

Stuck and Exploited

Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Italy Between Exclusion,
Discrimination and Struggles

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Italy's Reception System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees A System with Many Shadows and Little Light

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Abstract Since 2011 the increasing arrivals of asylum seekers forced the Italian State to organise a wider and more widespread reception system for refugees and asylum seekers. This paper aims to highlight some of the shadows and few lights that characterize this system, showing its social effects on the population hosted. The analysis proposed is based on the study of official documents, laws and statistics produced by Italian state, interviews with some migrants that lived in reception centres and the participation of the author in the campaign 'LasciateCIEntrare (Let us in)' as an activist. After the analysis, some suggestions are proposed about possible policies able to overcome this reception system, also through a radical change in the Italian housing policy oriented to guarantee housing access as a universal social right.

Keywords Asylum right. Reception system. European Union. Migration. Inferiorisation.

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1 Introduction

Since 2011, increasing numbers of asylum seekers have forced the Italian State to organise a wider and more extensive reception system despite the fact that Article 32 of Law 189/2002 already enabled the implementation of the Protection System for Asylum Seekers and



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Refugees (SPRAR). The Italian State decided to respond to the influx of asylum seekers from North Africa due to the Arab Spring uprisings by developing a reception system at a territorial level, which was initially carried out through administrative acts and, subsequently, through Legislative Decree 142/2015, which formalised the reception system for asylum seekers and refugees based on two levels. Due to the extent of the emergency, the first level, which was characterised by the so-called extraordinary reception centres, became the ordinary level.

In less than five years, these centres were already hosting around 80% of the people under the national reception system; whilst the second level, the SPRAR, which the Italian laws recognise as the ordinary form of reception, became the less used service.

This combination of emergency and exceptionality led to the implementation of a public policy with many shadows and little light, with multiple negative consequences, especially for the asylum seekers and refugees involved.

This study aims to highlight some of these shadows and the reasons behind them. The proposed introductory analysis was based on a study of official documents, laws and statistics produced by the Italian state; interviews with some migrants that lived in reception centres; and the author's participation in the 'LasciateCIEntrare (Let us in)' campaign as an activist, a campaign particularly focused, especially between 2014 and 2019, in the visiting of several reception centres in all Italian regions, as documented in the campaign's website.¹ In this campaign, I have actively participated in a part of the visits in the centres following the ways that the campaign shares to develop this kind of activity, that have allowed me to check on the ground the living conditions in the reception centres. The second paragraph presents a series of data regarding the arrival and presence of asylum seekers and refugees in Italy. The third paragraph provides an account of some of the main rules on the right to asylum and reception in the European Union and in Italy. The fourth paragraph outlines certain historical elements and the general organisation of the reception system in the Italian context. The fifth paragraph analyses some of the many shadows that beset the reception system. Finally, some suggestions are offered with respect to necessary policies based on both the definitive overcoming of the extraordinary reception centres and on a radical change in the housing policy to be made into a universal social right.

¹ <https://www.lasciatecienrare.it/viaggio-nellitalia-della-mala-acoglienza/>.

2 Presence and Number of Asylum Seekers and Refugees

We live in a world filled with conflict, characterised by rampant inequality and increased mobility. These elements show just how profound a social and political transformation we are going through, so much so that international migration and asylum applications did not stop despite the imposition of travel bans and border closures due to COVID-19. Providing certain figures related to a specific type of spatial mobility (i.e., that of asylum seekers, internally displaced persons, and refugees) could make it easier to understand the magnitude of the involuntary displacement.

UNHCR's statistics indicated that there are approximately 79.5 million refugees, displaced persons, and asylum seekers around the world as of 2019.² This is a significant increase over the last decade: in 2009, the estimated number was only 43.3 million people. A series of relevant surveys and studies show that in some parts of the world, refugee camps have become newly established cities. Part of the architectural research is increasingly being applied to housing solutions for such contexts, as, for example, Ikea's self-built house, clearly shows (Radford 2015; Muggah, Erthal Abdenur 2018).

The Mediterranean area is particularly involved in the involuntary displacement of people. For example, according to 2018 data, out of the approximated remaining population in Syria of 17 million people, 6.6 million were internally displaced and 5.6 million were refugees abroad (Wainwright 2017; Radford 2015).³ This is apart from the estimated 350,000 to 500,000 deaths due to the war as of 2019.⁴ Currently, at least 5 million Palestinian refugees live assisted by a specific UN agency, UNRWA, as do millions of other refugees on the African continent. In light of this global issue, based on a review of UNHCR data, the European Union, with a population of about 500 million people, hosts around 3.5 million people who are either applicants for international protection or refugees. Specifically, UNHCR Italy's 2018 data recorded a total of 105,624 asylum seekers and 189,243 refugees.

It could also be useful to look into other data concerning the arrival of people by sea - which has become one of the main ways of entering Italy and other European countries in the last decade - in almost the total absence of policies for granting visas for job search or access quo-

² These data are available on the UNHCR's website: <https://www.unhcr.org/data.html>.

³ UNHCR, *Syria Emergency*, in <https://www.unhcr.org/syria-emergency.html>.

⁴ Only estimates are available on the number of people who died as a result of the war in Syria from 2011 to 2019, which vary depending on the source. In 2016, UN Delegate Staffan de Mistura was already talking about at least 400,000 people killed until 2016 according to the news available in <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/note-correspondents/2016-04-22/note-correspondents-transcript-press-stakeout-united>.

tas for self-employment, seasonal, or permanent employment. Notably, Italy has reduced its position as a transit area since 2011 to partially become a country of arrival and also due to the changes in migration policies at a European level. Historically, such changes have coincided with an increase in the number of people arriving in Italian territory in search of international protection who have been forced to make a stopover in Italian territory in accordance with the Dublin III regulation and the hotspot approach adopted at European level since 2015.⁵

From 2007 to 2019 (December 13) 844,248 people arrived in Italy by sea and were recognised by the State as disembarked, 72,082 of whom were unaccompanied minors, with an acceleration that occurred from 2014 to 2017, through which 624,747 people entered Italy.⁶ The National Asylum Law Commission registered 482,467 asylum applications between 2011 and 2017. Over time, denials of such applications increased. According to data from the CIR (Italian Council for Refugees),⁷ the Ministry of Interior and the Department for Civil Liberties and Immigration denied 39% of applications submitted in 2014, 60% in 2016, and 58% in 2017; while, in the same year, it was recorded that 25% of applicants received humanitarian protection, 8% subsidiary protection, and 8% international protection. In 2019, the trend was carried on with 81% of applications being denied, the almost complete disappearance of humanitarian protection, 11% of international protection concessions, and 6% of subsidiary protection.⁸

3 The Right to Asylum and the Duty of Reception

From a legislative point of view, Article 10 of the Constitution of Italy states that “a foreigner who is denied the effective exercise of the democratic liberties guaranteed by the Italian Constitution in his or her own country has the right of asylum in the territory of the Italian Republic, in accordance with the conditions established by law”.⁹

⁵ The regulation known as Dublin III establishes “the criteria and mechanisms for determining the Member State responsible for examining an application for international protection lodged in one of the Member States by a third-country national or a stateless person (recast)”. It is available at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/IT/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32013R0604>. For a presentation of the hotspot approach it is useful to read European Court of Auditors 2017.

⁶ The source of these data is the Department for Civil Liberties and Immigration of the Ministry of Interior, available at <http://www.interno.gov.it/it/sala-stampa/dati-e-statistiche/sbarchi-e-accoglienza-dei-migranti-tutti-i-dati> and <http://www.libertaciviliimmigrazione.dlci.interno.gov.it/it/documentazione/statistica/cruscotto-statistico-giornaliero>.

⁷ These data are available at CIR 2016, Ministero dell’Interno 2014; 2015.

⁸ Data about 2019 are available at <https://seenthis.net/sites/1633966>.

⁹ Unless otherwise specified, all the translations from Italian to English are by the Autor.

Italian law provides numerous provisions for persons seeking international protection, recognising refugees as persons who, in accordance with the provisions of the Geneva Convention of 28 July 1951, are outside their country of origin and either cannot or do not wish to avail of their country's protection out of fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion. These persons are eligible to apply for asylum in the first host state if they meet the above-mentioned conditions.

Parallels between Italian law and European Union's attitude towards asylum are evident in the latter's fundamental documents, e.g. Article 18 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. According to these documents and attitudes, European Union "has been working to create a Common European Asylum System (CEAS) and improve the current legislative framework".¹⁰

With a common aim of implementing the Common Asylum System, European Union countries have shared minimum reference criteria to guarantee the reception of persons seeking protection through certain directives. The first directive with minimum standards for the reception of asylum seekers (Directive 2003/9/CE) was defined in 2003 and implemented in Italy through Legislative Decree 140 of 30 May 2005. The first directive, reformed in 2013 by Directive 2013/33/EU and accepted in Italy in 2015 through Legislative Decree 142 of 18 August, was entitled "Implementation of Directive 2013/33/EU laying down standards for the reception of applicants for international protection and Directive 2013/32/EU on common procedures for granting and withdrawing international protection status".

This decree stipulates how reception services should be carried out in practice and provides that a person seeking international protection is granted a six-month renewable residence permit until a decision on the application for asylum is made in accordance with the objectives of the European asylum system. Specific territorial commissions assess the requests and a dispute could be filed after the first adverse decision, although the likelihood of this has been reduced due to Law 46 of 2017. This legislative norm, known as the 'Minniti-Orlando Law', reduced certain rights of asylum seekers, setting off a discriminatory trend that continued with the so-called 'Immigration and Security Decree' (Law Decree 113/2018) promoted by the Former Italian Minister of Interior Matteo Salvini. This decree, which was converted into Law 132/2018, affected certain rights of asylum seekers (e.g., permitting registration in municipal registry offices) and introduced changes to the reception system, as shown below.

¹⁰ EU Commission – Migration and Home Affairs. *Common European Asylum System*, https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/asylum_en.

4 The Reception System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Italy

The arrival of people from North African countries during the 2011 Arab Springs prompted the Italian State to increase the number of reception facilities for asylum seekers, by adding extraordinary reception centres to the ordinary reception centres managed by municipalities in collaboration with the Ministry of Interior (SPRAR). Accordingly, the State implemented a law in 2002 to organise a reception system through the SPRAR service (Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees) established through Law 189, which was anticipated by past decentralised reception experiences that occurred between 1999 and 2000. A memorandum of understanding was also signed in 2001 by the Ministry of the Interior-Department for Civil Liberties and Immigration, National Association of Italian Municipalities (ANCI), and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for the implementation of the National Asylum Programme. Despite the implementation of the said law, it was still necessary to implement a somewhat different and unprecedented system. This mainly took place through administrative acts and was only better systematised through Law 142 in 2015. The active reception system in Italy currently has two levels to which the zero level must be added. The level zero is that of identification centres, the so-called hotspot centres, which are not subordinated to a specific legislation, but “alternatively, the Italian Interior Ministry, in cooperation with the European Commission, has adopted Standard Operating Procedures for the hotspots” (Mentzelopoulou, Luyten 2018). The first level consists of extraordinary reception centres (referred to as ‘CAS’ in Italian) while the second level consists of the SPRAR centres, which were later renamed as SIPROIMI (Protection System for Persons with International Protection and Unaccompanied Foreign Minors) centres through Law Decree 113 of 2018. The first two levels are considered as the exclusive responsibility of the Ministry of Interior through local prefectures, as far as the CASs are concerned; whereas the second level is the responsibility of the Central Service, established by the Department for Civil Liberties and Immigration of the Ministry of the Interior and entrusted (via an agreement) to the National Association of Italian Municipalities, whose operations are backed by the Cittalia Foundation.

The opening of the extraordinary centres was carried out under a State programme called the ‘North Africa Emergency’ along with the following measures: urgent provisions were stipulated in the OPCM (Order of the President of the Council of Ministers) of 13 April 2011, no. 3933 along with an allocation of 1.3 billion euros until 31 December 2011 and extensions until February 2013 when a further decree sanctioned the end with the issuance of a humanitarian permit for all and a severance payment of 500 euros, except for the pos-

sibility for vulnerable people to remain in the reception system. for vulnerable people. Through the OPCM of 13 April 2011, no. 3933, the Head of the Department of Civil Protection-Presidency of the Council of Ministers was appointed as the Delegate Commissioner for the implementation of all interventions necessary to manage the emergency. A Coordination Committee was subsequently established. Within the framework of this committee, the Delegated Commissioner specified the number of reception facilities with the relative design characteristics, as well as the types of services required. Consequently, the head of the Civil Protection Department together with the regional contact person became all-powerful and out of control. According to Yasmine Accardo (2019, 34), an activist that had first-hand experience of this together with some groups of migrants hosted in the implemented reception system, "there was no call for tenders, the emergency enabled a total lack of transparency and control. This emergency phase should have been overcome in a few months to transition into the second phase with the involvement of local authorities. The North Africa Emergency never saw a second phase, as it remained in the hands of the hoteliers until the end".

It is no coincidence that the Ministry of Interior itself already recognised the "series of problems in the operational management", especially of the CAS, back in 2015 (Gruppo di studio - Dipartimento per le libertà civili e l'immigrazione del Ministero dell'Interno 2015, 29). Even though such centres, introduced through administrative procedures and then regulated by a law, are recognised by the Italian State as an exception because they are deemed extraordinary, they ended up becoming the ordinary reception service, which accommodated approximately 80% of eligible persons from 2011 onward. What was officially defined as extraordinary has ultimately been made ordinary by the reception policies implemented, in a system conducive to breeding indifference towards the received persons, so much so that the Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry on "reception system and identification and expulsion centres as well as on detention conditions and public resources invested" had to note that:

these centres, by their very nature, are essentially temporary structures. The temporary profiles - which are often also derived from the call for tenders that determines the duration of the service in a few months generally make it difficult (if not impossible) to provide services according to acceptable quality standards. One thinks, for example, of the inevitably precarious situation of the staff working there, whose professionalism cannot be guaranteed against mere quarterly assignments. This, in turn, impedes any form of real integration with the territory, which are certainly not favoured by their usual location in peripheral urban areas or even in rural areas that are sporadically connected with cen-

tres that are also small in size and therefore unable to adequately provide the necessary social and health services.¹¹

According to data from the Department for Civil Liberties and Immigration, the number of people hosted increased between 2014 and 2017, and were progressively being concentrated in the CAS. In particular, 51.5% of the total number of people (equal to 68,927) were hosted in 2014 in the CAS, while 81% of the 186,681 people present in the reception system were hosted in 2017 in the extraordinary centres.

The spread and centrality acquired by these types of centres has led to the de facto privatisation of the reception system. The consequences of this process have been denounced by countless Italian human rights organisations that have specifically highlighted the poor living conditions in many CASs violate the provisions of the laws and conventions and the awarding contracts, which could also be attributed to the limited control exercised over these centres by the institutions responsible, especially prefectures (Cittadinanzattiva, Lasciateci centrare, Libera 2016). On the contrary, many investigations have been conducted on officials from prefectures or even prefects. A quick search on the Internet would reveal the names of the centres in Cona, Gradisca d'Isonzo, and Imperia, which are associated with those of certain prefects. Further inspection of the officials of the prefectures would yield even more results, consequently widening the geography of the poor reception.

These judicial enquiries have fuelled public debate on the reception-business equation, which seems to have forgotten that the persons responsible for any business are not the asylum seekers and refugees hosted, but entrepreneurs, private managers, and officials or managers of public administrations. The people hosted in the reception system have suffered due to this kind of setup, along with the general limitations of the reception system despite the fact that they neither produced them nor contributed to the transformation of reception facilities into businesses. However, asylum seekers and refugees found themselves in the paradoxical situation of being declared by public communication and political propaganda as the perpetrators of the so-called reception business. They had to go through this additional ostracism, which was part of a long political and media campaign accusing them of earning 35 euros a day, being parasites, guests of luxury hotels, tourists on holiday in Italy, or even going on Mediterranean cruises.

This kind of propaganda supported the changes to the reception system introduced by the so-called security and migration decree

11 Commissione parlamentare di inchiesta sul sistema di accoglienza e identificazione ed espulsione, nonché sulle condizioni di trattenimento dei migranti e sulle risorse pubbliche impegnate (https://www.camera.it/leg17/1281?shadow_organo_parlamentare=2649&shadow_organo=102&natura=M).

promoted by the Former Italian Minister of Interior Matteo Salvini in 2018 (Law Decree 113/2018). This decree moved to exclude asylum seekers from the reception system managed by municipalities, which necessitated a name change from SPRAR to SIPROIMI, and to reduce the services provided in reception facilities. The second level of reception was penalised by the new Decree, pushing asylum seekers outside the reception system and towards Extraordinary Reception Centres, which are considered as the main primary business component of the reception system.¹² The significant economic and management changes in the reception system were set off through the Decree of the Ministry of Interior no. 14801 of 20 November 2018, which amended the “tender specifications for First Reception Centres, Repatriation Centres, [and] Hotspot Centres”. The Ministry of Interior decided to reduce the allocated budget for the reception system by decreasing the daily fees per capita from around 32 to 34 euros to 19 to 26 euros. As a result, a number of third sector actors withdrew their participation in the calls for tenders and a number of municipalities also found it difficult to support the system. However, profit-driven companies that are willing to manage larger centres have remained in the field, although this usually means a decrease in the quality and quantity of mandatory services offered (Battaglia 2019). This decree prioritises profit generation, sustaining the larger centres and a cutting back on the quality of services offered to people hosted, despite the fact that the propaganda of the previous years had veered against the reception-business association.

5 Reception, People, Denial

The reception policy organised by the Italian State - which is also under international agreements that require both the acceptance and verification of asylum applications and the provision of reception services - has been implemented using an emergency logic. This spurred racism towards the immigrant population, reinforcing the belief that immigrants are a threat to public and social order, as well as a public liability that a group of companies use to their benefit by means of a mechanism favoured by the private management of this policy (Accorinti 2015; Moreno-Lax 2017; Penasa 2015),

Reception centre managers and institutional regulations impose a daily routine on asylum seekers and beneficiaries of protection living in the reception system, which, in many cases, limit their opportunities in life, impeding the development of close relationships with local populations and social resources (Avallone 2019). A long wait is

¹² For the renewed access modes to the SIPROIMI system see SIPROIMI 2019.

to be expected, as people usually stay for at least two years.¹³ These circumstances have exposed, and continue to expose, these people to potential vulnerability, which is often exacerbated by poor relations with local society, insufficient professional training and education, and inadequate language learning opportunities (Ruíz-Estramil 2018; Lacomba, Moraes 2020). Consequently, the suspended people, although initially strong upon leaving their countries of origin or departure, find themselves confronted with two predicaments. On one hand, they live in isolation with limited opportunities for self-determination. On the other hand, they could undergo the process of demoralisation, which Thomas and Znaniecki defined as a consequence of the crisis of the rules interiorised by the subject and his difficulty in determining a personal life plan in a new living environment (Benemei, Scarselli, Signorini 2017; Castellano 2017; Guida 2017).

In many extraordinary reception centres, people live similarly to migrant workers who live in hostels in France (the foyers) (Cammelli 2017): impossible communities, characterised by superficial and fleeting relationships. Sayad (2008, 62) acknowledged that “housing in the foyer in these conditions isolates residents from each other within the foyer itself and also from other immigrants rather than bringing them closer together and uniting them”.

Combined with the criminalisation of all forms of migrants' claims through mobilisations and collective or individual protests – as evident in the measures of the second title of the so-called ‘Immigration and Security Decree’ of 2018 – this process of breaking people's spirit could potentially turn them into docile subjects. This section of the decree targets certain forms of social conflict in particular roadblocks, which have mainly been used in recent years by the asylum-seeking population to draw attention to the curtailment of rights in reception centres.

The production of docile subjects is a consequence of institutional racism and is linked to more widespread social racism, which results in further damage due to the potential restriction of alliances between citizens and non-citizens, as their legal and social differences are highlighted.

Through participating in the national ‘LasciateCIEntrare’ campaign, I had the opportunity to visit CASs whose guests had not attended even a single hour of Italian lessons for months. Additionally, I saw how difficult it was for them to access the National Health System and healthcare and their lack of opportunities for socialising with the local communities because they were basically closed off from outside contact in the centres. Under these conditions, people who

13 For a deeper look to this experience, I suggest to watch the anthropological film *Waiting*, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tW8acIXx0o>.

leaves a reception centre would certainly only be able to access the economic circuits and opportunities that are within their reach due to the scarce skills acquired. Given this, the likelihood of becoming an exploited worker in the tomato fields, a small-time drug dealer, or a prostitute is high among young men and women who do not speak Italian and do not have any access to proper employment channels. It is essentially a question of opportunity, which is the same for Italians. The precarisation of work is a universal issue with much deeper roots, although all this is swept under the rug in favour, instead, of creating an external enemy that has nothing to do with the general attack on working conditions in Italy.

Based on the series of CASs visited, and the many others analysed and publicly denounced by the 'LasciateCIEntrare' campaign, there was an evident misuse of financial resources. Moreover, there were no useful avenues for social integration, training, sociality, or trauma processing that were organised. However, many centres have been built as areas for waiting, improved solely by the social and relational skills of the asylum seekers and refugees themselves and by the commitment of the networks of activists and volunteers.

In many centres, people cannot speak out about serious human rights violations, administrative offences, or crimes. Instead, a sense of abandonment, disinterest, and exile pervades. Such affliction is almost expected in these places that are void of concern for people's wellbeing. If asylum seekers and refugees encounter a favourable social context or one that is at least not explicitly hostile, then they could establish social, work, and school integration paths. However, in the CASs visited, there was often no support from the reception centres management, nor was there any concern for the internal spaces: everything is reduced to a bare minimum, to absolute savings, and to bureaucratic responses to certain basic needs.

The people are merely seen as objects of the reception system; they are hardly ever the protagonists. The way the changes in a series of contracts between centre managers and local prefectures have been handled so far is a clear indication of the marginalisation of the reception system's true protagonists. For example, in 2019 a section of a small CAS was closed down due to new calls for tenders and guests were consequently transferred to larger facilities, some even very far away, with only 24 to 36 hours' notice, at most. Due to these sudden relocations, some people, especially those who could not find suitable alternatives, lost all or almost all of the integration work they've accomplished since arriving in Italy and had to start all over again (Pitzalis 2019). This system clearly does not take the people it hosts into account; otherwise, these people wouldn't be uprooted and abruptly moved to faraway locations, causing them to lose the jobs, friendships, education paths, and bonds that they have built during their supposedly permanent stay in the area.

After a decade of implementation, there are clearly some missed opportunities in the current reception system for asylum seekers and refugees, given that the management generally prioritises propaganda, profits, or blind bureaucracy over the needs and paths of social inclusion of asylum seekers. Needless to say, this outcome is primarily to the detriment of asylum seekers and refugees.

In Italy, the nexus between reception and immigration has been associated with emergency policies and speeches that denounce ideas and actions that are different. According to current international data, particularly UNHCR data, the movement, escape, and mass departure of asylum seekers and refugees must neither be seen as a biblical exodus nor an avalanche. However, the social and political construction has been very different: oriented towards speaking of migration as a disaster, reinforced by fear-based propaganda, and fuelled by most political factions and parties. The use of images and categories to define this phenomenon based on the words of the state (e.g., clandestines, irregular people, terrorists, and invaders) escalated after 2011. In addition, the divide between nationals and non-nationals has widened, exacerbated by the spread of words and metaphors that reinforce a monolithic image in which humanity ends up disappearing: expressions and words such as 'waves of migration', 'flows', and 'asylum seekers' landings' refer to masses in which human individuality is non-existent.

As a result, migrants become commodities for both the reception system and for political propaganda that solicits votes by participating in a field that facilitates consensus building in the absence of bold political alternatives. In a situation where the margins of agency for domestic political actors are greatly reduced by countless international constraints, the attacks on migration are often approved by electorate, reinforced by the dehumanisation and criminalisation of migration.

This fosters public hatred towards asylum seekers, often even acting in their absence, as if they were ghosts. This is exactly what happened in a number of municipalities to objecting the opening of reception centres - with mobilisations, blockades, signature campaigns, and protests against the arrival of hundreds of foreigners and, in some cases, even unaccompanied immigrant children. Those who oppose the arrival of unknown strangers - who are essentially regarded as mere figures, masks, representations, or ghosts - express vehement denial and rejection, a hatred directed towards faceless people stripped of their humanity, rights, and privileges; and reduced to being shadows to be removed, risks to be eliminated, or dangers to be avoided.

The denial of the *other* has been employed to reinforce the idea of territorial ownership, proposed as an exclusive and closed community in itself, built against the others constructed as dangerous enemies. Such denial is often neither hidden nor disguised, giving rise

to a manifest hatred, a clear expression of one's political position, one that supports slogans based on radical exclusion such as 'Italians, first' or 'masters in our own home'.

These negative sentiments are not only directed towards asylum seekers because it extends further, nurturing the idea that the world could be divided into hierarchies and borders: with privileged people (i.e., subjects who have a say and make the decisions) and a subordinate population (i.e., objects who are silenced and are deprived of the right to fight for their rights).

6 Conclusion

Italy's reception system for asylum seekers and refugees is filled with shadows and only little light. It is a system that often neglects the people it is supposed to host and ends up, producing people who, once outside, find themselves disoriented, in a predicament exacerbated by the general lack of housing policies and available job training.

The constitutive limits of the reception system depend on its exceptionalism; in other words, on the attribution of very particular characteristics to the hosted people, defined as 'other people' who are radically different and with a different set of limited rights. In line with this definition, a policy was created for the *others* (i.e., those who are different), for those to be kept completely separate from the rest of the population. In terms of implementation and governance, this definition was translated into a policy for 'exceptional' presences, therefore making it an exceptional and emergency policy.

As a result, the reception system was turned into a system that contains rather than welcomes, that distances rather than brings people closer to the local society, that disciplines rather than promotes socialisation.

In this manner, reception is essentially no longer a social policy, but an order and control policy, that, beyond individual and local positive experiences - normally subordinated to the goodwill of the immigrant guests, some operators and volunteers or activists, who act locally independently of the resources of the reception system - usually is a hostile system for the foreign-born population residing within it.

With such a reception system, the temporal continuity that characterises and forms every individual biography is set aside and, with it, the diversity of people's needs. What drives the reception system is the need to respond to an institutional demand of order, that of placing people somewhere. This trend is consistent with the emergency nature of reception, fundamentally intended not to disturb public order, negligent to the fact that migrant people have been subjected to a private management, defined and governed as commodities to exploit for maximum economical or political gain.

In line with other previous studies (Fabini, Firouzi Tabar, Vianello 2019; Campesi 2018), this study's findings highlights the need to consider a major overhaul of the current reception system for asylum seekers and refugees, which focuses on the general theme of housing and the development of a universal housing policy. At the same time, in the short term, the new law on immigration and reception approved by the Italian Parliament in December 2020 emphasises the urgent need to deal with the consequences of the Security Decree on the current reception system, starting with a reinvigoration of the reception centres now part of the renamed SAI (Reception and Integration System), formerly known as SIPROIMI and SPRAR, which could be strengthened by a policy that sustains the establishment of such facilities in municipalities that lack them, in order to achieve a progressive reduction of the extraordinary reception centres.

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