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# Shadow circuits: urban spaces and mobilities across the Mediterranean

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In Italy, as in other southern European countries, both the notions of diversity and multiculturalism have only recently come into use. In this article, we show how over the last 30 years two Italian cities, Turin and Naples have been transformed and reshaped by patterns of mobility and informal commerce that we have referred to as 'shadow circuits'. Shadow circuits work through the connection of distant places in Europe and the Mediterranean and contribute to the understanding of complex, stratified societies, mobile societies in particular. A mobile ethnography perspective has been carried during fieldwork and is discussed in length in this article. The examples of Turin and Naples are particularly useful because, unlike many other Italian cities, both have developed pro-multiculturalism and pro-diversity policies in the last two decades. This makes them particularly interesting case studies for addressing the gap between diversity as a policy and diversity as a social fact.

**Keywords:** shadow circuit; mobilities; cities; migration; mobile ethnography; everyday multiculturalism

## Introduction

Diversity has become a powerful buzzword for speaking of urban complexity, in both normative and descriptive terms. However, as suggested by Mette Louise Berg and Nando Sigona in their 'Introduction to this Special Issue', different forms of diversity may coexist without necessarily overlapping. In this article, we draw on the cases of two Italian cities, Turin and Naples, in order to describe the existence of mobility patterns that have not been addressed in previous literature on diversity. In doing so, we show the incongruity between diversity as a policy and a public narrative on one hand, and existing social practices of diversity on the other.

By highlighting specific practices of everyday multiculturalism that are eclipsed in policy, media and scholarly discourses, we show how they concretely contribute to the making of a more complex, changing and connected city; a city whose identity is constantly reshaped and transformed by multiple flows and encounters. In particular, we acknowledge the role of multi-scalar mobilities and informal economies in the making of increasingly diverse cities.

In the first part of the article, we outline our central argument: the patterns of diversity we describe are unknown because they fall into forms of organisational

invisibility. We use the notion of ‘shadow circuit’ in order to qualify such patterns. We argue for the need to investigate shadow circuits in order to understand and interpret different dimensions and configurations of diversity in complex, stratified societies, mobile societies in particular (Adey 2009). We then discuss the methodological implications of studying shadow circuits, especially the need for a mobile ethnographic practice. In the second part of the paper, we turn to in-depth descriptions of the making of shadow circuits as we have observed them in Naples and Turin, and expose the gap between these circuits and the current public discourse on diversity. We show how taking shadow circuits into account may contribute to a better understanding of urban diversity in Turin and Naples, and more broadly, in the Euro-Mediterranean region.<sup>1</sup>

Looking at shadow circuits helps us overcome the ‘ethnic lens’, identified as one aspect of the methodological nationalism of migration studies (Glick-Schiller and Çağlar, 2011). In Italy, as in other southern European countries, the notions of diversity and multiculturalism have come into use very recently. Only in the last few years, have they become relevant in public debate promoting local pro- or anti-immigrant policies, especially at the municipal level. The examples of Turin and Naples are particularly useful because, unlike many other Italian cities, both have developed pro-multiculturalism and pro-diversity policies in the last two decades. This has been done through an ethnic and national lens which, as we show in this article, leads to misunderstandings and misleading evaluations of contemporary migration. If we look at migrant practices through the mobilities they enact, we observe forms of cosmopolitanism and everyday multiculturalism significantly different from those celebrated by the supporters of cultural diversity. This makes both Naples and Turin particularly interesting case studies for addressing the gap between diversity as a policy and diversity as a social fact.

### **Circulatory territories, Zelizer circuits and the making of shadow circuits**

In the introduction to his book *La mondialisation par le bas. Les nouveaux nomades de l'économie souterraine*, the French scholar Alain Tarrius began as follows:

As a sociologist, I have witnessed a striking phenomenon: the genesis at our doors, in the Western Mediterranean, of genuine networks of nomadic entrepreneurship. Their originality relied on the animation of an underground economy with a global scope. This phenomenon strongly attested to the existence of a different globalisation: a subtle one, accomplished from below, seldom recognized but carrying heavy consequences for our future. (2002, p. 15, our translation)

Tarrius is among the scholars who since the 1980s have observed the circulations of people and objects within and between Mediterranean cities, especially through the prism of informal trade (Tarrius 1992, 1995, see also Péraldi 2001, 2005). Most of these scholars were sociologists and anthropologists who carried out fieldwork throughout the western Mediterranean area at the time when

Marseilles was becoming a leading marketplace connecting North Africa to southern Europe, transforming the region into a new territory of exchange, circulation and hybridisation. During the following two decades, this territory expanded as the local clientele diversified, notably because of the growing middle class in North Africa and the dissemination of North African diasporas in Europe and the Mediterranean. Developments similar to that of Marseilles were observed elsewhere, such as Istanbul, Alicante, Damascus, Milan and the two cities we discuss in this article (see Péraldi 2001, 2005 but also Sempere Souvannavong 2000, Césari 2002, Schmoll 2005, 2011, Semi 2006, 2009).

In order to grasp the complexity of these ongoing transnational networks of people, goods and activities, Tarrius (1992) developed the notion of a *circulatory territory*, to describe the social and spatial organisation of such mobilities. Based on two decades of ethnographic research in the entire Mediterranean area, his model of 'globalisation from below' (Tarrius 2002; see also Portes 1996) focussed mainly on the existence of patterns of cross-border commerce, the making of transnational marketplaces, and the emergence of cosmopolitan identities among thousands of Algerians, Moroccans, Tunisians and Turks.

It is arguable that this mechanism is closely tied, if not historically path-dependent, on the legacy of the Mediterranean, as depicted by Braudel (1972) across the sixteenth century. The world economy that developed in this area, which Braudel based mainly in Venice and dated back to the early fourteenth century, was largely a pre-industrial economy, with significant patterns of trade and circulation of handicrafts and craftsmen across all of Europe. Still, the globalisation from below described by Tarrius is not simply a contemporary incarnation of the world Braudel described of merchants, fairs, bankers, caravans and inns throughout the Mediterranean. Tarrius's reference to circulation is central, but the main difference lies in his description of a process of globalisation that is both 'subtle' and 'seldom recognised'. By contrast, the Venetian and Ottoman traders and merchants in the sixteenth century were politically influential and recognised as economic leaders, placing the Mediterranean at the centre of the global economy of its time. This is not the case for the generation of petty 'suitcase traders' described by Tarrius and other scholars. Moreover, the centrality of the Mediterranean is now largely undermined by other geographies of power and wealth, ranging from the North Atlantic area to the network of global cities (Sassen 1991).

In order to better define the circulations we describe in the following paragraphs, the territories they encompass, and their organisational shape, we need to clarify the spheres of exchange we are looking at. Similar to the notion of a 'circulatory territory' is that of 'Zelizer circuits' (Collins 2004), in reference to Zelizer's (2004) work on 'circuits of commerce'. In an influential contribution, Zelizer (2004) suggests looking at how people 'bridge the apparently unbridgeable gap between social solidarity and monetized transactions' (p. 122) and calls for the recognition of specific commercial circuits, based on interactions between sites of exchange. Such circuits include four elements, according to Zelizer: (1) a well-defined boundary between members and non-members, (2) a distinctive set of

transfers of goods and services, (3) being based in specific media and (4) the creation of shared meaning among participants. According to Zelizer (2004, 2006), these circuits operate as an institutional structure reinforcing trust, reciprocity and credit.

As we will show in the following paragraphs using ethnographic data, the emergence of a distinct set of trading activities in specific Mediterranean cities over the last 30 years may be understood as a 'Zelizer circuit'. The circulatory territory acts as a boundary, the circuit concerns specific goods and services, communication and transportation are central to understanding its workings, and within the circuit, situated forms of cosmopolitanism emerge which have little interaction with the societies they cross.

We propose adding to Zelizer's conception of circuits a set of interactions we define as 'shadows'. This addition is necessary to highlight what Tarrius called a 'subtle' globalisation (*discrete* in French) in the preceding quotation, expressing what we consider to be the main feature of the circuits we describe: invisibility. We define 'shadow circuits' as partially invisible sets of interactions within a circulatory territory, in which migrants act as traders and intermediaries for goods and services, following distinct routes and flows and sharing primarily non-ethnic cosmopolitan identities. The making of shadow circuits corresponds to an ongoing process, which deals, interacts, conflicts and, most astonishingly, sometimes conflates with the muscular, mainstream, side of globalisation.

We define these as 'shadow circuits' because of two processes, one related to understandings of mobilities and the other related to the common strategic advantage of invisibility for migrants (Brighenti 2010). The first concerns the late and partial recognition of mobility, transnational networks and circular migration by both academics and policy-makers. As scholars of the new mobilities paradigm put it, the dominant sedentary narratives (Cresswell 2006, Adey 2009) shared by researchers and policy-makers led them to undervalue the dimensions and impacts of such circuits. This oversight has two possible explanations. First, the common understanding of the Mediterranean as an economically peripheral area, defined as a migrant-sending area (in particular for North-African countries) rather than an area of migratory circulation. Second, scholars have been relatively weak on recognising immigrants' economic agency as a dynamic and positive force, not just as a reaction to state powers and labour market discrimination. In combination, these two factors have led to an under-acknowledgement of the importance and scope of migrant trading in the region.

This observation leads us to the second reason why these are 'shadow circuits'. Invisibility can be a strategic and relevant asset for people who rely, for better or worse, on borders. Migrants rely on borders, moving across them and taking advantage of the gaps between different states' regulations and structures. Being invisible may facilitate migrants' activities and circulation, as in the case of transnational trade. We explain later in this article how shadow circuits have emerged in the specific contexts of Naples and Turin. First, however, we need to address a methodological question: how can we observe and analyse the making of shadow circuits?

### Taking multi-sited research seriously

In reconstructing shadow circuits, we embarked on what may be defined a ‘mobile ethnography’ (Adey 2009, Faist 2012). We observed the flows of people and goods not only in the places where they intersect, that is, cities and neighbourhoods but also in harbours, markets, hotels and wholesale centres. Accompanying migrants on trade routes, taking ships, cars, and coaches, reconstructing their stories, following their social networks, visiting their main buying and selling destinations and generally participating in the activities of trade and circulation all presented opportunities to observe the multiplicity of migrants’ social networks, the way they ‘dwell in mobility’ (Urry 2000, Diminescu 2001). We observed their ability to live between different places and to transform them, and we argue that these migrants were able to take advantage of dispersed sets of opportunities and contacts at a transnational scale (Ma Mung 1999, Schmoll 2011). Moreover, mobile ethnography is a helpful tool for observing how the making of shadow circuits produces new forms of cosmopolitanism, through the multiple encounters provoked by mobility and trade (Vertovec and Cohen 2003).

Our mobile ethnographic perspective is attuned to what has been called ‘multi-sited ethnography’ (Marcus 1995, 1998). We believe that the understanding of global networks such as the ones we observed carries a methodological imperative to ‘follow the people’ and ‘follow the thing’ (see Cook 2004):

The exchange or circulations of objects or the extension in space of particular cultural complexes such as ritual cycles and pilgrimages may be the rationales for such ethnography, but the procedure is *to follow and stay with the movements* of a particular group of initial subjects. (Marcus 1998, p. 90, our italics)

In Marcus’ original formulation, he advocated following and staying ‘with the movements’, but most of the resulting applications translated ‘following’ and ‘staying’ into two, distinct, moments and situations. Very common to multi-sited ethnographies, then, is a multi-local perspective of social practices, which is *per se* an initial step towards the recognition of global processes such as the ones we are highlighting (see, for instance, Hannerz 2003). Nonetheless, circulations, and shadow circuits in particular, require a further effort, both theoretical and methodological: to experience the social practices of living in circulation as a participant-observer, one must follow and stay *in the flow* and within the multi-scalar and temporal positions occupied by the members of shadow circuits. It is not a simple matter of moving from A to B, but of living within the space and time created by the movements from A to B (for a discussion on mobile methodologies, see also D’Andrea et al. 2011, Faist 2012).

Theoretically, our understanding of multi-sited research leads us to renew our understanding of ‘terrain’ as a bounded site for fieldwork. As stated by Sheller and Urry (2006, p. 209)

the claim to a ‘new mobilities paradigm’ is not simply an assertion of the novelty of mobility in the world today, although the speed and intensity of various flows are

greater than before ( . . . ) It is rather part of a broader theoretical project aimed at going beyond the imagery of 'terrains' as spatially fixed geographical containers for social processes.

By investigating shadow circuits, we want to contribute to rethinking our concept of fieldwork, towards increasingly fluid and mobile 'terrains'. Similarly our concept of 'place' is transformed by mobilities: places are increasingly embedded within transnational flows, thus becoming what some scholars have called 'translocalities' (Appadurai 1996, Smith 2005, Adey 2009).

During our fieldwork, we followed migrants in the different places they moved through and inhabited. Each of us focused on a specific shadow circuit. Semi followed a group of entrepreneurs from Morocco travelling back and forth from France to Turin, in Italy, while Schmoll did the same with a group of entrepreneurs living in Tunisia and travelling back and forth to Naples. These two cities were chosen for their strategic role as quasi-border cities, Turin being the biggest and nearest Italian city to the French border and Naples also being a central Mediterranean harbour. We did our best to be useful witnesses: we drove cars and carried bags, shared hotel rooms with our informants, translated documents, mediated with institutions and sold tea, clothes and shoes. We had to deal with multidimensional, hybrid, fragmented or overlapping flows (of people, information, documents, things and money), deployed at different scales and acting at different speeds. One of the difficulties of the terrain was then to find a balance between keeping an eye on these multiple flows and the necessity to select and try to focus on some strategic ones among them.

We shared moments of anxiety but also of joy, stress and boredom that mark the traders' routines. At the beginning, we worked separately: we decided to put our research results together and discuss them comparatively only when we discovered that we were researching similar dynamics. Because shadow circuits feature a strategic organisational invisibility, we had to face ethical questions about the risk of illuminating invisible practices. We tried to discuss this issue with our interlocutors in order to agree on what could be revealed through our empirical accounts and what should not be shown. But as we will explain in detail further on, we quickly realised that policy-makers were not particularly interested in recognising the existence of shadow circuits, probably because they contrast, as we will show next, with the dominant narrative about ethnic and disempowered migrants.

### **From Piazza Garibaldi to the Mediterranean: the making of a Neapolitan marketplace (Schmoll)**

The history of the Neapolitan marketplace can be narrated through the trajectories of its protagonists, such as Sofiane, a 40-year-old Tunisian trader who I followed for several months while doing fieldwork in Naples. Sofiane came to Naples after spending a few years in Marseilles, working alternatively in petty trade, in the bakery of a co-ethnic friend, and as a street-level drug dealer. He decided to go

to Italy in the late 1980s because the strengthening of French policies towards irregular immigrants made him fearful of deportation or jail. At that time, Naples was considered the transit destination *par excellence* by irregular migrants, since the scale of the local informal sector provided immigrants with opportunities to work illegally while they waited for a regular permit and the possibility for a legal job (Reyneri 1998, Schmoll 2011). In Naples, Sofiane started working as a street trader. He set up a corner stall near the railway station where he sold condoms, cigarettes and lighters to North-African prostitutes and their Italian and Maghrebi clients in the night. After a few years, he managed to invest his earnings and convert his knowledge of Marseillais, south-Tunisian and Neapolitan networks into a new job, becoming an intermediary for suitcase traders coming to buy in Naples. As described in the first part of this article, during the 1990s, the North African demand for western commodities grew so much that many Euro-Mediterranean cities became important marketplaces for suitcase traders. Neighbourhoods such as Belsunce in Marseilles, Piazza Garibaldi in Naples or Barbès in Paris started to become famous within these circuits. This development provided great opportunities for migrants settled in Naples. In 2000, Sofiane bought a van and rented a small office in the vicinity of the railway station. The station neighbourhood – often referred to as the Piazza Garibaldi – is the headquarters of 'intermediaries' to this day. Intermediaries are of different origins – Maghrebi, sub-Saharan Africans, Italians – and work with a very diverse clientele in terms of gender, ethnicity and place of residence. All the intermediaries, however, share a history of long-term mobility and trade, which affords them very good knowledge of the marketplace and its participants. When I meet him in 2003, Sofiane had become one of the most famous intermediaries in the marketplace. Each month he welcomed about 50 suitcase traders who comprised a very heterogeneous population of various origins, backgrounds and legal statuses. They usually live outside Italy and come to stay in Naples only when they need to buy merchandise (Schmoll 2011), leaving soon thereafter to sell the purchased commodities in shops and markets, not only in their home countries (Tunisia, Libya, Morocco and Algeria) but also in France, Spain, Greece and northern Italy. Sofiane puts them in touch with wholesale traders, hotel owners or foreign exchange brokers, and helps them negotiate prices and deadlines. He also arranges the circulation of traders within the Neapolitan shadow circuit: he organises coaches, vans and rented cars; and when needed he accompanies them to the wholesale markets. He is also able to organise the shipping of goods, such as finding a space in a container when there are too many commodities to fit in suitcases. Most of all, Sofiane knows the norms and the conventions on both sides of the exchange in the Neapolitan shadow circuit. In other words, he makes the economic exchange culturally possible, which is essential in a context that is often characterised by informal arrangements (Schmoll 2011).

I followed Sofiane's activities for several months; my presence was tolerated and even seen as an opportunity when I agreed to work for free. I drove people around, carried bags and welcomed clients at the office when he was absent. Working with Sofiane, I soon discovered the primary reason for the appeal of

Naples: the great variety of local commodity supply. Traders coming to Naples were able to buy in a wide range of places: the informal markets in the city centre and the counterfeit goods district, but also many other sites in the wider metropolitan area, such as industrial districts, Italian wholesale centres and even Chinese wholesale shops. In the Neapolitan metropolitan area, these different sites together form a set of interconnected places that are profoundly reshaped by traders' mobilities. Chinese and Italian wholesale traders also started to produce or subcontract the production of specific goods for this particular clientele, such as lingerie collections, sportswear and household linens adapted to North African tastes. At the same time, wholesalers have invested in advertisements and shop signs in Arabic. This adaptation can also be seen in the shops' spatial organisation, where symbols referring to the cultural origins of the clientele – such as verses of the Koran – are often put in a prominent place, sometimes in proximity to Christian symbols. Such a strategic use of languages and symbols can be seen as a sign of ordinary openness towards the others, which allows a climate of proximity and trust.

At the centre of the Neapolitan shadow circuit economy sits Piazza Garibaldi, the central railway station neighbourhood, where traders settle and meet during their trips to Naples. Piazza Garibaldi was described by Lamine, one trader I met, in the following way:

There are different worlds in Piazza Garibaldi, so many worlds! Worlds of legality and worlds of illegality, worlds of trade, prostitution, trafficking in false documents ( . . . ) And then, there are the international traders: Arabs living in Marseilles, in Lyon, in Paris, coming for shopping; those coming straight from Morocco, Algeria Tunisia. It is really another world, a world in a single place, Piazza Garibaldi

Piazza Garibaldi is also the area where many hotels are concentrated. This is where Lamia, a Tunisian trader I followed between Italy and Tunisia for several weeks, stays when she comes to Naples. Lamia owns three shops in the Tunisian city of Sousse where she sells clothes and shoes coming from Naples. She also occasionally sells commodities to other traders who cannot travel to Naples, because of the difficulties in obtaining a visa for the EU. She loves coming to Naples: she says 'it is a breath of fresh air, a chance to have a little distance from my family duties in Tunisia and to meet new people and make friends'. In Naples, Lamia has established a routine: she meets and works with other women traders, who have become long-term friends. She has also good friends with Marcello, the owner of a hotel entirely devoted to women traders in the shadow business. Trading networks tend to be gender-specific and women prefer not to mix with male traders, in order to control their reputation on the marketplace (on the role of gender in transnational trade, see Schmoll 2005). In his hotel, Marcello set up a tea-room as well as special rooms for storing the traders' bags and suitcases. Marcello also provides suitcase traders with letters of invitation, which are absolutely essential for the visa procedure. He has also learned some words in Arabic and visits traders in Tunisia regularly.

Marcello, Lamia, Lamine and Sofiane, along with dozens of other traders I met, contribute to the making of a lively cosmopolitan economy in Naples. It is 'cosmopolitan' in the sense that it is based on a pragmatic and ordinary 'openness towards otherness' (Hiebert 2002, p. 211), and the formation of new social ties rather than ethnic solidarity and local allegiances (for a broader discussion on the importance of cosmopolitanism in the Neapolitan marketplace, see Schmoll 2011). Yet Neapolitan shadow circuits are commonly overlooked by policy-makers and scholars. This is related to the fact that, officially, Naples is not a significant migration destination. It is often considered to be a transit destination, and migration is therefore seen as temporary and with no effect on local spaces. Such a perspective on migration contrasts radically with migrants' long-term spatial appropriations, present for over 30 years now in Piazza Garibaldi and other places that are part of the Neapolitan shadow circuit. The municipality of Naples, however, has been politically oriented to the left for a couple of decades and wants to promote an immigrant-friendly image. That is why, for instance, the city council established multi-ethnic markets a decade ago, allowing immigrants to trade products from their home countries. In the area of Piazza Garibaldi, 80 such stalls have been established. The establishment of such markets are a way of acknowledging the role of immigrants within the urban fabric, but the municipality's decision to oblige traders to sell 'products of their home countries' is decidedly out of touch with the reality of most traders who are not interested in selling 'their' alleged 'ethnic' products to the local clientele, but rather in buying local goods in order to sell them elsewhere, including their home countries. The municipality's decision thus corresponds to a process of ethnicisation of the traders' practices, and does not fit with the reality of migrant business in Naples. It is essentially a policy of multiculturalism from above, a promotion of diversity that produces public visibility of a certain kind, in sharp contrast with the rather different trading practices I experienced through my fieldwork. Moreover, most of the traders I met are not interested in settling in Naples, they see the city only as a point in the territories they cross and travel through on a regular basis. Nonetheless, they are relevant local social actors since they contribute to the transformation of the urban economy and social fabric. In brief, shadow circuits are transforming the organisation and landscape of Naples, but, as the concept itself highlights, in a largely invisible way.

#### **Human relations are a treasure: informal trade and cosmopolitan attitudes across French and Italian borders (Semi)**

In mid-March 2003, on a cold morning, I joined Abdelfattah at his shop to pack his van with second-class coffee pots, cotton pullovers and sports socks. Mohammad, a refined man in his sixties observed us. He had arrived the day before from Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, where he lived. Mohammad calmly watched us working, and when the van was full, he entered and we all left Turin for Lyon. Abdelfattah was a commercial entrepreneur from Al-Jadyda, Morocco, living in

Turin and trading manufacturers' 'seconds' from the textile district of Biella, near Turin, in other commercial neighbourhoods across southern Europe, including Lyon and Marseille in France, and Prato and Naples in Italy. Unlike Abdelfattah, Mohammad was not a trader, but a salesman and informal notary, economic figures described by Tarrius (1995, p. 98) as 'invisible from our view, they are brokers, basically men who instantly create a relationship among people whose belongings and roles would otherwise keep them apart' (see also Boissevain 1974, Gribaudi 1980). His main activity was to represent Chinese companies and help them access informal marketplaces in Euro-Mediterranean cities, as in the example below.

Our goal in Lyon was to negotiate an arrangement for the exchange of Italian 'seconds', mainly textiles from Biella, with French and Belgian carpets, connecting Turin and Lyon more regularly, since the two cities are near enough to allow daily return trips. It was an arrangement made by small entrepreneurs moving within a shadow circuit, based on a circulatory territory with junctions in a few specific neighbourhoods. In other words, it was not a circuit between cities as such, but rather one connecting particular neighbourhoods within them: Porta Palazzo in Turin, la Guillotière in Lyon and Belsunce in Marseille: people in the circuit mostly talked in terms of neighbourhoods or even streets, not of cities.

After three hours on the highway, we parked in the narrow streets of La Guillotière in central Lyon, where we had two days of meetings. In 2003, the neighbourhood was mainly a commercial district where Armenians, Arabs and Jews from the entire Maghreb region had their shops, easily identifiable on the basis of the framed pictures hanging on the walls behind the counters: a picture of King Mohammad VI for Moroccans, of President Ben Ali for the Tunisians, of President Bouteflika for the Algerians or a picture of mountains for the Armenians. The difference between Jewish and Arabic shop owners was detectable in small signs in Hebrew distinguishing the former from the latter. Most of the shops sold the same objects, including teapots and cups, suitcases and trolleys, Moroccan-style handicrafts produced in Italy or Belgium, boxes of dates, spices, Chinese cigarette lighters, boxes of Mecca-Cola, ceremonial dress, etc. The origin of each object is often separate from its cultural imaginary as well as from its site of consumption, as widely recognised in globalisation studies for other goods too (Appadurai 1988, Cook and Crang 1996). Within this world of mobile objects and peoples, Mohammad played a major role: he was visiting La Guillotière in order to oversee the distribution of Chinese mint, to help Abdelfattah finalise his deal as an informal notary, and to keep his contacts alive. Mohammad had developed a deep understanding of routes and commercial mechanisms, at the same time becoming a theorist from below. For instance, when explaining the role of connections in the shadow circuit to me, he ended by citing an Arabic proverb: *maarifat arrijal kounouz*, he said, and rapidly translated into French: *les relations humaines c'est du trésor* (human relations are a treasure). When I asked what that meant, he made explicit the need to engage in a cosmopolitan attitude towards people by saying that 'trust is the central aspect in commercial activities' but 'control is the best form of trust' (*la meilleure confiance c'est le contrôle*). This conviction explained why part

of his work consisted of moving through the circuit in order to enforce previous deals and control its functioning, obtaining information and letting people know he was still within the shadow circuit's flow.

The following day we left Mohammad in Lyon, where he would spend another day before leaving for Marseille-Belsunce where part of his family lived, while we travelled back to Turin-Porta Palazzo to unload the van filled with boxes of spices and dried fruit. Early the following morning, I read in the local newspaper *La Stampa*, that during those very same days the mayor of Turin, Sergio Chiamparino, had met his equivalent Gérard Collomb in Lyon: with other politicians and entrepreneurs they had discussed transportation system cooperation policies between the two cities, in particular a high-speed train line. Thus, by coincidence, two separate networks were deployed that same day, across the same route, one linking the governments of two border cities which are also regional capitals (Turin of Piedmont and Lyon of Rhône-Alps), and the other one connecting two neighbourhoods which are pivotal places within a shadow circuit, namely Porta Palazzo and La Guillotière. What should be highlighted here (and what I develop next) is that neighbourhoods, not cities, are the relevant entry point for shadow circuits.

I carried out fieldwork in the neighbourhood of Porta Palazzo between 2001 and 2004, visiting it regularly up to the present. It is essentially the traditional central commercial district of Turin, a locality that has grown up around the daily open-air marketplace in the Piazza della Repubblica square since 1835 (Semi 2006, 2009). Like la Guillotière in Lyon, it is recognised as a commercial neighbourhood for migrants. As such, for incoming migrants, Porta Palazzo is a labour market, a place of residence and above all one of the few public places in the city where they can meet fellow countrymen.

I have developed elsewhere a closer view on market activities, suggesting to consider them from the perspective of the migrants who played a significant role in building up the shadow circuit (Semi 2008).

One of the main fieldwork conclusions was that, while the presence of thousands of migrants was perceived as the emergence of ethnic communities demanding for economic integration within the traditional and fordist labour market, contributing to the urban landscape with an unquestioned cultural diversity, what remained completely misunderstood was the integration of these people within Euro-Mediterranean networks and across societies. The visible part of the shadow circuit was often the less challenging: food, for instance.

Over the years, the Turinese have become familiar with Moroccan mint tea, *halal* sausages and meat, *couscous*, handicrafts and pastry, often produced in the city or region and sometimes imported from Morocco (Semi 2006). The surface of the shadow circuits, exemplified by food, was the most fashionable, and cultural diversity has thus begun to be considered a common, everyday aspect of urban life (for a similar process in London, see Rhys-Taylor 2013). Citizens, politicians and entrepreneurs rapidly integrated what was interpreted as palatable and consumable cultural diversity into a broader framework where food plays a major role in

everyday multiculturalism (Semi *et al.* 2009, Wise and Velayutham 2009). This is especially true in Turin and the surrounding area, where global movements such as Slow Food or international food fairs such as *Terra Madre/Salone del gusto* were born and produce a voluminous discourse on cultural difference and food culture (Andrews 2008). In many cases, the same shop owners, bakers or restaurant owners who work in the shadow circuits (or for people involved in it) played the role of the ‘authentic’ Moroccans in local exhibitions, meetings or festivals. The surface of the shadow circuits was thus ethnicised for local consumption and multicultural policies. Significantly, the more mundane aspects of the shadow circuits, and aspects that are less suitable for consumption by non-migrants, have remained largely hidden.

### Conclusion

In this article, we have shown how Turin and Naples, over the past 30 years, have been transformed and reshaped by patterns of mobility and informal commerce that we have referred to as *shadow circuits*. Shadow circuits work through the connection of distant places across Europe and the Mediterranean. They contribute to the reshaping of cities at different scales (Brenner 2011), from the location of shops and the reorganisation of local industry to the transformation of entire urban neighbourhoods, which have become transnational hubs within a Euro-Mediterranean economy. As in many informal economies, shadow circuits draw on specific social networks and figures such as intermediaries and informal notaries.

Issues of migration, cultural diversity and multiculturalism are at the forefront of scholarly literature and public debate in Italy, but shadow circuits such as the ones we have described in this article have been remained under-researched. Local policy-makers and journalists tend to ignore the capacity of migrants to build businesses outside the model of the ethnic trader or the petty shop owner, drawing on ethnic resources and dedicated to a specific ethnic clientele. Paradoxically, multiculturalism as it is defined by policymakers seems to entrap migrants in one single ethnic identity and not to allow them any kind of non-ethnic agency and relations. More broadly, the current development of identity policies at the urban scale, by defining specific identities and groups – such as sexual, ethnic or religious – may potentially entrap people in one single/univocal identity, thus obscuring existing forms of cosmopolitanism. The same applies to scholarly literature: in Italy, the debate on so-called ‘ethnic entrepreneurship’ (Kloosterman and Rath 2003) is vibrant among scholars (Magatti and Quassoli 2003, Ambrosini 2012), but often the picture they paint is one of a family of immigrant origin, bound by alleged ethnic ties, opening a small shop and seeing relative success and wealth. Such a debate, even when it is focussed on transnationalism, hides the role of mobilities and cosmopolitanism as crucial resources for entrepreneurship. Ethnic and national identities do, of course, exist and play a relevant role, but the methodologically nationalist view that still pervades migration and urban studies are unhelpful for appreciating the real extent of migrant practices.

The picture we put forward is a rather different one: behind the shop, there is a multitude of social actors overlapping, blurring the boundaries of race, ethnicity or nationality, enacting commercial activities through spatial mobility. Also fundamental to the understanding of shadow circuits is the existence of patterns of non-human circulation – such as goods and money transfers – that are dependent on and complementary to human circulation. As acknowledged by many contemporary urban scholars, taking such circulations into account is important for reconsidering the role of cities as sites of connection, and not as simple end-points or containers of social relations (Smith 2005, Adey 2009).

In doing so, our research on shadow circuits is attuned to Ayse Çaglar and Nina Glick Schiller's call for closer consideration of the evolution of urban patterns when looking at migration, and vice versa (2011, see also Salih and Riccio 2011). Not only is the city a receptacle of urban diversity (Vertovec 2007), but also is profoundly reshaped by circulations. We have witnessed a 'diversity turn' in both migration and urban studies, as this special issue so fruitfully shows. In order to deepen our understanding of the practices that build up this diverse urban fabric, it is urgent that we consider how complex, stratified and above all, mobile migrants are. Not only are migrants mobile but also enact prolific forms of mobilities as we observed in our investigation of shadow circuits. To understand the contemporary city, we therefore need to move across cities, and through shadow circuits in particular. Such an approach to cities and migrants requires the adoption of a new stance: theoretically, by looking at the intersections between cosmopolitanism and mobilities – and methodologically – by thinking of new ways of doing mobile ethnography and transcending conventional social (the ethnic group and the ethnic business) and spatial (place, neighbourhood) units of analysis.

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### **Note**

1. Photographs illustrating this article are available as supplementary material.

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