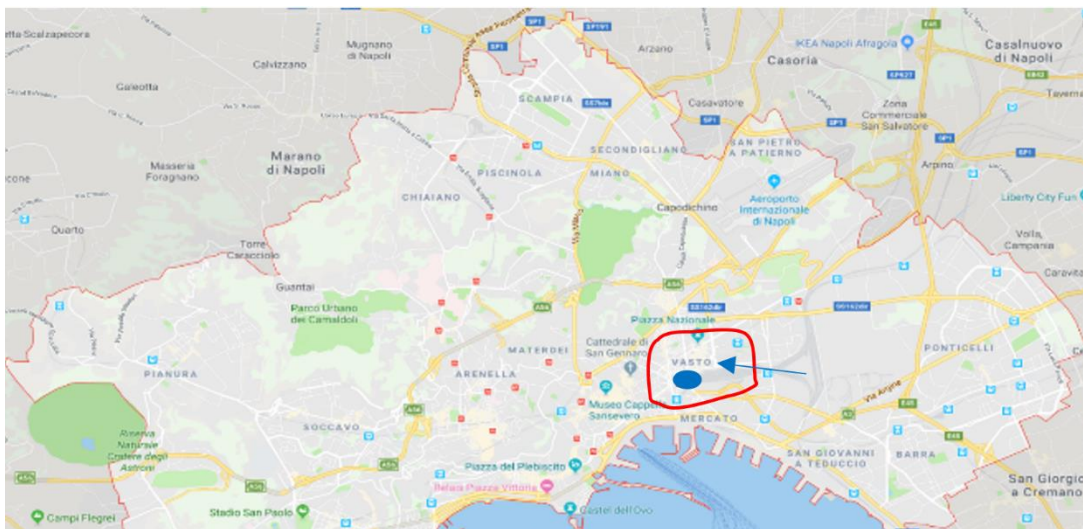
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This article draws on anthropological research in Naples to study critical dynamics of integration versus exclusion and of tolerance versus toleration engendered by the socio-economic impact of a huge and largely illegal foreign immigration on a local life marked by increased crime, insecurity and urban decay. Turning on its head a situation previously marked by generally positive relationships and economic collaboration between local people and immigrants, in the eye of the indigenous population the spiralling increase in uncontrolled immigration has made their neighbourhood dangerous and unliveable. The discussion invites reflection on mismanagement of the power to rule that breeds intolerance and conflict in a social, economic and cultural context traditionally oriented to hospitality and tolerance. The latter, it is argued, urgently need to be restored alongside *mutual* trust between governance and citizenship. The evidence suggests that this goal might be achieved by a governance that pursued a working combination of local residents' traditional tolerance, demographically and culturally compatible changes, fair and implementable legislation and, last but not least, a genuine drive to apply the law firmly and fairly.

**Keywords:** Uncontrolled immigration, tolerance vs toleration, misgovernance, trust.

### **Introductory Notes**

Since the late 1990s, Naples (Map 1) and its Province, like most of Italy, have experienced substantial demographic changes brought about by a huge and largely uncontrolled influx of foreign immigrants from non-EU countries. Since the mid-2000s, these changes have increased dramatically engendering an urban superdiversity (Rosbrook-Thompson and Armstrong 2018) that, in the eye of the indigenous population, has made their neighbourhood dangerous and unliveable. Here, as across Italy and beyond, these dark overtones prevail.



Map 1. Naples. Piazza Garibaldi is marked by a blue dot; the relevant surrounding area is circled in red.

<sup>1</sup> The final version of this essay has benefited from the feedback and comments given by the participants in the Symposia held at Brunel University on *Urbanity: Empirical Reflections* and at Anglia Ruskin University on *Cities in Flux: Ethnographic and Theoretical Challenges*, respectively in May and July 2018, and by two anonymous reviewers for *Urbanities*.

I draw on anthropological field research in central Naples to study how this phenomenon has engendered critical dynamics of integration versus exclusion and of tolerance versus toleration. These oppositions and their worrying ramifications were incisively discussed ten years ago by Giuliana B. Prato in her early, and at the time bravely argued, critique of multiculturalism as a political project (Prato 2009). In that example of what Laura Nader (2018) has recently called ‘contrarian anthropology’ that questions assumptions that inform entrenched mindsets, Prato and the contributors to her book (Prato ed. 2009) drew on ethnographic evidence to examine this obnoxious project on the ground. Their robust analysis aptly foresaw its failure, bringing powerfully to light its contribution to furthering injustice and inequalities; a failure now of course broadly recognised in the specialist literature and, critically if belatedly, in politics.

In my Naples-based contribution to Prato’s book I found that forms of conflict were minimal and sporadic, and relationships between local people and immigrants came across as relatively smooth and generally positive. In particular, the case material on joint entrepreneurial activities indicated not only tolerance of difference but, most significantly, productive economic collaboration (2009: 109-15). Later, urged from a distance by documentary evidence and media reports, I returned to Naples to investigate new developments. With specific reference to the relationships between the autochthonous population and foreign immigrants, this new fieldwork brought out a very different picture from that I was familiar with. The empirical situation stimulated reflection on the ‘mismanagement of the power to rule that breeds intolerance and conflict in a social, economic and cultural context traditionally oriented to hospitality and tolerance’ (Pardo 2017: 149). Perhaps the most striking observable consequence of such mismanagement of power was a turning of tolerance into toleration, which appeared to be progressing into aggressive, in some cases, violent rejection of the large, and growing, number of foreign immigrants living and operating locally. As Hannah Arendt (1958) taught us, however, things become irreversible only when people accept them as such. It is therefore significant that in the most affected areas of Naples residents fight for restoring decency and peace of mind in their neighbourhood.

What had happened? What could explain such an incredibly radical change of attitude among ordinary Neapolitans? What had turned a traditionally tolerant and open people into people who deeply resented the situation in which they felt they were forced to live, the foreign people who populate it and the local and national ruling élite whom they deem responsible for it, and whom they deeply despise?

As I have indicated, documentary sources suggested that the demographics of foreign immigration had undergone a dramatic change, both numerically and culturally. Numerically, according to the information produced by the Istituto Nazionale di Statistica (Italian Institute of Statistics, henceforth ISTAT), the change was significant indeed; the influx of foreign immigrants had increased considerably, and we now know that the incremental rate keeps rising.<sup>2</sup> As indicated by Caritas in their annual reports, foreign immigrants legally present in Naples and its Province have steadily increased: in 1996, they were 33,229; in 2004, they were

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<sup>2</sup> See ISTAT <http://www4.istat.it/it/archivio/208951>

70,134; in 2019, the number had risen to 134,330.<sup>3</sup> On the ground, I found that the presence of foreign immigrants was indeed larger than that reported in the official documents. Culturally, I soon realised, the change was even greater. Up to the early-2000s, most foreign immigrants originated in cultures from Eastern Europe, the Philippines, Latin America and so on, which were fundamentally in tune with the local one. Instead, the subsequent unregulated influx of foreign immigrants accounted for people who are bearers of cultures, whose precepts are received by ordinary local people as alien and incompatible with their values and way of life; they originate mostly from North, West and sub-Saharan Africa, the Horn of Africa, Bangladesh and Pakistan.<sup>4</sup> This process started almost imperceptibly in the 1980s,<sup>5</sup> as small numbers of such immigrants began to operate in the city, but accelerated slowly in the 1990s and, then, rapidly during the past ten-to-fifteen years. So, today's outlook is exponentially different from the relatively recent past. According to the ISTAT, in 2017 6% of the Naples population were legal immigrants.<sup>6</sup> Although the feeling I have drawn from participant observation tends to tally with experts' belief that the illegal presences now vastly exceed this figure, for obvious reasons, no reliable data on illegal immigrants are available.<sup>7</sup> Their numbers can only be inferred, with a great degree of approximation, through on-the-ground experience. Equally importantly, ethnographic experience can help us to understand the perceived weight, among the autochthonous population, of the impact of foreign immigration — legal and, most importantly, illegal — on local life.

The present discussion is based on the material collected during recent fieldwork aimed at looking at how the situation on the ground had evolved and finding out how ordinary Neapolitans talked and felt about it.<sup>8</sup> An extended analysis of the findings of my research belongs to a book-length discussion, now in preparation. Here, I focus on the area around Piazza Giuseppe Garibaldi (henceforth, Piazza Garibaldi; see Map 1). Traditionally known to Neapolitans as *'a ferrovia* (literally, the railways), the piazza is dominated by the largest rail station in South Italy.<sup>9</sup> For reasons that will become clear as we proceed, the piazza and the surrounding area are constantly in the local, national and international spotlight.

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<sup>3</sup> Caritas (2019). For data on immigrants' employment in Naples, see Ministero del Lavoro (2018).

<sup>4</sup> Currently (Caritas 2019), there are 1,580,000 registered Muslim immigrants in Italy (an increase of 2%). The total registered immigrants are 5,255,503 (that is, 8.7% of the total population).

<sup>5</sup> This process has been the object of numerous studies (King ed. 1999, Spagnuolo 2005).

<sup>6</sup> See <https://web.archive.org/web/20170806142909/http://www.demo.istat.it/bil2016/index.html>.

<sup>7</sup> According to police sources and judiciary reports, many are undocumented. For various reasons, which I have discussed elsewhere (2009), many of them cannot be easily expelled.

<sup>8</sup> Since the mid-1980s I have conducted anthropological research in Naples (for an outline, see Pardo 2018), involving the preliminary study of documentary sources and long-term fieldworks based on participant observation, informal interviews and the construction of case studies of individual, groups and event. As part of my ongoing research interests, I conduct periodical fieldtrips to the city and its Region.

<sup>9</sup> The Stazione Centrale (Central Station) is the main railway station in the city and the sixth busiest in Italy in terms of passenger flow.

A huge number of immigrants originating from Africa and Bangladesh have established themselves in this area.<sup>10</sup> The progression of their settlement follows a familiar pattern which, with the exception of a recent passing glimpse of a different kind of policy, stands stubbornly unbroken. As reported to me by my local informants, a few individuals act as ‘front-people’. ‘While playing nice to the locals’, an indigenous local activist said, ‘they rent a flat, which they proceed to fill with the largest possible number of fellow immigrant sub-renters from their country; in some cases, the latter may move to Naples from abroad or from elsewhere in Italy on the “invitation” of those who now live and operate locally’. This kind of accommodation seems to offer living conditions marginally better than those offered by the hostels that I describe later. When I did fieldwork in the mid-2010s several Bangladeshi were my neighbours. They, all men, quietly shared two flats in the building where I lived near Piazza Garibaldi.

### **A Corner of the Field**

Many travellers drive, fly or sail to Naples. Most arrive by train or coach. The main train and coach stations are located in Piazza Garibaldi. From here, one can travel on via metro, bus or rails connections throughout the city, its periphery, the hinterland and the region. The Piazza, which for several years has undergone renewal work (now completed), is close, to the South and South-West, to the port and the motorway system. Some of the city’s main street markets are in the vicinity, as is the Centro Direzionale located within walking distance to the North-East (Green Dot, Map 2). Started in the mid-1980s and completed in 1995, this broadly pedestrian cluster of eye-catching skyscrapers, fountains and broad walkways is Naples service centre. It hosts major business headquarters, company offices, University departments, the main branches of energy companies, banks and financial establishments, a church, the headquarters of several departments of the local bureaucracy, telecommunications hotspots, the Regional Assembly, the Courts and luxury Hotels and restaurants. The Centro Direzionale’s underground system lies in sharp contrast to its sleek above-ground outlook. It was originally intended to offer underground facilities, car parks and passage-ways that are now largely unused by the general public, because unsafe. Mirroring the state of many areas in the city centre, it is now a graffiti-strewn concrete domain dotted with uncollected rubbish and discarded objects (mattresses, broken furniture and household appliances, and so on) where cockroaches, rats and stray cats and dogs reign supreme.<sup>11</sup> It is an underground badly-lit world where few people dare to go; among them a few homeless people who find shelter there.

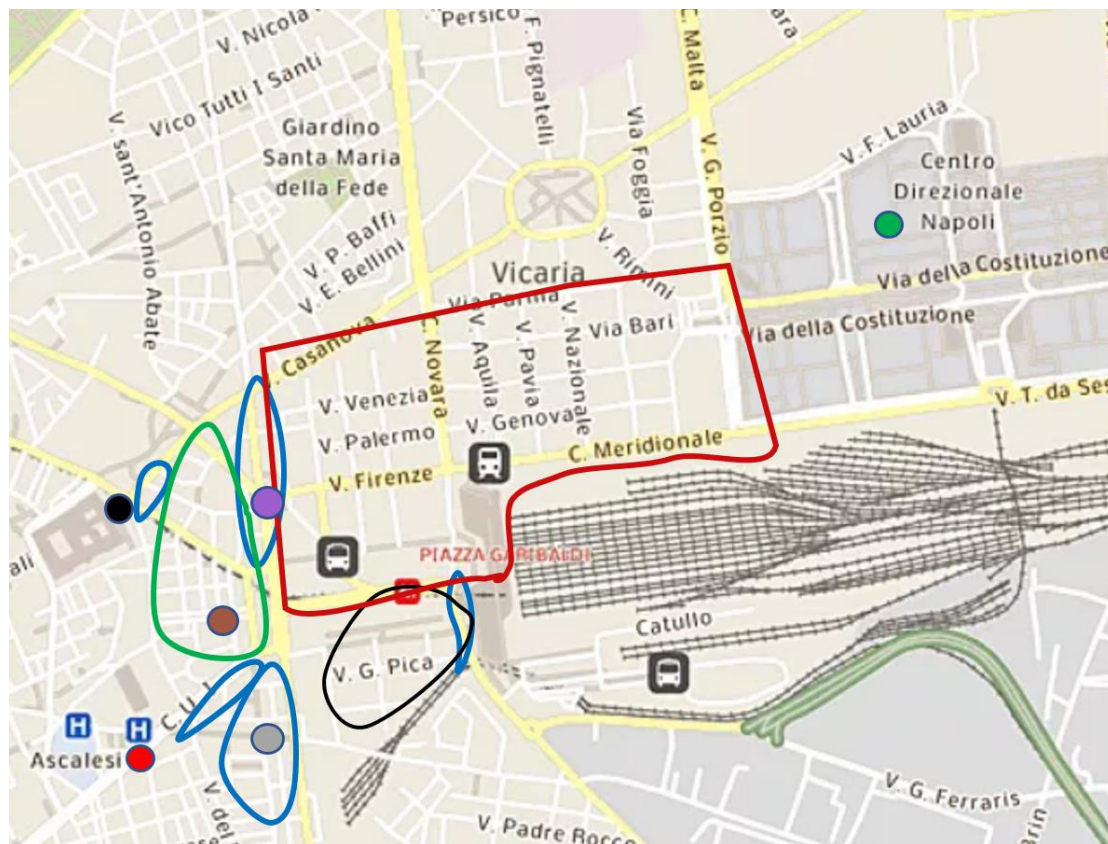
It does not seem unreasonable that Neapolitans should expect Piazza Garibaldi to be one of the city’s welcoming spots and ‘calling cards’, alongside the airport and the passenger sections of the port. Like the owners and staff of the few good hotels and restaurants located on its South-West and West sides, my Neapolitan friends say that ‘despite all that’s going on’

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<sup>10</sup> Observation and interviews suggest that legal and illegal immigrants live and operate in different areas of the city and its periphery, each basically dominated by people of the same ethnic origin.

<sup>11</sup> The interested reader can see report of 3 December 2019 by the local investigative journalists, De Crescenzo and Di Biase, and the attached telling photographs; available at: [https://www.ilmattino.it/napoli/cronaca/emergenza\\_rifiuti\\_napoli-4901491.html](https://www.ilmattino.it/napoli/cronaca/emergenza_rifiuti_napoli-4901491.html).

they have ‘a right to wish that the Piazza and its environs were in decent conditions’. For a long time, reality has failed to meet such legitimate expectations.



### Legend

Areas circled in Blue: Rubbish Peddling  
 Area circled in Red: The Vasto Neighbourhood.  
 Areas circled in Black: Predominant Bangladeshi Presence.  
 Areas circled in Green: Predominant Chinese presence.

● Centro Direzionale.  
 ● Porta Capuana.  
 ● Piazza Principe Umberto.  
 ● The Duchesca Neighbourhood.  
 ● Porta Nolana.  
 ● Corso Umberto I (Rettifilo).

Map 2. The Piazza Garibaldi area.

Reflecting the current state of most of the city, the Piazza’s environs could be appropriately described as an urban mess rife with street crime at the expense of passengers and passers-by. In the words of residents, the large urban sprawl surrounding the piazza is ‘a badly lit, decaying and menacing nightmare thick with graffiti, grime and filth’. This area brings together traffic chaos and street harassment, urban decay and rubbish, political slant and targeted inefficiency, legal and — mostly — illegal immigration, and trafficking in almost everything, from counterfeit merchandise to sex, drugs and danger.<sup>12</sup>

Ninety percent of the so-called immigrant reception centres of Naples and its Province are located around this Piazza. Some of the thousands of foreign immigrants from non-EU countries — whom Italians call *extracomunitari* — who populate the area are in Italy legally

<sup>12</sup> According to recent assessments (for example Caritas 2019), 20,255 foreign immigrants are incarcerated in Italy for various crimes, accounting for 33.9% of the total population in Italian prisons. Sixty-six per cent of 18-20-year-olds in jail are foreign immigrants.

on a refugee status or hold an immigration permit. Many are not. Some arrived in the country legally, were granted a temporary permit but overstayed it and then proceeded to disappear from the official world, which is when they became particularly vulnerable to the grasp of ethnic gangs specialising in drug-dealing, prostitution and various forms of slavery. Many more who now populate the city entered the country illegally and lack documentation — in Italy, they are collectively called *clandestini* (literally, clandestine people). Most are young and seemingly in good health. They originate, as I have mentioned, from Africa (mainly settled in the area outlined in red in Map 2), China (mainly settled in the area outlined in green in Map 2) and Bangladesh (mainly settled in the area outlined in black in Map 2). At the same time, the number of Roma has also grown exponentially.

This complexity develops in a city where, according to ISTAT, the officially unemployed are 24.2% percent of the active population, reaching 50.4% percent among the local young (15 to 29 years of age); this, in a context where according to Eurostat (2019), 53.6% of the population in the Naples region, Campania, runs a serious risk of falling into poverty (on an income level 60% lower than the national average) and social exclusion.<sup>13</sup>

Residents complain that it begs belief that this clearly difficult situation should be selectively ignored by the local administration, which they resent as unforgivable *laissez faire* that may serve certain elite groups but harms the ordinary people who have to live with its consequences. Lino, a Neapolitan friend I made in the mid-1980 (Pardo 1996: Ch. 2), cites ‘the damage done by militants of Centri Sociali, who can count on the support of powerful politicians and enjoy strong links with organised groups of immigrants’. Over the last decade, the influence of fringe extremist groups that support both foreign immigration and the present administration has increased, as have what local ordinary people and experts (Simonazzi and Casadei 2018) call ‘new forms of slavery’. For Lino, as for many other local informants, this is ‘a cancer’ that for expedient political interests and the economic returns for a few has been instrumentally allowed to grow and metastasise in the urban fabric, harming the ordinary many. According to current judicial inquiries (DIA 2018: 146-201), the aforementioned fringe groups engage in political aggression and violence while growing number of immigrants are managed by autochthonous criminal gangs and, increasingly, by their ethnic counterparts. On-the-ground experience suggests that, whatever the underlying political and economic strategy may or may not be, under these conditions it is hard to see integration as a viable project. It will be useful to outline a few major aspects of what comes across as a difficult combination of problems that appears to be brewing into widespread conflict.

Piazza Garibaldi was once equipped with adequately welcoming structures that have run into disrepair; some have been turned into residences for large number of illegal immigrants living at the margins of society; in some of these establishments, a few rooms are turned into prostitution dens. The sidewalks are now home to con-artists, pickpockets, bag-snatchers and drug and porn peddlers. On the North-West side of the square, the side streets criss-crossing the *quartiere* (neighbourhood) Vasto (indicated by a blue arrow in Map 1) offer graphic evidence

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<sup>13</sup> In 2017 this percentage was lower: 46.3% of the local population ran this risk (Eurostat 2019). On official unemployment statistics, see ISTAT <http://dati.istat.it/Index.aspx?QueryId=20745>

of the socio-economic deterioration surrounding Piazza Garibaldi.<sup>14</sup> They are rubbish-clogged open-air urinals scattered with drug-dealing hubs, and are often enlivened during the day but especially at night by knife fights between rival gangs of young immigrants that make the headlines in the media.<sup>15</sup> The Vasto is populated by around 15,000 Neapolitans (Comune di Napoli 2006), a large number of African immigrants — legal and illegal — who live and operate there and their fellow countrymen who live in the province and join them daily for business. Some man the licensed stalls on Piazza Garibaldi's sidewalk selling fake ethnic objects and a variety of knickknacks. Some patrol Piazza Garibaldi on foot peddling their wares and making all sort of offers to passers-by. Others operate there and the surrounding area, dealing in various dubious activities, including drugs and the sale of sexual services. Many display their wares on impromptu, easily dismantled stalls or on rugs laid on the pavement. The police rarely intervene. When they do, a peddler said to me 'all you've to do's run away; then you just can't be traced'.<sup>16</sup> When the police are in the area, word quickly spreads and the peddlers pack up and move elsewhere. I witnessed how they pick up the four corners of their rug, wrap the lot and go. When the need arises, it is equally easy for their stalls to disappear swiftly; they lift the cardboard sheet on which the wares are fixed, fold the cardboard box holding it and move on. As for the limited capital needed to start this kind of business, those I met said that they borrowed from family or friends.

Much of the supporting structure of what appears to be an efficient cooperation between well-organised autochthonous and allochthonous crime gangs lies in the large network of back streets, extending several blocks to the North-East. Here, foreign prostitutes solicit in broad daylight, part of a rampant sex trade that takes off at night. Here are located dozens of illegal 'warehouses' and a large number of basic guesthouses, small hotels and bed and breakfast establishments that are officially part of the CAS network,<sup>17</sup> but in fact act as incredibly overcrowded hostels for immigrants.<sup>18</sup> Using these places to host the huge numbers of people arriving legally in Italy from Africa is how the local administration seems to be actually 'coping' with the consequences of what authoritative commentators (Nordio 2018, Del Tufo 2018) describe as an 'open arms' ideology that in recent years has led to a description of Italy as the 'soft underbelly' of the EU.<sup>19</sup> Apparently, many who, in their own words, 'are fortunate

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<sup>14</sup> The Vasto is part of the 0.7-square-kilometre Vicaria district outlined in red in Map 2.

<sup>15</sup> A documentary broadcast nationally on 11 November 2019 offers an all-too-brief but telling portrait of this urban situation (*Quarta Repubblica* 2019: [https://www.mediasetplay.mediaset.it/video/quartarepubblica/napoli-quartiere-vasto\\_F309976201011C14](https://www.mediasetplay.mediaset.it/video/quartarepubblica/napoli-quartiere-vasto_F309976201011C14)).

<sup>16</sup> Conversations with foreign immigrants were conducted in Italian, English or French.

<sup>17</sup> The CAS acronym stands for Centri di Accoglienza Straordinaria (literally, Extraordinary Welcoming Centres).

<sup>18</sup> I have found that there is no exaggeration in the claims made by local resident associations, who found that one of these establishments 'accommodated' 28 legal immigrants in 5 rooms, another accommodated 52 in 9 rooms. They counted 101 legal immigrants in a hotel that has 15 rooms and 112 guests in one that also has 15 rooms.

<sup>19</sup> For a recent visual testimony, see <https://www.tgcom24.mediaset.it/cronaca/tropi-richiedenti-asilo-nel-rione-vasto-di-napoli-gli-abitanti-chiediamo-piu-legalita-3169735-201802a.shtml>

enough to have a place in a decent room' take it in turn to sleep in the same bed; one small room may host up to ten people, who do their cooking there, on camping stoves. These establishments have communal toilets and washing facilities. Field research and witnesses' reports suggest that this set up is replicated across central Naples and, in greater scale, in the hinterland. There is more.

Through network links or gangs' imposition, these legal placements are joined by a much larger number of illegal 'placements' not only in hotel rooms but also in the basements, cellars, stairwells or terraces of overcrowded buildings. While on two occasions I could glimpse into these buildings I could not gain sufficiently prolonged access to these places; so, I can only report what I have been told by African-immigrant informants, some of whom described their cramped living quarters as almost impossible to endure. Here, the expression 'almost impossible' is explained, in a sense ironically, by the ugly stories they told me. They tally with the outcry of a young Neapolitan resident with whom I spent much time in the field. It is indicative and worth reporting at length. Referring to one such building, this university student said,

'What is going on there is not hidden, it is not a secret. Drug-dealing, prostitution, pickpocketing, bag-snatching and stabbings are under anyone's eye. Much more goes on behind closed doors, so to speak. In short, this is a public case of total state failure, you know. This is a failure also of the part of the Neapolitan owners of the houses, who are complicit in such degradation. In that building there is a grocery store, a sex den, a dormitory on the rooftops and the stairwell, as well as three illegal canteens. In three apartments, illegal immigrants cook food to take away or to eat in; at lunchtime there is a long queue outside these apartments. In this building live *extracomunitari* who are my friends. They are good, respectable people who make a living as best as they can, without stealing, dealing in drugs or selling their bodies for sex. They, though, are forced to live in an indecent way and have to endure being painted with the same brush as their illegal neighbours. We [he and his local neighbours] have reported what is going on to the competent authorities, to politicians, but nothing has been done. How is it possible to know and at the same time tolerate? This is what depresses us and makes us feel that us, and them, we are totally abandoned to our destiny.'

Groups of young Africans are routinely seen apparently just hanging around or lounging at the entrance of small back-street hotels, ethnic shops, not-always-legal betting dens, internet cafes, ethnic takeaways and other assorted outlets. My own experience of some of the ethnic food outlets that have mushroomed in this area met the damning report of a health and safety officer who asked to remain anonymous. The statement reported below exemplifies the dismay felt among the officer's peers:

'You wouldn't believe what we find in the licensed so-called ethnic food shops, restaurants and take-away establishments here [the Piazza Garibaldi area] and across Naples and the periphery. The forefronts and areas open to the public are



usually superficially acceptable; greasy floors, table-tops and chairs relatively clean but filthy beneath, and so on. The rest is awful. The smell these places release in the street outside is nothing compared to the stench in the filthy cockroach- and rat-infested storerooms and backrooms and in the kitchens, where they cook the food. Not to speak of the dirty cooking equipment and their unwashed hands and bodies. Of course, we duly file our detailed reports. When the reports are followed through, the places lose their licence and get an injunction to close. When the follow-up controls are done and the place actually closes [. . .] well, that's not the end of the matter. Some places stay closed for good. Some simply open elsewhere, so we run into the same operators over and over. Many, after a while, have their license reinstated and are allowed to re-open. Most just carry on illegally. We keep doing our job but . . . it all seems a bit pointless. I don't know what's going on [. . .] it feels like we are engaged in a depressingly losing struggle.'

This problem, which has not escaped the attention of investigative journalists,<sup>20</sup> is widely discussed among local residents. As my old friend Lucia remarked, 'not much seems truly to change', though. Lucia belongs to the fourth generation of a family that has lived and worked in this neighbourhood. She said to me: 'the residents are exasperated and now they are starting to organise themselves to react. Under the eyes of all, Naples' visiting card has become a cesspit invaded by all kinds of aggressive squatters.' Significantly, I found that, like Lucia, both my autochthonous neighbours and other native informants whom I had long known from previous field research or met anew while updating my material met reports in the media and in the judicial files as they both raised serious issues of health and security. Let us now look briefly to other hot spots in this area.

As one walks on to the end of the North-West side of Piazza Garibaldi, one reaches the area directly opposite the train station. Here, in the area outlined in green in Map 2, it is the Chinese community that rules the roost of legal and illegal trading in goods imported from China or produced locally. Official statistics apart, even to a casual observer the huge presence of Chinese enterprises is undisputable. In the 1980, the only visible evidence of Chinese presence in the city was a restaurant near the *Questura Centrale* (the main Naples headquarters of the state police) and exotica sold in select shops run by Neapolitans. Now, Chinese shops run by Chinese people dominate the Duchesca neighbourhood (brown dot, Map 2) and are gradually extending to the Porta Capuana area (black dot, Map 2) at one end of this neighbourhood and to Porta Nolana (grey dot, Map 2) at the other end. Beyond central Naples, the most obvious examples of Chinese business expansion are the large local production of merchandise in sweatshops like those of San Giuseppe Vesuviano, a small town in the province, and the huge distribution centres in the Gianturco area, at Naples' immediate South-East periphery. On the other hand, a simple bird's-eye view of the seemingly endless rows of Chinese shipping containers in the city's commercial port gives a rough idea of the volume of imports.

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<sup>20</sup> For a summary of their findings, see, for instance, Falco (2018).

## Rubbish Matters

The area around Piazza Garibaldi is also a hub of rubbish peddling, which over time has expanded throughout the areas outlined in blue in Map 2. Regularly reported in the media (see, for example, Folle 2019), it takes place in the Piazza and extends southward to Porta Nolana and its back streets and northward into Piazza Principe Umberto and its environs (purple dot, Map 2). The rubbish trade, mostly run by Roma immigrants, also reaches North-West to the Porta Capuana and, on Sundays, to the Corso Umberto I, known to Neapolitans as Rettifilo (red dot, Map 2). The rubbish peddlers are regularly seen rummaging in the dumpsters, and then proceed to display and sell what objects they have scavenged — mainly shoes and clothes, but also reading glasses, purses, hats, gloves, and so on. My informants find, of course, no consolation in knowing that a similar trade takes place in Rome and elsewhere in Italy under germane styles of local governance.

In past works I have dealt extensively with the issues raised by uncollected rubbish and by the associated vermin in Naples and its Region (Pardo 2011, 2019). In Piazza Garibaldi, as throughout the Region, public space is periodically swamped with uncollected rubbish bags ripped open by stray dogs and cats and by sewer rats increasingly unafraid of human beings. Narrow alleyways become choked and main roads turn into ever-narrowing bottlenecks. As pavements disappear under the rubbish, pedestrians are forced to walk over festering heaps, doing their best to dodge the vermin but, of course, powerless against the revolting stench and exhalations. This reality accounts for a critical aspect of an urban context whose obvious decay is exacerbated by immigrants peddling objects scavenged from dumpsters. Each of these problems raises serious concerns for public health; combined, they do so very seriously. Much responsibility for this dangerous combination lies with the Naples government. As residents and traders in the city centre grow concerned for their health, a highly explosive situation is brewing that brings to mind past riots motivated by similar reasons (Pardo 2011: 32-38).

Naples residents are allowed to deposit household waste in the evening in dumpsters permanently placed by the walk-side and emptied during the night.<sup>21</sup> The council authorities must provide dumpsters in sufficient numbers, look after them and keep clean them and the sites where they are located. Rubbish collection is the responsibility of the Council's sub-contractors, whose low sense of duty has periodically allowed rubbish to accumulate — interestingly, with clockwork regularity, this generally last several weeks during the summer months.<sup>22</sup> In the areas peripheral to Piazza Garibaldi, as throughout the centre, many residents, autochthonous and legal immigrant street traders and shop keepers have lost hope in having the local authorities clean up their neighbourhoods. Some take direct action, organizing into

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<sup>21</sup> Council regulations state that rubbish should be placed in the dumpsters outside working hours, between 8 p.m. and 8 a.m.

<sup>22</sup> In the summer, temperature easily rises to over thirty degrees Celsius (eighty-six degrees Fahrenheit), which generally combines with high humidity. The Naples government charges residents for rubbish collection on top of the comparatively very high council tax.

neighbourhood ‘cleaning squads’ that sweep rubbish off the roads and remove graffiti,<sup>23</sup> while shopkeepers both help them and lodge damning complains through their associations.

The foregoing combines with rubbish-peddling. As an angry local resident typically put it, ‘despite the pretty obvious legal and health issues involved, this kind of trade goes on unchallenged, including in the very hot Summer time. We just seem to waste our breath complaining to the municipal police and the council. No one listens. So, we have organised protests. But to no avail. We will just have to take more decisive action’.

In 2014, the local administration decreed that anyone caught rummaging in dumpsters would be fined 500 euros on the spot. The text of this decree of November 2014 reads:

‘Those found in breach of this order, are to be punished by the application of the fine of EUR 500—in accordance with art. 7a TUEL and art. 16 of the Law of 24 November 1981 No 689 and s.m.i. and with the immediate destruction of the waste collected from the rubbish bins and of the equipment used for its collection and transportation’ (my translation).<sup>24</sup>

Subsequently, fines were duly issued (*La Repubblica Napoli*, 27 November 2014) but left uncashed because the transgressors were officially destitute or could not be identified. Local residents and traders seemed, therefore, to have a point as they resentfully complained to me that that their grievances were met with indifference by municipal police who seem to be ‘informally instructed’ to turn a blind eye. Sometimes, when the police do take action, they are attacked by the rubbish peddlers and end up in hospital.<sup>25</sup>

Most important, not only basic aspects of social order like security controls and imposition of the law (Weber 1978: Chap. 8: 753-84; Burman and Harrel-Bond 1979: Introduction; Lloyd-Bostock 1979) are sporadic and generally ineffective, but an unlikely contrast takes place that needs attention. Observation tallies with informants’ reports on the local authorities’ application of double standards in dealing with licensed native street traders, on the one hand, and with illegal immigrant street traders, on the other. For example, on one occasion, I witnessed interesting dynamics while discussing the rubbish trade situation and its ramifications with my informants in a back street, near Porta Nolana. We stood two blocks away from where a little earlier several rubbish peddlers had quickly packed up and run away from the police, whose presence was now preventing the resumption of the trade in their eyesight. Later that day, following a pattern that I have repeatedly observed across Naples and that appears to be established (Giannino 2018), the police left and within minutes the peddlers were back *en mass*.

So, I could be not surprised to hear a shopkeeper state, ‘I respect the police and appreciate their efforts but what they are ordered to do is futile. This kind of occasional and time-limited police action is clearly insufficient. It is obviously for show. Clearly, the authorities are taking

<sup>23</sup> For meaningful examples of such action, see Medolla (2019) and Folle (2019).

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, <http://www.napolitime.it/59631-mercato-abusivo-dei-rifiuti-napoli-il-sindaco-ferma-questa-pratica.html>

<sup>25</sup> For media reports of recent aggression against the state police see Folle (2018) and <https://www.vocedinapoli.it/2018/05/29/notte-di-violenza-nel-quartiere-vasto-carabinieri-circondati-e-aggredditi/>

us for a ride. They are just not interested in truly addressing the problem'. This view echoed through my fieldnotes and case studies. Recently, residents' groups like the Comitato Quartiere Vasto and the Comitato Orgoglio Vasto<sup>26</sup> and the associations of shopkeepers have lodged formal complains. Exemplifying local grievances, a member of the latter said, 'Since these people started peddling rubbish, sales have dropped by 50% and keep dropping; still, it continues. I have lost many regular customers, and passers-by have almost completely disappeared because this area is dirty and unhealthy. It is criss-crossed by rats unafraid of human beings. I don't know how long I can carry on doing business.'<sup>27</sup> Another pointed out, 'We've asked for help from the Municipality, the prefecture and the police headquarters but no action has been taken to protect our safety. This part of the city is abandoned to itself and, of course, residents cannot cope with this social emergency on their own'.<sup>28</sup>

While this goes on, however, the law is strictly applied to autochthonous traders, who are heavily fined when they break the rules. Claudio, a shopkeeper in his mid-thirties, sells household goods from tiny premises which he rents at an ever-increasing price. Lack of space in the premises makes it necessary 'to display the merchandise outside, on the walk-side space adjacent to the shop', for which he cannot get a licence. Like many local shopkeepers, Claudio has been repeatedly fined by the municipal police. He says, 'I'll just have to keep paying the fines till I go bust. Unfortunately, I just can't do like the illegal peddlers who operate here, run from the police just to reappear when it is safe, and if caught cannot be made to pay because officially they've no income and usually no i.d.'. Similar cases abound in my ethnography. Peppe and his sons and daughters are among the traders who operate Christmas stalls, the profits accounting for most of their yearly income. A serious problem started a few years ago, when his and others' permits were withdrawn, which in a context where ordinary people are at a high risk of poverty (see note 13) came across as a rather peculiar decision. Ever since, Peppe has attempted to run his Christmas stall, sometimes successfully through bribery, sometimes not. Like his fellow traders, Peppe is 'sorely aware' that unlicensed immigrants' street selling continues unchecked throughout Naples. Including in the area where he would trade at Christmas. When the prohibition to trade was first issued, Peppe's eldest son remarked, 'my family will now be in real trouble, while illegal immigrants can sell what they want where they want'. Recently, I asked him whether his view of the situation had changed. He said in frustration, 'Yes, it has. I'm angrier than ever but I'm not alone, you know. No one listens. This place is a mess. The rubbish trade has grown. Illegal commercial and service activities and receptions centres continue to mushroom. But I and lots of others who feel like me will find ways to deal with this'.

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<sup>26</sup> Respectively, Vasto Neighbourhood Committee and Vasto Pride Committee. Alongside its participation in organised protest, the latter's commitment to improve the area has recently made the headlines (Covella 2019).

<sup>27</sup> For recent accounts in the press, see, for example, Folle (2020).

<sup>28</sup> According to Confesercenti, the traders' association, an impressive number of businesses run by Neapolitans have closed in recent times: 25% in the Vasto district, 40% in the Piazza Garibaldi area and 90% in the nearby Gianturco area, which, as mentioned earlier, is where large Chinese distribution centres are now located.

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## A Bad Situation Gets Worse

In September 2018, Neapolitans living in the Vasto made a plea for the local administration and the state to re-establish control over the territory where they live and reinstate law and order there. Their open letter was addressed to government leaders and amply publicised in the press. It read:

‘Mr President and Mr Vice-Presidents of the Council of Ministers, we appeal to you so that our homes and our lives are not abandoned to the law of the strongest. In spite of the commendable and valuable work done by the state police and the carabinieri, who are always present and ready to defend us from aggression, we are afraid. It is no longer possible to raise our children in a neighbourhood that is perpetually in a state of siege, where even a look can trigger a guerrilla war. We only ask to be allowed to live quietly in an environment free of ethnic tensions, like our neighbourhood was just a few years ago. Our peaceful neighbourhood is fading away along with its people, who are no longer able to live and work here: there are so many activities that have closed or that will close soon, with occupational consequences that will further affect local families, who are already struggling to make ends meet. Today, the Vasto is a powder keg ready to blow up at the first spark, which would bring Italians and foreigners to battle with unpredictable and uncontrollable consequences. We ask the national institutions to help prevent this from happening. We want the authorities to regain control of the territory, through both police action and political action aimed at safeguarding the rule of law and the constitutional freedoms of the citizens put at risk by those who dictate their own law made of violence and abuse.’ (my translation)

Much official rhetoric and politicking followed. However, according to the ordinary Neapolitans who live here, not much has improved.<sup>29</sup> ‘If anything’, they say, ‘the situation is getting worse, as more African immigrants move in and more trouble develops, progressively, daily.’ Carlo, a teacher whom I met in the mid-1980s during my original fieldwork remarked:

‘Here, in the Vasto, we’re citizens just like those of the Vomero [a posh neighbourhood]. And yet, here, you feel you are in a no-man’s land: dirty, smelly, hostile. Here, there are schools, including one mostly attended by adolescent girls, who must walk through the neighbourhood on their way to and from school. Here, violence and the threat of violence reign in the air, where immigrants of all colours and their turf wars dominate. They sell drugs, thieve, sell cheap sex or just hang about, seemingly intent on doing nothing. Once it is dark, they let loose tribal-based feuds amid screams, bottle- and stones-throwing, knife fights. In broad daylight, just ask them to let you pass or stop shouting and count yourself lucky if you don’t

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<sup>29</sup> The Comitato Orgoglio Vasto points out that over the last 5 years the presence of *extracomunitari* in the neighbourhood has increased by 400%.

end up like the shopkeeper who, on opening his shop the other day, did just that, was hit on the head and is still in hospital with a fractured cranium’.

Giulio, a 45-year-old craftsman, added, ‘In the neighbourhood there is a general feeling of growing tension and insecurity as we are often alone in dealing with episodes of petty crime, neglect and violence’. Giovanna, a middle-aged resident who recently replaced her sister working part-time as an assistant in a local shop, matched eye-catching headlines in the local and national press when she said:

‘Every day bands of African immigrants do battle with broken bottles and knives in the street just outside my building. Why are these people here?’ Her eyes filled with tears as she went on to say, “‘Whore!’” has been repeatedly shouted at me and my daughters. At us! And why? Because we don’t cover our bodies head to foot. Last week, my older daughter was physically harassed by one of those people. She reported him to the police. Nothing has happened yet; he still sells ethnic clothes at the street corner. Every day, I grow more afraid for me, for my family. Who is supposed to protect us?’

In anger, Lucia met these views, as she described immigrants’ shows of their Islamic culture and values as obnoxious, and the attendant practises as offensive; particularly, though not only, to women. Giovanna’s neighbour, a woman in her mid-thirties who manages a shop a couple of hundred metres from the building where she lives, added, ‘they become verbally aggressive, spit on you if you just look at them; some go as far as pawing you. It’s revolting’. She carried on saying ‘Anyone who lived or worked here for just a few days would find out what violence and degradation we experience day in day out’. Claudio, a 41-year-old accountant, remarked, ‘it isn’t just that immigrants sell rubbish, peddle drugs and assault each other; they harass us; people like me often end up in the emergency department of the local hospital. It’s all the worse, if you’re a woman or are old’.<sup>30</sup>

Residents have demonstrated strongly, repeatedly making the headlines locally and nationally (see, for example, Garau 2018). When discussing with me his experience of this situation, a local university student remarked:

‘Twice, my sister and my fiancée have had abuse hurled at them while walking home or standing on our balcony; now they no longer walk on their own. I am disgusted by the irresponsibility, hypocrisy and racism of our high-born rulers and their cohorts. Cocooned in a life of privilege, they pontificate about “human solidarity” and “hospitality” while enjoying life in their posh neighbourhoods’.

He carried on saying, ‘Clearly, they don’t care about the hundreds of poor immigrants who end up dwelling where us, the less privileged, live. They don’t care that our neighbourhood has become a slum’. His fiancée remarked, ‘We are afraid of walking alone, especially at night but also during the day. We are forced into a curfew. We don’t dare having a coffee on our own or

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<sup>30</sup> Hospital staff reports and the police and judicial files both corroborate my material and offer an incomplete picture, for many instances are not formally reported to the authorities.

taking our children to school. It's a waking nightmare!' Their young friends, a man and a woman in their early thirties, said, 'to avoid violence and abuse, we are forced to return home before dark. We go out after dark in cars and only in large groups. Does this sound normal to you?'

The foregoing brings to mind vividly similar remarks made by my informants in the mid-2000s, which I discussed in my early contribution (Pardo 2009) to the critique of multiculturalism (Prato ed. 2009). In particular, it brings to mind the illustration of the critical opposition of tolerance to toleration brought out by a dinner conversation with Lello, his wife and adult children.<sup>31</sup> As I discussed in detail in the cited essay (Pardo 2009: 112-14), both generations described how certain immigrants, particularly from African countries, posed worrying challenges to their and their significant others' daily lives. They highlighted the friction they experienced in dealing with the culture and approach of foreign immigrants who originated from Islamic countries; a culture and approach which, I have found, local people collectively regarded then, as they do now, to be sharply in conflict with their moral values and way of life. I suggested to Lello and his children that they were perhaps generalising too harshly. Echoing the views that I have reported above and similar others that I have recorded recently, Lello's daughter, Rosaria, a non-practising lawyer, replied:

'That is easy for you to say; you don't have to deal with those people on a daily basis. We are not being racist or narrow-minded, here; like most people we know, we generally get on very well with immigrants. Some have culture and religious beliefs that look strange to us but, as long as they are respectful of us and of our ways, we welcome them and appreciate what they have to offer ["like the Chinese", her brother said in an aside]<sup>32</sup>. The people we are talking about, however, make no secret, in words and actions, that they despise us, our culture and our way of life.'

Rosaria's brother, an engineer, nodded his approval as Lello added, 'that applies to us all, and especially to women, whom they regard as a kind of sub-species. Every day the papers report their involvement in armed aggression, violent burglary, attempted rapes, rapes and gang rapes. Even if we did not want to believe the papers, we still would have our own direct experience of their contempt, bullying and violence'. This met the remarks of a local priest, who illustratively said:

'The neighbourhood is angry. But, mind you, I've never met a racist here. We must not confuse intolerance for the total lack of rules, of civilisation, of decorum, of tranquillity, of security, with racism. No one would want to live this way, not even the most welcoming person in the world. This neighbourhood cannot help all these incomers. We need to offer something decent to those who arrive. As there seems

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<sup>31</sup> Lello is a small entrepreneur who for many years has been one of my principal informants (Pardo 2009).

<sup>32</sup> This remark is worth mentioning because it tallies with what many informants' view of Chinese immigrants who, in short, may well be far more numerous than any other immigrant ethnic group, but are generally described as 'people who are respectful, work hard and mind their own business'.

to be no viable strategy for reception, arrival should be limited. Otherwise integration just becomes impossible.’

Back to my exchange with Lello and his family, I put to them, as I did recently to my other informants, that some people would call them intolerant. Rosaria, encapsulated a concern voiced then as now by most local people as she said:

‘Of course, not everyone believes the same thing, but I don’t have to put what another person believes on the same level as what I believe. If a terrorist blows up innocent people in a bus, I shouldn’t be expected to respect his beliefs, values and behaviour and to hold them on the same level as mine, when I think that life is sacred. If someone wants to take away my hard-earned freedoms as a woman and a citizen, not only I don’t have to comply but I better fight. Does this seriously mean that I am judgemental and intolerant? Tolerance and political correctness have become twisted.’ She added, ‘Disagreement with someone’s beliefs and behaviours is not intolerance, it is discernment and conviction. If we are to hold everyone’s beliefs and behaviours on the same level and become accepting of them, why do these people would not hold my opinions on the same level as theirs? Why should they be intolerant of them? Why must I give up what I believe and approve what they believe in? Why should *I* integrate to *them*? Do you not see a double standard here? Surely, having values, opinions, beliefs and moral standards does not equal fanaticism.’

### **‘What will become of us?’: Reflections from the Field**

Reasonable minds might expect that over the last 15 years or so, governance would have developed and implemented appropriate policies that addressed both the situation and ordinary people’s concerns. We know that this cannot be said to have happened. We know that foreign immigration, especially but not only of the kind deplored by Rosaria, Peppe and their fellow Neapolitans, has grown exponentially and has become entrenched in large swathes of the urban fabric. We also know that residents of Naples’ less privileged districts may have reason to feel that the authorities — local and national — do not care about what they describe as their ‘worrying predicament’. As I have argued at length and in detail elsewhere (Pardo 2012: 68-74), ordinary Neapolitans have long had reason to feel treated as second-class citizens. This feeling has now strengthened considerably in the face of what is received at the grassroots as governance’s unforgivable failure to manage power responsibly in the interest of the wider society. From their viewpoint, it is only consequential that the intense feelings aroused by the combination of adverse events that I have described should translate into action.

My local informants have seen their neighbourhood become, in their own words, a ‘*terra di nessuno* (no man’s land), where security and decent living conditions have disappeared’. Their individual and collective protests have evolved into a semi-permanent vigilantism involving mostly young men and some young women; as a local woman in her late twenties said to me, ‘We have realised that we couldn’t just sit back and wait for a happy ending. We



had to take action'. Reminiscent of classic anthropological analyses (Abrahams 2000) of the moral legitimacy accorded to action that attempt to address the socio-economic cracks caused by bad governance and mismanagement of power, baseball-bat-armed people have taken to patrolling their neighbourhood, especially in the evening when residents return home. They state, 'We keep an eye especially on violent and disorderly immigrants who harass our women or engage with frightening regularity in fights and aggression'. At the same time, organised attacks have been mounted against the rubbish traders, sometimes extending to drug-dealing immigrants. Described in some local media as 'Fascist extremism', these actions have nonetheless gained ordinary people's approval. On occasion, large numbers of local residents join in, while others throw objects from their windows on the rubbish traders. These new developments bring to a head the concerns of local councillors who long ago feared that 'The situation in the area around the station [...] continues to be dramatic and the risk of a very violent clash between the residents and the many non-EU citizens who camp out feeding the many illegal activities present in the area becomes more and more probable'.<sup>33</sup>

Immigrants who are legally in Italy and have endeavoured to integrate in the local society express their dismay, too. When discussing this problem with me, several, of various ethnic origin, found common ground in saying that they resent the behaviour of many new incomers, especially those who operate illegally, and who hurl abuse at protesting locals. 'They give a bad name to foreigners as a whole' was a common remark usually followed by the explanation that, as put by Maria, 'this kind of behaviour seriously harms the hard work that people like me have done for many years and our efforts to fit in and feel at home here'. Maria is a Latin American graduate in economics in her late thirties who emigrated to Italy over 20 years ago and now runs a legitimate business in partnership with a Neapolitan woman. I met Maria in 2004 (Pardo 2009: 116-18), when I learnt her story and recorded how she started working informally as a maid and slowly built her present position through apt management of the complex relationship between the formal and the informal. Now happily married to a Neapolitan self-employed electrician with whom she has two children, she feels fully part of local life. She says she feels 'threatened as a woman and as a businessperson, and disappointed as an immigrant, by so much blatant illegality tainting the diverse immigrant community in Naples'. A man in his forties from Sri Lanka who runs an internet café and call centre in the area where most rubbish sellers run their business remarked, 'I've strived to make it here. For many years I have been happy. I felt safe, accepted. I felt almost like a local. Now I'm afraid for me and for my family, for my wife. I get threatened every day and my customers are afraid to come to the shop. If this goes on, I'll be forced to close and go away'. An older man from the Philippines, who, now in his mid-fifties, has succeeded in developing a small local enterprise, said,

'I and my wife have lived and worked in Naples for many, many years. My children have gone to school and now also work here. We have loved it here. We felt we

<sup>33</sup> See *Corriere del Mezzogiorno* (18 May 2017):

[http://corrieredelmezzogiorno.corriere.it/napoli/cronaca/18\\_maggio\\_07/napoli-l-allarme-verdi-c-rischio-uno-scontro-violentissimo-residenti-ed-extra-comunitari-8c3b00fc-5218-11e8-a738-a158166f2af5.shtml](http://corrieredelmezzogiorno.corriere.it/napoli/cronaca/18_maggio_07/napoli-l-allarme-verdi-c-rischio-uno-scontro-violentissimo-residenti-ed-extra-comunitari-8c3b00fc-5218-11e8-a738-a158166f2af5.shtml)

fitted in. Neapolitans have warmly embraced us. Now [...] now!? Things have changed. I see foreigners who want to impose their culture and way of doing things on the locals. I see many who are dirty and menacing. I see them abusing local residents verbally and physically. I feel betrayed by wrong policies. And I feel that things are changing for me. I feel it in the air. I feel it when passers-by look at me sideways. I feel it when people who don't know me see my darker skin and stare with hostility, while not long ago no one would care about the colour of my skin or the way I speak. Things are getting uglier. I fear for me, for my family. Our world is falling apart. What will become of us?

### **Concluding Remarks**

The foregoing both raises worrying questions and engenders sobering thoughts. Will the concerns of ordinary Neapolitans and legitimate foreign immigrants continue to fall on deaf ears? Will the city's highly problematic areas be made decent, safe, liveable and well-managed superdiverse (Rosbrook-Thompson and Armstrong 2018) urban settings? Will tolerance and cooperation between local ordinary people and foreign immigrants be re-established? The present situation and its diachronic development might well inspire serious doubts in the mind of a realist. Indeed, to feel doubtful one does not need to be a die-hard sceptic; a level-headed observer simply needs to consider the conditions under which immigrants and the autochthonous population are forced to live and co-exist. Interestingly, recent but short-lived political action of a new kind aimed at curbing illegal immigration and regulating the legal influx, was widely applauded among my informants as promising, because it opened a window on what could be achieved. The situation is indeed not hopeless.

It could be argued that a style of governance that pursued a working combination of local residents' traditional tolerance, demographically and culturally compatible changes, implementable legislation and, last but not least, a genuine drive to apply the law firmly and fairly might do the job. We know that, despite the progressive worsening of the situation in which they are forced to live, local people are far from resigned to tolerating it as unchangeable, which may well end up proving Hanna Arendt (1958) right. Radical change needs, however, to occur in the management of power and much work needs to be done on restoring goodwill among the population, a key element that is in scarce supply and urgently needs to be reconstructed alongside an informed mutual trust between governance and citizenship.

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