Wonderful World House
From Exclusion to Intercultural Relations in the Aftermath of Law Decree 113/2018 (Immigration and Security Decree)

Chiara Marchetti
CIAC Onlus

Abstract   This chapter offers an overview of the role of social relations in reception practices towards asylum seekers and refugees, updating these considerations in the framework of the Immigration and Security Decree (3). The experience of the Wonderful World House in Parma is described as a reaction to the exclusionary policies enacted at the national level (4) and it is analysed as a space offering emplacement opportunities both to migrants and Italians (5). The final part confronts the Wonderful World experience with the concepts of direct social action and social innovation, in order to foreshadow its medium- and long-term impact in asylum policy making (6).

Keywords   Refugees. Exclusion. Intercultural relations. Emplacement. Direct social action. Social innovation.

Summary   1 Introduction. – 2 Countering Exclusion Through Reception and Social Relations. – 3 The Effects of the Immigration and Security Decree. – 4 Wonderful World House: A Community-Based Initiative in Parma. – 5 From Displacement to Emplacement through Intercultural Relations. – 6 Community Building Between Direct Social Action and Social Innovation.

1   Introduction

March 2020. In the midst of the COVID emergency volunteers can no longer attend the Wonderful World house.[1] They are forced to stay home because of sanitary risk of infection and are called to respect the obligations issued by the Italian government. Many of them are aged, retired, and feel lonely. No grandchildren to look after, no friends to meet, no good excuse to go out. And the same happens to the eight refugees[2] hosted in the house. All in a sudden the doors have shut. They are among the lucky ones who have not been closed out and can enjoy a safe place to stay: single bedrooms, in order to facilitate social distancing, granted food and other benefits. But they are deprived of direct relations with friends, social workers and volunteers.

Meanwhile, something strange starts happening on line. Every evening, Irlanda, 83 years old, self-records a video while playing the piano. Brahms, Beethoven, Chopin. But also ragtime and the song "What a wonderful world", in honour of the house where she used to go at least twice a week before the Coronavirus. The videos – more than 100 since the beginning of the pandemic – circulate in the volunteers' WhatsApp chat and reach the refugees, who react with their own songs and messages. Amadou and Salung perform the reggae song they have composed: *Stai a casa* (Stay home) is first of all dedicated to their Italian friends.[3]

Day by day a new routine takes place. Social relations are not the same as before, neither for refugees nor for Italians, but the quality and intensity of interaction occurring even in (or *thanks to*) circumstances of physical separation shed light to the features of a different community: where you can welcome migrants while welcoming also fellow co-nationals. Keeping company to refugees with messages and videos often sounds like a way to feel useful and alive. This has always been true (a typical dynamics in care relations, see e.g., Malkki 2015), but it sounds even clearer in this emergency time. It also shows that a new sense of community is shared by volunteers and migrant guests.

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[1] The empirical part of this chapter is based on research and participant observation which took place in Parma since 2018, after the publication of the Immigration and Security Decree.

[2] I decide to use the term 'refugees' with no specific reference to the legal refugee status but referring to the migrants who entered to asylum system and procedure, no matter of the outcome of their assessment. In the next paragraphs the legal dimensions of protection and their consequences on rights and opportunities of migrants will be better explained.

[3] Many of these videos have been collected in the short film *Wonderful World Lockdown Reggae*, released on CIAC YouTube channel on the World Refugee Day (20 June 2020): https://youtu.be/Ly7LdFskNfQ.

This chapter offers an overview of the role of social relations in reception practices towards asylum seekers and refugees (2), updating these considerations in the framework of the Immigration and Security Decree (3). The experience of the Wonderful World House in Parma is described as a reaction to the exclusionary policies enacted at the national level (4) and it is analysed as a space offering emplacement opportunities both to migrants and Italians (5). The final part confronts the Wonderful World experience with the concepts of direct social action and social innovation, in order to foreshadow its medium- and long-term impact in asylum policy making (6).

2   Countering Exclusion Through Reception and Social Relations

Since its origins back in the early 2000, Italian protection system for asylum seekers and refugees was based on the intuition that the best way to protect refugees and foster their integration was to embed their assistance as close as possible into the ordinary welfare system, with a preeminent role assigned to local administrations, third sector and civil society. This intuition – which oriented the creation and implementation of the SPRAR System[4] as the result of a bottom-up process strongly promoted by the third sector in what can be considered a social innovation practice – has never become the rule, being this system heavily undersised and underfinanced even when numbers could have easily allowed a full implementation of this approach. Later on, starting with the management of the so-called *Emergenza Nord Africa* during and after the Arab Spring (2011-12), and again in the midst of the European refugee crisis (2014-15) when a system based on Extraordinary Reception Centres (CAS) spread in all the Italian territory, the political and quantitative prevalence of a reception system based of big centres mainly disconnected from the public social services became evident, in spite of the efforts to implement and promote the SPRAR system and the approach of a decentralised 'integrated' reception.

Nevertheless, the awareness of the positive outcomes of that approach have conditioned and inspired the professional choices and the resistance of many civil society organisations and some local administration, even when numbers of asylum seekers and refugees skyrocketed and the reception system as a whole reached the size of around 200,000 migrants hosted in different facilities and under different conditions (Marchetti 2017).

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[4] Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees (with the Italian acronym SPRAR) was established in 2002 by the Law 189.

The importance of starting the integrated approach since the early stages of asylum seekers' reception corresponds to the opportunity to experience access to services (health, housing, mobility, education, professional training etc.) in mixed contexts, even though facilitated by the presence and the mediation of social workers specifically devoted to organise and deliver interventions meant to provide support for each individual in the reception system. This happens through a personal programme designed to enable every migrant to regain a sense of independence and – collaterally – reinforce local services, designed to profit the entire community, both indigenous and migrant.

This approach has always considered public and universalistic welfare services as pivotal not only for assisting refugees, but also to offer a path towards full citizenship. But the combination of the elements listed above was also meant to foster participation and intercultural relations at the very local level: the idea was that refugees and natives would have met and get along, attending the same neighbourhoods, the same residential buildings, the same bus, the same waiting room at the doctor. After around 20 years, it is doubtful that such an irenic and spontaneous scenario has really occurred, and the success of right-wing racist parties, together with the worrying data regarding discrimination and xenophobia (see § 3) seem to confirm this pessimistic scenario.

At the same time, the goodness and effectiveness of that approach to reception and integration has never been denied. It might be interpreted as an evolution of Community-Based Protection proposed by UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) as a strategic way to guarantee refugees' protection. In the UNHCR definition, the term 'community-based approach' (CBP) implies that communities engage meaningfully and substantially in all aspects of programmes that affect them, strengthening the community's leading role as a driving force for change. CBP puts the capacities, agency, rights and dignity of persons of concern at the centre of programming: it generates more effective and sustainable protection outcomes by strengthening local resources and capacity and identifying protection gaps through consultation (UNHCR 2013). This approach has mainly been oriented to refugee communities (e.g., in large refugee camps and/or in first asylum countries). If we apply it in the context of Italian reception system, it expands to include also the local community of Italians. The potential of this 'whole-of-the-community approach' regards the positive side effects for natives and not only for the official beneficiaries of protection and interventions: when it works, this happens both in terms of positive relations countering exclusion and marginality (no matter of nationality and documents), and in terms of quality and resources to provide welfare services.

3 The Effects of the Immigration and Security Decree

In 2018, Law Decree 113/2018 (Immigration and Security Decree), implemented by Law 132/2018, furthered marginalised migrants by portraying potential asylum seekers as illegal aliens and abolishing humanitarian protection.[5] Until then, not only migrants granted international protection, but also asylum seekers and humanitarian protection holders could enter the SPRAR system: in 2018 they respectively counted for 25.9% and 42.5%, while less than one third (28.8%) of the guests had refugee status or subsidiary protection (SIPROIMI, Cittalia 2019, 43).

As a consequence of the abolition of humanitarian protection, Italy is now witnessing an increase in irregular migration and social marginality, as well as more general security problems. In 2019, the overall recognition rate dropped to 19%, compared to 36% in 2018 (already effected by the Decree and the general impulse to reduce the scope of humanitarian protection) and around 40% in the previous three years (2015-17). These data correspond to around 77,000 rejected asylum seekers only in 2019 (Ministero dell'Interno, Commissione Nazionale per il diritto di asilo 2020). Many of them appealed against the decision of the Territorial Commissions, but they will hardly be acknowledged any form of protection and therefore their fate is to lose any legal permit to stay in Italy, since there is no possible regularisation even for those who already have a work contract. In spite of this fall into irregularity, the number of those repatriated is significantly low: 6,298 migrants in the first 11 months of 2019.[6]

This means that an increasing number of irregularised migrants keep staying in Italy, but 'disappear' from statistics and in many cases from local and national policies and social services, having access – in the best option – only to basic low threshold interventions. On the contrary, these migrants become visible to the extent that they are forced to sleep in the open air or in squatted buildings, or

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[5] According to Art. 5, § 6 of the Consolidated Law 286/98 (which finally implemented the 'Constitutional asylum', provided for by Art. 10, § 3 of the Constitution, under which Italy must recognise asylum to all those who in the countries of origin are not recognized the fundamental rights and freedoms recognized by the Constitution), the Police could grant a residence permit for humanitarian reasons to foreign citizens, such as unaccompanied foreign minors strongly traumatized by the journey, women with children who suffered torture and/or detention in Libya, those whose human dignity was violated, or people fleeing emergencies such as conflicts, natural disasters or other particularly serious events in countries outside the European Union.

[6] Cf. https://ilbolive.unipd.it/it/migranti-rimpatriati-italia-2019. The figure also includes assisted voluntary returns, counting approximately for 1,000 migrants or less. Contrary to the demagogic slogans of the Minister of the Interior, irregular migrants cannot be all forcibly repatriated to their countries of origin, particularly since Italy has no repatriation agreements with most of these countries.

when they get involved in the informal/black market, in precarious and exploited housing and working opportunities etc.

The Law 132/2018, following the Immigration and Security Decree, ultimately affected also the SPRAR reception system. Asylum seekers are not allowed to access this form of 'integrated' reception anymore: now they are assigned to Extraordinary Reception Centres, where they receive minimal welfare services and no integration or language services. For asylum seekers, the collapse of the open reception and protection system drastically restricted the services available for their path of protection and social inclusion, exacerbating their growing vulnerability. At the end of 2019, there were around 67,000 asylum seekers living in extraordinary centres, finally institutionalised as 'ordinary' by Law 132. SPRAR system (now named SIPROIMI) hosted 23,400 migrants, mainly refugees (the number of asylum seekers and holders of humanitarian protection still present in SPRAR projects is rapidly shrinking).[7] If we compare these figures with the ones of the end of 2018, we can easily notice that the overall reception system 'lost' around 44,400 places; but in terms of people, the loss is much higher if we consider the new asylum seekers on the one end and the rejected asylum seekers on the other (Ministero dell'Interno 2019; 2020).

The current situation is very hostile towards forced migrants. Individuals traveling to Italy are no longer considered potential refugees but irregular migrants to be summarily rejected. The few asylum seekers who succeed in arriving (11,471 by sea in 2019, compared to 23,270 and 119,369 respectively in 2018 and 2017) and entering the determination procedure (43,783 new asylum applications in 2019, compared to 53,596 and 130,119 respectively in 2018 and 2017) are not entitled to a wide set of rights. As they did when they could access ordinary reception. Complementary forms of protection don't allow migrants to enjoy institutional reception. These people add up to the thousands of rejected asylum seekers who are left alone and criminalised.[8]

The ones described above are the effects regarding the legal status and the reception opportunities of asylum seekers and refugees. Nevertheless, there are other important social repercussions both in terms of exclusion and marginalisation, and in terms of discrimination, racism and mistrust. These aspects are at once cause and product of the Immigration and Security Decree and of the hate politics

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[7] The ones already present in the SPRAR system in the moment when the Law 132 was approved were allowed to stay until their individual project expired and no longer than 31 December 2019.

[8] We can refer to this process as an example of 'crimmigration', that is to describe the unprecedented convergence of criminal and immigration law at the levels of statute, policy, and implementation (Stumpf 2006; see also Coutin 2011).

carried out by some political parties in the period before and after the publication of the decree.

Across Europe, North America and Australia, there is strong consensus that diversity – despite possible difficulties – brings also wealth and opportunities to the receiving country. Two exceptions are Greece and Italy, where respectively 62% and 45% of the population who oppose diversity. It is interesting to underline that while in several European countries, people belonging to right-win and/or anti-immigration parties are patently more opposed to increased diversity in their country, in Italy the opinion divide between left and right ideology in respect of being in favor of increasing diversity is really low (6%) (Pew Research Center 2019). The same Research Centre notes that Italy is a country where the majority thinks that fewer immigrants or no immigrants at all should be allowed to move in: 71% would like them to be less than those currently present, only 5% hopes that they would be more numerous, while 18% would maintain the current level. With these data, Italy ranks fourth among the most closed countries among the 27 countries studied. In many countries, more people today say migration is a much bigger or moderately bigger problem than in 2002, when the Centre began asking this question. In Russia, Japan, South Korea, Kenya, Poland and Italy, the share saying this has climbed about 15 percentage points or more during this time (Pew Research Center 2018).[9]

In Italy the observatory carried out by the association Lunaria has collected 7,426 cases of discrimination and racism between 1 January 2008 and 31 March 2020 (Lunaria 2020, 81). Although the data have no statistical representativeness, it is worth noting the anomalous occurrence of physical attacks, carried out individually or in groups, documented in the two-year period 2018-19 compared to the years 2012-17. Moreover, among the 1,008 cases of discrimination, 663 fall under the responsibility of institutional (political or administrative) actors. This number should not be underestimated. According to Lunaria, "it indicates how much there is still to be done to prevent xenophobia and racism even in those locations that should be in the front row in preventing and fighting them" (Lunaria 2020, 73).

In this perspective, the Observatory for security against discriminatory acts (OSCAD) shows worrying data for 2019.[10] If overall hate crime has slightly decreased compared to the previous year, the percentage of racist crimes is the highest: 726, that is, three out of four.

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[9] The countries studied are: Greece, Hungary, Italy, Germany, Sweden, Poland, France, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Spain, Indonesia, India, Australia, the Philippines, South Korea, Japan, Israel, Tunisia, Russia, Argentina, Mexico, Brazil, United States, Canada, South Africa, Kenya, Nigeria.

[10] The note *OSCAD and the Monitoring of Discriminatory Crimes* was disseminated on the occasion of the conference on hate crimes organised on 21 January 2020.

Racist and xenophobic physical attacks also increase, rising from 88 to 93. However, the same observatory reports that the data could be much higher, since they are certainly conditioned by under reporting (lack of complaints) and under recording (failure to recognise the discriminatory intention of the police and other actors of the criminal justice).
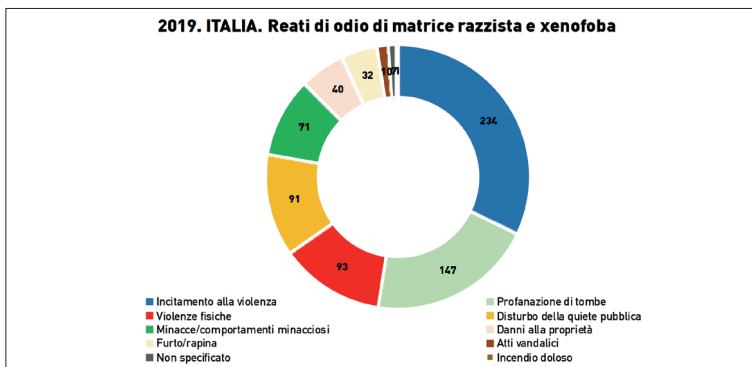

2019. ITALIA. Reati di odio di matrice razzista e xenofoba

- ■ Incitamento alla violenza
- ■ Violenze fisiche
- ■ Minacce/comportamenti minacciosi
- ■ Furto/rapina
- ■ Non specificato
- ■ Profanazione di tombe
- ■ Disturbo della quiete pubblica
- ■ Danni alla proprietà
- ■ Atti vandalici
- ■ Incendio doloso

Figure 1   Italy. Hate crimes due to racism and xenophobia (Lunaria 2020, 70)

In this social and political environment, generally hostile towards migrants and diversity, forced migrants have increasingly lost their credibility and a possible more favourable attitude than the one expressed towards "economic migrants". Asylum seekers and refugees have been given false hope that a good behaviour (e.g., through volunteer work) would have been rewarded not only by social acceptance, but even by juridical recognition, namely via humanitarian protection. But after the Immigration and Security Decree, the regime of deservingness has given way to one of containment. With the described politics of suspicion, there seems little need to invest in integration: there is no longer any ladder, or any 'staircase of transition,' to climb in order to be accepted as a member of the (Italian) community of value (Marchetti 2020, 247).

4   Wonderful World House: A Community-Based Initiative in Parma

In this context, the association CIAC has pursued a multifaceted strategy in order to both assist migrants excluded from protection and reception because of the new norms, and to actively lobby for a political change. This approach is consistent with the mission and approach of the association, having always played a key role in asylum

policymaking in the whole province of Parma and beyond (Bazurli et al. 2020). In the aftermath of the issue of the Security Decree, CIAC strived to establish a concrete project which could act as a pivot of different (but intertwined) actions, namely to offer practical help to excluded migrants, to foster intercultural relations and counter racism, to promote a radical change in the field of asylum policies and to give evidence of the positive effects of an integrated reception model producing social innovation through community building.

During 2019 CIAC registered not only an increasing number of migrants having access to the immigration desks distributed in the Province of Parma, but also a different distribution among three categories of "socio-legal risk":[11] if in the 3-year period 2016-18 the majority of migrants asking for assistance at the desks fell into the category of "medium risk", in 2019 they mainly belonged to the "high risk" group. More specifically, the association encountered 227 migrants in need of reception for different reasons. Among them, apart from the refugees eligible for access in the institutional reception system (SPRAR/SIPROIMI), many were excluded from any possible assistance officially financed by the State (e.g., 57 migrants entitled with humanitarian protection); many others (47) – being asylum seekers – had formally the right to access extraordinary reception centres, but because of administrative discrimination and delays in the procedure were de facto living rough in the open or in the Municipal dormitory, with only basic services.

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11 Low socio-legal risk: recognised refugees and holders of subsidiary protection, as well as holders of permits for family reunification with refugees (they are entitled to wide and stable set of rights; they can carry out work activities and have unrestricted access to social and health care and services); Medium socio-legal risk: asylum seekers (they have the right to institutional reception in the CAS but it is subject to long waiting times and the orientation of the Prefecture of Parma not to authorise numerous accesses. The possibility of carrying out work and access socio-health services mitigate the risks associated with the precariousness of the legal condition resulting from the acceleration of asylum procedures and the abrogation of humanitarian protection. Social security of asylum seekers in the CAS is limited by Law 132/2018); High risk: asylum seekers waiting to formalise the asylum application without a residence permit, asylum seekers who belong to the safe countries list, asylum seekers who reiterate their application, rejected asylum seekers, asylum seekers appealing against refusal, asylum seekers who received a withdrawal of reception, holders of special protection (L. 132/2018) and humanitarian protection (pre L. 132/2018) who do not qualify for the conversion of the document into work/study/family, undocumented migrants, who need to be oriented to possible forms of regularisation (these groups suffer severe limitations in access to any form of reception and assistance).
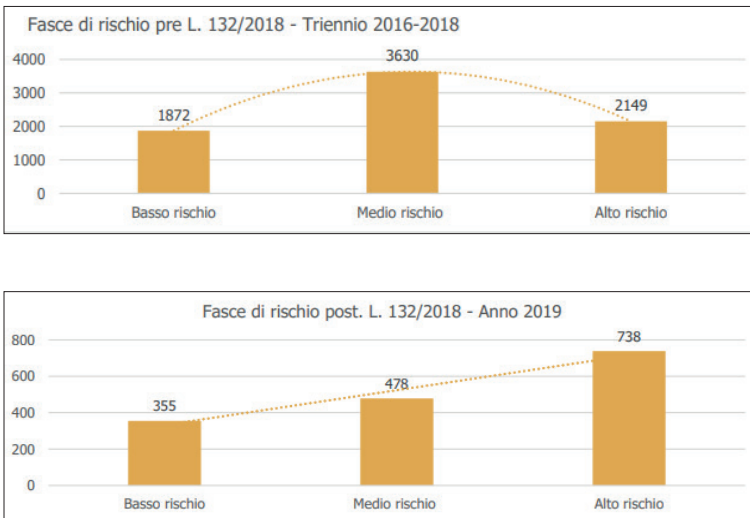
Fasce di rischio pre L. 132/2018 - Triennio 2016-2018

Fasce di rischio post. L. 132/2018 - Anno 2019

Figure 2 Classes of risks before and after Law 132/2018 (CIAC 2019, 6)

In this context it was urgent to find a concrete solution not only to assist migrants from a juridical and sanitary point of view (this has always been guaranteed, thanks to the territorial immigration desks managed by CIAC), but also to provide reception opportunities to the excluded migrants. During the public assemblies meant to explain the effects of the Immigration and Security Decree and in many bilateral meetings with the most relevant stakeholders, CIAC tried to mobilise different resources at the local level. At the beginning of 2019 the possibility to find an adequate accommodation for some migrants became more concrete, thanks to the mother house of the Xaverian missionaries – based in Parma – which offered to the association a three-storey building on free loan. The aim of CIAC was to find not only the economic resources necessary to implement a reception system with exactly the same conditions and opportunities offered to refugees in the SPRAR/SIPROIMI system, but also a wide range of local citizens to be engaged in the everyday management of the facility, mainly in the proximity relationships with the guests.

After some months of hard work to organise and adapt the building, on 23 December the Wonderful World House opened its doors to the first two migrants. Christmas Holidays were approaching, and the cold had already begun to make outdoor life practically impossible. They could not wait any longer.

> When you sleep in the street, someone comes to steal your backpack and many things happen, they steal backpack, mobile phone, a mess, it is cold at night… ugly, very ugly, very difficult. (Salung, Gambia)

In the first weeks, around 10 people moved to the tiny rooms of the facility; they used to live in a squatted house, at the station or in other very precarious and insecure places scattered around the city. Most of them held humanitarian or special protection. Some others were asylum seekers waiting for the formal application at the Police Office and the subsequent access to an extraordinary centre. They were all men (so far), coming from Pakistan, Sudan, Senegal, Gambia, Mali, Iraq, Ivory Coast. Considering their experiences of exclusion and marginality, the house represents a safe haven. But in the intentions of CIAC, it needs to be something very different from a shabby dorm:

> We named it Wonderful World because we really want it to be a beautiful, cozy place. It's also a provocation: reception centres are often sad, grey, impersonal facilities. None of 'us' (Italians, white, rich etc.) would never live there. On the contrary, we bear in mind the words of Louis Armstrong song: "The colors of the rainbow So pretty in the sky Are also on the faces Of people going by". The colors of the rainbow are the same of the peace flag which is displayed at the entrance of the house. In this Wonderful World, everyone is welcomed as a protagonist and a full citizen. (Emilio, president of CIAC)

Candidates for the house are selected from a territorial waiting list, combining different urgency criteria. When they move in, guests sign a three-months (renewable) agreement, entailing mutual engagement by the guests and CIAC. The association offers them the same set of services as the ones granted in the SPRAR: legal aid, health literacy and orientation to services, Italian courses, training and job opportunities, etc.

5 From Displacement to Emplacement through Intercultural Relations

In the house there is no permanent social worker present night and day. In order to facilitate the migrants' orientation and integration in the local services, they are invited to reach the offices, the desks, the training rooms spread around the city. At Wonderful World, everyday routine is organised with the presence of the volunteers and often of the president of CIAC (a volunteer himself). The idea is not (only) to facilitate the everyday activities, but to promote occasions for mutual interactions and friendship.

> I don't consider myself as a volunteer. When I think of a volunteer, taking turns in the house, I see an asymmetrical relation of help. I like the fact that there is not a strict organisation. I come here to meet them, to make conversation. Meanwhile I can also help bringing some food or cleaning the rooms with them, but the relation comes first. (Bernadette, during an organisational meeting with volunteers)

> Now I know many people: white, black… When you don't study, you don't speak with many people with different colours, you are always closed. When you listen to other people, you understand many things. (Amadou, Gambia)

Italian people attending the house are very different one from another: even if there has not been an official and public opening of the house, a wide range of volunteers approached CIAC, mainly through word of mouth. The first ones had already taken part in many assemblies, seminars, demonstrations against the Security Decree. In some cases they also militate in anti-war movements, anti-racist groups, in wider NGOs/organisations (Amnesty International, Emergency, Community of Sant'Egidio), or had political experiences in the past, but a large number among them don't: actually they look for a different form of participation and active citizenship and are often disillusioned from traditional membership, both to political parties and third sector/volunteer organisations.

It is impressive that, before COVID emergency hampered a direct and physical presence in the house, that is from the end of December until beginning of March, 42 people actively engaged participating in the activities, mainly in the morning and in the late afternoon/evening. The WhatsApp chat, meant to organise the presence of volunteers and to exchange ideas and proposals, collects more than 60 people, ranging from the age of 20 to over 80.

> We volunteers are actually a group of people of different ages… in some cases there is also a great difference in age. However, we are very close-knit and manage to coordinate perfectly. There is a lot of debate and dialogue, and this is a real richness […] Here you meet real people, who put themselves at stake out of a pure sense of humanity, love and trust towards others. There is a beautiful atmosphere of mutual inclusion. And it is a lot of fun because of friendship both with the migrants and with the volunteers. (Anastasia, Italy; in Dartizio 2020)

This diversity mingles with migrants' diversity, showing a complex race/gender/class/sexuality/nation nexus, with different combinations of privileged and subordinate subjects, as described in the frame of

intersectionality (Cho et al. 2013). The intercultural relations taking place among migrant guest and their Italian "friends" show a different dynamic than the one occurring in the care relations displayed by social workers: roles are more flexible, asymmetry is less evident and intimacy can take place in a more free space. This doesn't exclude a possible exercise of power, dependency, and (mutual) manipulation, but at the same time the guarantee of rights and services provided by CIAC and its professional workers takes away from the volunteers the responsibility to discharge the material needs and individual protection of the (vulnerable) migrants. These relations resemble somehow the ones displayed in the warm domestic space when families host refugees (Campomori, Feraco 2018; Giuffré, Marchetti 2020; Marchetti 2018): with the key difference that at Wonderful World both migrants and Italian live in a "third space". It is nobody's home and at the same time it is everyone's home. In this way they can experience the same sense of family, with almost interchangeable roles.

This perception was confirmed by the message written by two Pakistani asylum seekers when they were finally accepted in an extraordinary centre and consequently left the house: "Thanks for the love you gave us… We felt at home, you have been like a family" (Faizan and Amir, Pakistan). The concept of home and family are very fluid and re-establish new conditions for intimacy and belonging. This is even more crucial if we compare it with the nostalgic disorientation and the homelessness experienced by all forced migrants, and even more by the ones excluded from institutional reception (Boccagni 2018): "Yet loss of home is the only condition that all refugees share, not trauma" (Papadopoulos 2002, 9).

This experience can be described as the inner and social transition from displacement to emplacement (Bjarnesen, Vigh 2016), where the latter implies a conceptual move away from place as location toward place as a process of socio-affective attachment, as a point of valued or tenable being, as "a vast, intricate complexity of social processes and social interactions at all scales from the local to the global" (Massey 1994, 115). The need for getting emplaced is not a prerogative of forced migrants; it is also common among Italians of different generations who don't fell comfortable (they don't feel 'at home') in the social and political environment we live in. During the COVID lockdown, a 73-years old Italian volunteer, who had been living in Belgrade for years before returning back to Italy, sent to the Wonderful World's guests an eloquent videomessage:

> When I came back to this city where you are now, I was a foreigner and I was not well, and I didn't know how to explain it, I was a foreigner and I was sad. So I got an idea, to know people who like me lived in Parma and felt like a foreigner. From that moment on, when I am with you, I don't feel sad anymore because I understand

that we can be foreigners and non-foreigners in our city, and foreigners and non-foreigners in the city where we have chosen to live right now. (Adele, Italy)

6 Community Building Between Direct Social Action and Social Innovation

Active participation of Italians in the house is not only a form of volunteer work. It entails a different conception of reception and integration: even if it started as a reaction to exclusionary policies enacted by the national Government, and therefore resembling an example of direct social action, we argue that what is happening in the Wonderful World House has the potential for a social innovative practice.

The concepts of direct social action and of social innovation need further explanation. Bosi and Zamponi describe direct social actions as those

> forms of collective action that aim at directly changing, by means of the very action itself, some specific aspects of society without being primarily oriented towards securing the mediation of public authorities or the intervention of other actors (e.g., opponents in labour struggles). These forms of action have in common a primary focus on the political power of the action itself, instead of its capacity to express political claims. (Bosi, Zamponi 2015, 374)

If direct social action emphasises the political power of the action itself, social innovation looks also at the structures of multilevel governance. In fact it refers to local community mobilisation processes that generate participation and tend to produce governance changes, also triggering collective empowerment (Murray et al. 2010; Moulaert et al. 2014). In the words of Campomori and Feraco, we can recognise a social innovative practice when four conditions are satisfied:

> A first dimension of social innovation concerns the satisfaction of needs that previously (before some practices were activated) were not addressed or in any case did not find a solution; a second dimension concerns the triggering of processes of transformation of social relations in the direction of a decrease in social exclusion; a third dimension can be identified in activating a community in an attempt to alleviate social problems that emerge in the community itself; another fundamental dimension is that of the realisation of an innovative governance, that is a modality of relationship between public and private actors such that the third sector is en-

titled to actively participate in the policy making process while at the same time the public actor continues to safeguarding (also economically) universal rights. (Campomori, Feraco 2018, 151)

On this perspective we can assume that the Wonderful World House is something in between direct social action and social innovation. The call for action launched by CIAC in the aftermath of the Security Decree has reached many common citizens who appreciated the possibility to "get their hands dirty" in a very concrete and positive activity. The opportunity to help and assist migrants, developing new relationships with them, wouldn't have been so attractive if it had not also been characterised by a dimension of political denunciation. Many volunteers initially approached the project with few notions of asylum law and of the practical consequences of the normative turn occurred in 2018. They learnt by doing. Questions and stances came out from direct action, and not vice versa.

The case of the Pakistani asylum seekers is paradigmatic in this sense and helps us to understand a (possible) shift from direct social action to the frame of social innovation. While it has always been clear to all volunteers that migrants holding humanitarian protection were excluded from any form of public reception, and therefore Wonderful World filled a gap left by the neglect and rejection of the institutions, the condition of asylum seekers was more ambiguous. Participating at the regular meetings in the house[12] they understood that CIAC was completely opposed to the dismantling of the SPRAR system and to the conditions experienced by asylum seekers into the CAS. The provisional presence of two asylum seekers in the house, however, has become necessary to satisfy needs which were completely unattended: local institutions (namely Prefecture and Police) delayed the procedure to have formal access to asylum procedure and reception; therefore a fundamental basic right was violated and CIAC prioritised the entry of the two Pakistanis in the Wonderful World House both to respond to their need (they had already been living adrift for more than two months) and to prevent them from slipping into invisibility, and therefore to make the political claim for their rights more effective.

Nevertheless, the reaction of the volunteers when the asylum seekers were finally accepted for a CAS is understandable: when, during an assembly, CIAC expressed its satisfaction for the result and the consequent transfer of the Pakistanis, the volunteers were dis-

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12   Before COVID, CIAC organised on regular basis assemblies with volunteers and social workers. In these occasions practical and organisational issues were addressed, but there was also room for explanation, mainly through the questions of the volunteers, of the positions of CIAC on the recent asylum reform and the efforts to introduce improvement changes, lobbying at local and national level.

oriented. How could the association be happy to move the boys to an inefficient, precarious reception centre? Almost with no services, and above all without that warm network of relations with Italians?

These objections were addressed bringing the discussion back to a wider frame of governance. As illustrated in the social innovation theory, a fundamental dimension is represented by relationship between public and private actors (namely the third sector) while it is crucial to actively participate in a bottom up process, the direct action and engagement is not a substitute for State duties. In other words, the defence of rights (in this case asylum seekers' entitlement to public reception) is too important to be set aside in favour of private assistance, even if the quality of reception was destined to get worse in the CAS. The volunteer finally understood this approach: a farewell party was organised to greet the Pakistani asylum seekers and they promised to keep in touch and to keep watch over the respect of their rights, even outside the home.

To conclude, we can describe the Wonderful World House as a community-building initiative, with a strong potential in the field of social innovation. The engagement of a third sector association (CIAC) together with local citizens in the role of 'volunteers' is not a solution against or instead of the State. In the house social and juridical exclusion are countered through intercultural relations and qualified assistance, but the overall goal also entails a radical change in asylum policies, both at the local and at the national level, claiming for a renewed involvement of institutions in the provision of substantial rights to refugees: as it happened in the late Nineties for the beginning of the SPRAR, when the third sector action largely anticipated the responses expected by the State (Campomori, Feraco 2018, 154).

In the early 2020s, the real challenge is to keep together, as co-creators of policies, not only the third sector and the State, but also 'normal' citizens and refugees themselves. Despite the climate racism and discrimination, the times seem to be ripe. And the case of Wonderful World House seems an important first step in this direction.

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