Stuck and Exploited
Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Italy Between Exclusion, Discrimination and Struggles
edited by Francesco Della Puppa, Giuliana Sanò

Migrating Alone, Living Together
Reframing Unaccompanied Minors in Italy across Local Bologna Policies and Citizenship

Selenia Marabello
Alma Mater Studiorum – Università di Bologna; Università di Modena e Reggio Emilia, Italia

Maria Luisa Parisi
CIDAS, Cooperativa Inserimento Disabili Assistenza Solidarietà

Abstract This paper discusses reception practices for unaccompanied minors in Italy by juxtaposing legislative changes, ideas about and social representations of the condition of minors, contingent events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, and the refugee crisis along the Euro-Mediterranean border. This crisis is particularly key for interpreting migratory processes involving unaccompanied foreign minors because it has framed migrant minors in a morally ambivalent and polysemous way. Of the many formulas and practices involved in minor migrant reception, the analysis focuses on a shared housing project in Bologna called Vesta in which young migrants about to reach the age of majority, a moment that marks a sudden change in their lives, are temporarily placed in Italian citizens' and families' homes. Through an anthropological lens, we examine how welfare policies involving citizens and spaces of social relations and cohabitation create commonly overlooked spaces in which intersecting individual and collective claims condition the pathways of young migrants, steering them in the arrival society, and give rise to diverse ideas and imaginaries about family ties.

Keywords Unaccompanied migrants. Italy. Domestic space as a part of migrant reception systems. COVID-19.

Edizioni Ca'Foscari

Società e trasformazioni sociali 8
e-ISSN 2610-9689 | ISSN 2610-9085
ISBN [ebook] 978-88-6969-532-2 | ISBN [print] 978-88-6969-533-9

Peer review | Open access
Submitted 2020-09-23 | Accepted 2020-11-28 | Published 2021-10-27

DOI 10.30687/978-88-6969-532-2/006

1 Introduction

Since 1990, Europe has been a destination for children and adolescents migrating alone or experiencing family separation across the multiple state borders of their migratory trajectory. In this same period, academic and legal debates – albeit redundant and also characterised by blind spots – have developed around the phenomenon of 'children growing up in migration'. As scholars have thoroughly documented, these young people's status as migrants prevails over the broader and better-protected condition of their minor status (Kanics, Senovilla, Touzenis 2010) and the protections actually granted them in arrival countries often deviate from the tenets of international law. European countries have modified and updated their legislation at different times in keeping with legal logics for protecting and governing migrating minors, whether accompanied or unaccompanied. The resulting reception models, though varied, share a focus on concrete procedures for protecting minors and entrusting them to the care of legal representatives, guardians, families or reception facilities. In this context, the challenge facing states is to re-articulate the best interests of the child (as asserted in conventions such as the 1959 United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child and 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child) in the framework of increasingly stringent European border control policies. European national and international legislation on minors and asylum policy has developed complex and contradictory ways of accommodating this challenge, casting migrant children in various guises from innocent child victims to impostors or pawns of criminal networks. The prevailing media silence on the issue of migrant minors has been broken only by spectacularising representations of failed journeys and unexpected deaths involving migrating children (Gjergji 2017).

In the 2000s, unaccompanied minors appeared on the stage of the Euro-Mediterranean border as a specific component of the refugee crisis (Lems, Oester, Strasser 2020). In spilling over from legal debate about juridical protection into public discussion, however, this new migrant subject (Vacchiano 2012) has taken on a contradictory shape in the social imaginary. The so-called North African Emergency and numerous arrivals by sea have reinvigorated security and surveillance policies and their associated procedures for containing migrants, restricting their rights and externalising border control (Cassarino 2016). At the same time, the 2015 European Agenda on Migration both legitimised the management of migration through specific security measures[1] and established 'hotspots'. These increasingly

1 These measures involve strengthening FRONTEX and EUROPOL, the former in force since the mid-2000s under another name and the latter in an embryonic form since the 1990s. For a more in-depth discussion of this topic, see Fontanari, Pinelli 2017.

rigid migration-containment measures have impacted minor migrants as well but, due to their status as minors, they are able to selectively permeate the politics of frontiers (Vacchiano 2012). In this macro framework of European border security policies, indeed, the number of unaccompanied minors arriving in Italy peaked in 2016 with a UNHCR-estimated record of 28,223 minors out of 181,436 total arrivals. Reports show that minors accounted for between 11% and 19% of arrivals by sea between 2011 and 2016 (UNICEF, CNR-Irpps 2017, 13) to settle at around 16% in 2019. As of 31 December 2020, there were 7,080 unaccompanied foreign minors in Italy requesting protection, an increase of 16.9% compared to the same survey period of the previous year (6,054), although with a decrease of 34.4% compared to 2018 (10,787).[2] The macro categories of forced and economic used to filter migrants (De Genova 2002; Fassin 2011) have been supplemented by other classifications such as vulnerable and unaccompanied foreign minors (UFM). It is these latter that we focus on in this chapter, reflecting on a specific Italian area – the Metropolitan City of Bologna – and how it has responded to incoming flows of UFMs, legislative changes (Law Decree no. 47 of 7 April 2017) and specific forms of reception involving the citizenry (Fechter, Schwittay 2019).

Seeberg and Gozdiak (2016) have expressed concern about the lack of dialogue among researchers and social workers. With the aim of fostering a thoughtful exchange among practitioners and researchers, this article is based on academic research[3] and professional[4] engagement in migration, vulnerability and health issues carried out by the authors, both trained in cultural anthropology. After briefly tracing the scientific debate on childhood, we outline the theoretical and regulatory framework governing Italian reception practices. We then focus on a specific reception program for unaccompanied minors and young adults called Vesta that the authors have been joint-

2 Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Annual Monitoring Report on unaccompanied foreign minors in Italy 2020. https://www.lavoro.gov.it/temi-e-priorita/immigrazione/focus-on/minori-stranieri/Documents/Report-di-Monitoraggio-MSNA-31-dicembre-2020.pdf.

3 This chapter was written as part of the activities of the Bologna-based research unit directed by Prof. Bruno Riccio in the framework of the project PRIN - 2017 "Genealogies of African Freedoms" (PI: Alice Bellagamba). This research, currently ongoing, explores representations of freedom in diasporas from West Africa and, in particular, processes of mobility among women-mothers and children. Selenia Marabello, MSc and Phd, is a post-doc researcher at the University of Bologna and Adjunct Professor of Anthropology of the Contemporary World at the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia.

4 Maria Luisa Parisi PhD, is an anthropologist at CIDAS (Bologna); she is currently engaged as a Multi-professional Team Coordinator in two national projects dealing with minors, FAMI Start-ER and COV-ER.

ly investigating since April 2020.[5] Adopting ethnography as qualitative and empirical research tool, we delve into social representations and practices, shedding light on the dynamics of migration across local contexts, legal norms and institutional organisations. Indeed, the Vesta project offers a window onto the way local social practices and institutional contexts reinterpret the macro landscape of migratory processes and respond to social contingencies. In particular, this case allows us to analyse how ideas about borders, adulthood and social ties are re-forged in domestic and family space.

The ethnographic density of our research helps us to critically reinterpret the wider and more heterogeneous processes unaccompanied minors find themselves interacting with in Italy and the reception system more generally. The Vesta project targets young migrants nearing the age of eighteen, a transition that entails a sudden loss of status and protection under Italian law (Walker, Gunaratman 2021).

2 Framing Childhood in Migration

According to Hashim and Thorsen (2011), in the late 1990s the vibrant 20th century debate on child labour focused on phenomena such as prostitution, children's involvement in armed conflict (Jourdan 2007; 2010) and child-trafficking that are patently harmful and exploitative (Myers 1999, 24). This focus was reflected in the Child Labour Convention[6] drafted by the International Labour Organisation and Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) adopted by the United Nations general assembly in 1989 and widely ratified. Although the CRC represented an important advance in asserting children's rights, it has also been criticised for its universalising framing of childhood and parental relationships. Parent-child relationships were already part of the ethnographic corpus of social and cultural anthropology (Mead 1961). In the 1990s, however, anthropological research shifted its attention, deconstructing romanticised ideas of infancy and maternity to examine the politics of childhood as well as forms of abuses, poverty and exploitation (Stephens 1995; Scheper Hughes,

5 The Vesta study is based on eight audio-video interviews (1 and a half hours each) conducted in April-May 2020 with the members of four host families differing in age, geographical location (city center/province), and familial structure (co-residential nuclear family, transnational single-parent family). The data have been triangulated through comparison with interviews with professionals holding management and supervision roles in the organisation running Vesta and also the notes recorded by Maria Luisa Parisi during the nine months of training provided to the families who decided to host migrants. This chapter is the outcome of a joint and indivisible work by the two Authors; if for academic reasons individual authorship is assigned, however, Maria Luisa Parisi wrote § 3, while §§ 1, 2, 4, 5 and 6 were written by Selenia Marabello.

6 ILO Convention no. 182 – *Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention* (1999).

Sargent 1998; Taliani 2006). These critiques are highly pertinent to understanding children's migration as they have generated a complex debate about the contested aspects of childhood (Seeberg, Gozdiak 2016) across different social and cultural groups, nation-states, transnational networks and legal horizons.

Building on Aries' (1962) seminal insights, common views of childhood as a universally constituted and biologically determined phase of human development have been overwhelming rejected in favour of viewing children as agents in changing contexts. As Seeberg and Gozdiak (2016) have noted, the field of childhood studies has shifted from studying children primarily as adults in the making to exploring the lived experience of childhood.

While children have not been wholly overlooked in migration studies, the prevailing perspective has privileged social structures and the idea of adults as drivers of migration, thereby casting children as victims or dependents, or excluding them from the research lens altogether. Several authors sought to counter this trend by addressing children and adolescents as a "new migrant subject" and examining the independent trajectories of children migrating alone (Suárez-Navaz, Jiménez Alvarez 2006; Jiménez, Vacchiano 2011). These studies have explored agency and victimhood process (Ensor, Gozdiak 2010), children's labour (Morganti 2007) and the interplay of context, identity and belonging as well as the power relations in which children are implicated (Ni Laore et al. 2011) in an effort to shed light on transnational movements and the dynamics and inequalities of global capitalism (Gardner 2012). A growing research interest in migration brought attention to bear on the lived experience of childhood and young people's subjectivity (Vacchiano 2011; Veale, Donà 2014; Meloni 2020), documenting how childhood is contested rather than representing a trans-historical or trans-cultural category (Comaroff, Comaroff 2005). This research has mapped the global circulation of both the ideologies and practices underlying the notion of childhood (Morganti 2007; Hess, Shandy 2008) and the role of the state. Scholars studying the state's treatment of minor migrants and role in rendering them visible/invisible (Hess, Shandy 2008) have shown that administrative labelling, services for migrant minors and a prevailing focus on counting this population has deliberately masked – if not obscured – the phenomenon of young people's migration (Humprey, Sigona 2019). As a result, certain types of minors have been granted intense visibility despite their relatively low numbers (Vacchiano 2012). In Italy, migrant minors numbered from 6,000 to 8,000 between 2000 and 2020, with a peak in arrivals between 2014 and 2017[7] (Consoli 2021). At the

7 The main actors responsible for providing data on unaccompanied minor migrants have been public officials; more recently, a SIM (*Sistema Informativo Minori*) reporting

European level, the first study on minor migrants conducted in 2008 counted 20,237 minors assisted by public administrations in the 22 countries studied (European Migration Network 2010). If we consider unaccompanied minor migrants to include asylum seekers migrants, victims of trafficking and minors with a migratory background, it becomes difficult to identify a clear number because national classification and labelling systems vary so widely. These divergent classificatory systems also impact on the services made available to these young people. Furthermore, administrative labelling, international and national legal norms and local arrangements are entangled with cultural and social representations of the childhood-to-adulthood transition, the freedom and agency of young people, and familial roles. By looking at a particular migration project aimed at fostering unaccompanied minors' social inclusion in Italy, therefore, we seek to explore how Italian citizens and young migrants involved in temporary hosting arrangements formulate meanings and ideas about migration, family and childhood in the Italian social and legal framework.

3 Migrant Minors and the Regulatory Horizon

The full array of ways minors migrate is beyond the scope of this chapter; here, we concentrate on those who migrate without a parental figure and sometimes without the knowledge of their families of origin (Vacchiano 2012; Valtolina 2016; Belloni 2020). The boys – and girls, though far fewer in number – and adolescents who cross state borders both embody and unsettle the contradictions of migrant subjectivities, host society contexts and cultural ideas about childhood and protection. Perhaps more so than other macro-categories, they pose challenges on both the social level and the operational level of management and care, understood in terms of politics, ethics and welfare. They are so challenging because they represent a point of intersection between the right to protection enshrined in international and national law[8] and the security-oriented logics fueling recent European and Italian migration policies. They translate the symbolic element of embodied crossroads (Hess, Shandy 2008) – by virtue of their age and, no less important from a situational point of

tool was created. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policies page provides and comments on these data: https://www.lavoro.gov.it/temi-e-priorita/immigrazione/focus-on/minori-stranieri/Pagine/Dati-minori-stranieri-non-accompagnati.aspx.

8 All regulations share essential principles rooted in the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, stipulated in New York on 20 November 1989 and ratified in Italy with Law 76/1991.

view, their gender – onto the institutional level.[9] Indeed, the best interests of minors are increasingly at odds with the tangle of social representations and legal conditions in which these young people's diverse lives unfold.

In terms of legislation, the 2017 'Zampa Law' incorporated and modified some previous legal concepts[10] to define an unaccompanied foreign minor as:

> A minor who does not have Italian or European Union citizenship and who is in the territory of the state for any reason or is otherwise subject to Italian jurisdiction, without the assistance or representation of parents or other adults legally responsible for him/her according to the laws in force in the Italian legal system. (Law 47/2017, Art. 2)

The definition thus involves three conditions: minor status, citizenship in a country outside of the European Union, and not having any adult(s) legally responsible for the minor in Italy.

On the one hand, their age – under 18 – clearly entitles minors to rights by virtue of a condition that is transitory and must be verified, in cases of uncertainty, by means of specific medical-legal procedure.[11] On the other hand, the very condition of unaccompanied foreigners threatens the solidity of their identity and belonging. No longer materially tied to a specific adult figure, they are often entrusted to and included in wider informal, para-legal and transnational networks of their fellow countrymen. This state exacerbates the risk (often implicit, and more or less internalised by the minor) of falling victim to exploitation and coercion. Whether desired or imposed, the destination country is a terrain in which links among national migration policies, local welfare systems, trajectories of caretaking, and anthropo-poietic paths (Remotti 2002) of constructing adulthood take shape and are built by the various actors involved in defining what is at stake on multiple levels (individual and community, symbolic and material).

9 For more in-depth information on this subject, see: Chamber of Deputies, Study Service XVIII Legislature, Unaccompanied Foreign Minors, 2020. https://www.camera.it/temiap/documentazione/temi/pdf/1104665.pdf.

10 These definitions of unaccompanied foreign minors were previously formulated in Prime Ministerial Decree 535/99 (Art. 1, § 2) and Legislative Decree 85/03 (Art. 2, letter f). The most relevant difference is that the 1999 text excludes minors who have applied for asylum from the notion (and therefore from the regulation) of MSNA (UFM in English).

11 Cf. UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Southern Europe regional office, *L'accertamento dell'età dei minori stranieri non accompagnati e separati in Italia*, 2014. https://www.unhcr.it/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/accertamento.pdf.

In Italy, there have been procedures in place since 2014[12] to manage all unaccompanied foreign minors, including those not seeking asylum,[13] within a single governmental reception system.[14] Law Decree 113/2018 (converted with amendments via Law no. 132 of 1 December 2018) enlarged the scope of this system,[15] making it the central hub of an integrated series of interventions. These range from the initial reception services that meet migrants where they disembark or arrive by land to programs designed to progressively grant them a series of skills that, in the idiom of socio-cultural integration, define the traits of an autonomous subject (cf. Atlante SIPROIMI 2019, 95).

In 2019, a total of 6,472 minors were processed by the governmental system in Italy, with UFMs accounting for 31.1% of all the minors admitted into the system (Atlante SIPROIMI 2019, 53). It is important to note that young people who have just turned 18 are also included in the UFM category: this is because a significant proportion of the migrants admitted – 55.7% (Atlante SIPROIMI 2019, 53) – are close to turning 18; by including them in this category, they continue to be eligible for UFM services for a further six months, or until the age of 21 if the Juvenile Court issues them an administrative continuation order.[16] All UFMs are also eligible for placement in family foster care.

Generally speaking, UFMs are covered by the same protections afforded to minors deemed to have been abandoned.[17] Of these, perhaps the most significant is an assigned legal guardian, or *tutore* (pl. *tutori*), deriving from the Latin verb *tŭĕor*. *Tutori* are tasked with protecting, supervising and taking care of the minor entrusted

12 Stability Law no. 190 of 23 December 2014.

13 Building on the planning process that began with the Plan on the Reception of Migrants that was agreed upon at the Unified Conference on 10 July 2014.

14 At the time called SPRAR (*Sistema di Protezione per Richiedenti Asilo e Rifugiati* 'Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees'), then SIPROIMI (*Sistema di protezione per persone titolari di protezione internazionale e minori stranieri non accompagnati*, 'Protection System for Persons with International Protection and Unaccompanied Foreign Minors'), today SAI (*Sistema Accoglienza ed Integrazione*, 'Reception and Integration System').

15 Further evidenced by the gradual scaling down of first-line reception interventions for minors that had been operating since 2016, funded by the EU's Asylum Migration and Integration Fund – FAMI, as further clarified and defined in the Ministry of Interior's circular dated 27 December 2018.

16 Law 47/17, Art. 13, c. 2, establishes that the Juvenile Court may order an administrative continuation measure for all cases in which an MSNA, upon reaching the age of majority, requires further support for the successful completion of his or her trajectory of social insertion, in order to achieve autonomy.

17 Art. 343 of the Civil Code regarding the protection provided by the judicial authority and Law 184/1983 (right of the minor to have a family) which provides for a minor temporarily deprived of "a suitable family environment to be placed with a family, a single person [or], where possible, a family-type community […]".

to them. Before Law 47/2017, this task was generally assigned to a representative of the local institutions where the minor was placed (mostly mayors and/or city councillors). Given how many minors each guardian was assigned to assist, however, this relationship was merely formal and the institutional representative did not personally look after the minors' concrete, essential needs. The 'Zampa Law' introduced a new figure, that of voluntary guardian. Modelled after best practices developed in certain parts of the country, this role can be filled directly by any private citizen who registers with the official rolls after being accepted and trained by local institutions in collaboration with the regional Guarantor for Childhood and Adolescence. This new figure of voluntary guardian shifted responsibility and custody from institutional figures to citizens; as such, these guardians have come to constitute key advocates – formally but also substantially – for unaccompanied foreign minors, supporting young people as they pursue their chosen socio-educational pathways in the host community and ensuring their rights are protected.

In light of these data and the legislative framework governing the operational care of UFMs in Italy, therefore, we can reflect more broadly on the practices and contexts of reception. Despite efforts by lawmakers and managing agencies to render these services more homogeneous and consistent, they vary significantly from one local context to the next.

4 Reception Spaces and Practices

In the 2011-12 period, most foreign minors came from Afghanistan. Since 2013, the range of countries of origin has expanded to include Syria and Egypt and various parts of the Horn of Africa as well as countries in West Africa such as Gambia, Ivory Coast, Guinea, Nigeria and Senegal (UNICEF, CNR-Irpps 2017, 14).[18]

The fact that migrant services are based on an emergency response logic coupled with an institutional inability to meet UFMs legal protection and assistance needs in a timely manner have led to the majority of minors being placed in facilities designed for adult migrants. This tendency clearly illustrates the way minor status (and its associated legal-welfare provisions) ends up being subordinated to the overall status of migrant. Italian local institutions enjoy absolute discretion in terms of setting timeframes and procedures, and exist-

18 For more recent data, see six-monthly reports by the General Directorate for Immigration and Integration Policies and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. http://www.lavoro.gov.it/temi-e-priorita/immigrazione/focus-on/minori-stranieri/Pagine/Dati-minori-stranieri-non-accompagnati.aspx.

ing services are ineffective and unprepared to deal with unaccompanied foreign minors. The result is a deep gap between legal provisions and substantive protections. As outlined above, these laws were reformed in 2017[19] with the idea of improving the safeguards and concrete practices of a reception system that has been characterised by gaps, forms of institutional abandonment (Biehl 2005) and discriminatory, practices and nano-racism (Mbembe 2019). Young unaccompanied migrants often find themselves exposed to danger on Italian soil as well, and in many cases they have responded by organising in groups to flee institutional facilities and settle elsewhere. These escape efforts point at just how inadequate and unsuitable many of the reception structures and sites actually are (Sanò 2017);[20] at the same time, UFMs who leave their assigned facilities or placements may no longer be able to access services. The distribution of unaccompanied young migrants in Italy is highly disproportionate, with most settled in Sicily and one third of the remaining population living in Emilia Romagna, Calabria, Puglia and Lazio (Atlante SIPROIMI 2019, 36).

Minors and international protection applicants are formally guaranteed health services, education, vocational training and linguistic support, but in practice institutions are not effective in ensuring such services. This paradigm of scarcity (Vacchiano 2011) characterises the entire Italian reception system, but it is impossible not to notice that resources (and unaccompanied young migrants themselves) are distributed unevenly across the territory of the Italian state. This asymmetry tends to trap minors in the places where they arrive, preventing them from moving between Italian regions. Unaccompanied minor fostering and guardianship arrangements have their own ambiguities, stemming from prevailing perceptions of what constitutes childhood (Comaroff, Comaroff 2005), adolescence and adulthood. At the same time, this process re-articulates claims of protection and autonomy (Mai 2010) and, through the wide range of young people's experiences, illustrates how institutions come into being via social relations. In this case, the social relations are characterised by power asymmetry between young migrants and the individual Italian citizens or families who sign up to represent the minors' best interests in relation to local society and institutions and to defend their potentially threatened rights.

In spite of current Italian regulations, the contingent management of the COVID-19 epidemic has also affected UFMs, generating new slippages in the effective application of the law or, at least,

19 The above-mentioned Legislative Decree no. 47/07 April.

20 In 2012 there were 1,754 minors identified and then unaccounted for; in 2016, there were 6,508 (source: UNICEF CNR-Irpps 2016 based on Ministry of Labour and Social Policies data).

new spatial-temporal arenas of legal crisis. Abou Diakitè, a 15 year old Ivorian boy, was rescued on 10 September by the humanitarian ship Open Arms; on 5 October he died in a hospital in Palermo. Between September and October, he spent a week on board the Spanish NGO's ship before being transferred to the quarantine ship Allegra from which he was urgently evacuated. As an UFM, under the 'Zampa Law' Abou was entitled to be assigned a guardian within 72 hours of arriving in Italy.[21] However, ship-based quarantine does not count as arrival in Italy and so suspends the established timeframe (he was not appointed a guardian until he set foot on Italian soil on 1 October, 4 days before his death).

While Abou Diakitè's case points to issues of disembarkation and initial reception, COVID-19 containment measures have also impacted unaccompanied minors in the National System of Protection for Refugees and Unaccompanied Minors or those who are about to come of age. Schooling and job placement have been delayed or even completely interrupted. Guardians and associations involved supporting these minors have responded by seeking to take advantage of legal provisions that allow these young people to remain in the system until the age of 21, despite having already reached the age of majority.[22]

In Italian public discourse, unaccompanied minors are cast as exemplars of the Mediterranean area refugee crisis, and this representation tends to polarise attention around legal status or reception practices. In this paper, we seek to recompose these two macro-areas and instead highlight the experiences and meanings attributed to reception in domestic spaces. In the next section we present the Bologna-based Vesta project, an endeavour to construct a reception policy specifically for UFMs who are moving out of residential communities so as to facilitate their social transition to adulthood. The following section presents selected extracts from interviews with Italian citizens who have participated in the project by welcoming migrant minors into their homes. Our intention is to analyse how these reception policies are being enacted and how participants represent and experience the act of living with unaccompanied minors. Social research has thoroughly documented migration and reception policies (Sedmark, Gork, Sauer 2017) and, more recently, ethnographic studies have focused on migrant children (Lems, Oester, Strasser 2020) and the meanings they attribute to migration and freedom (Meloni 2020). In this chapter, we look at welfare policies involving citizens

21 This stringent temporal guideline, not established by the 'Zampa Law', derives from the application of higher-level regulations such as the Italian civil code, and it is precisely the complexity of the regulatory landscape that leaves room for disregarding or circumventing legal norms.

22 https://www.asgi.it/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Nota-COVID-19-e-percorsi-dei-MSNA-ai-18-anni.pdf.

as well as spaces of social relations and cohabitation; we employ ethnography to capture the underestimated spaces that are created in these policies and relations, spaces in which individual and collective demands contribute to charting the pathways of young migrants by orienting them as they navigate the host society, nurturing their aspirations and reformulating their ideas about family ties.

5 Vesta: Migrant Reception in Private Domestic Spaces

Unaccompanied minors' arrivals by sea peaked in 2016, and the same year a family hosting project was launched in Bologna, a city with 152 UFMs housed mainly in residential communities and group apartments.[23] The programme, conceived by Cooperativa Camelot, was called "Vesta".[24] Part of the National System of Protection for Refugees and Asylum Seekers, this reception project for UFMs and young migrants who have just turned 18 has a two-fold aim. First, to invest in and strengthen the relationship between host and guest by investing in citizens' social participation and the subjectification of the hosting relationship. And second, to generate virtuous and consolidated processes of inclusion in the Bologna area by building meaningful personal relationships. This latter component is one of the project's most innovative aspects and was implemented in all the local areas that participated in the experiment.[25] It also represents a fruitful object for anthropological investigation into how the collectivity and institutions operate (Biehl, Good, Kleinman 2007) as well as the relationship between individual and community agency.

Beginning with its name referencing the Roman mythological figure of Vesta, guardian of the hearth, the project clearly evokes a symbolic imaginary of domestic intimacy. As we discovered from the accounts of research participants, Vesta hosts welcomed young people into

23 The first Italian example of this kind of project was *Rifugio Diffuso Accoglienza in Famiglia* (Diffused Shelter Family Reception) that has been operating since 2008 in Turin. This project involves family foster care and since 2015 has been included in the SPRAR network. In Emilia-Romagna, the first experimentations took place in Parma and Fidenza SPRAR systems, with the project *Rifugiati in famiglia* (Refugees in the family) organised by CIAC Onlus. For an in-depth study of this topic, see the proceedings of the conference, organised by CIDAS and UNHCR on 19/12/2018 in Bologna, *A Casa Nostra. Esperienze di Cittadini e Cittadine Accoglienti nell'ambito delle progettualità SPRAR*. https://www.progettovesta.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/A-casa-nostra_atti-convegno.pdf.

24 Today CIDAS works on behalf of the Metropolitan City of Bologna managing projects dedicated to the non first-line reception of UFMs, adults, families, individuals with health/mental vulnerability and LGBT people.

25 Cf. *A Casa Nostra. Esperienze di Cittadini e Cittadine Accoglienti nell'ambito delle progettualità SPRAR*. https://www.progettovesta.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/A-casa-nostra_atti-convegno.pdf.

their families in ways that reflected their own individual trajectories, traits and personal styles. By examining the wide variety of approaches they adopted, we can investigate how specific influences, notions, forms of moral responsibility, action and subjectivities intertwine (Biehl, Good, Kleinman, 2007). Residential facilities have a number of problems (Börjesson, Forkby 2020) and Vesta deliberately sought to give these young migrants material conditions that contrast with those of group homes. Each Vesta placement is structured to adapt to the volunteer's own specific situation and inclinations, so as to make the experience effective for everyone involved, both the citizens opening their homes to young migrants and the UFMs grappling with the implications of coming of age and the resulting sudden loss of legal protections for minors.

This transition from minor to adult status is understood as a new threshold of life for young migrants to cross, and the project focuses on the safety of both UFMs and the volunteers who felt moved to host them. On learning about this opportunity to host a young migrant, almost all of the women we interviewed expressly framed their willingness to open their homes to young migrants as a concrete act of opposition to Italy's harsh migration policies.

We interviewed the young heterosexual couple hosting M.M. and both of them noted, in different tones and ways, that their involvement in this project is deeply political.

> R.V.: I felt I had to do something… our house has always been very open… to friends in need, my brother who lived here for a while after his separation… we were used to living with people in our house and, therefore, when I heard on the radio about this opportunity I immediately looked for news on the web and then proposed it to my partner. There were no particular discussions, we both agreed and we went to do the first [screening] interview.[26]

> F.S.: [R.V.'s male partner] I don't think we've done anything extraordinary, we've welcomed and supported a young guy who is coming from a difficult situation and I think what is "extraordinary" is everything we've seen every day for months, in the news, about sea arrivals, deaths, or the decision to close the ports and do nothing at all.[27]

In participants' accounts, the media coverage of immigration and the urgent need to do something was caught up with ideas about justice, coexistence and the way they want their families and homes to be. They semantically recast the idea of home, making it into a space in which to take a political stance on immigration.

26 Online interview conducted on 06/05/2020 by both Authors.

27 Online interview conducted on 06/05/2020 by both Authors.

In our conversations with interviewees, 'home' and 'family' often overlapped and were sometimes interchanged.

> F.S.: We want our family to be truly open, not closed in on some pattern that we all develop around children and routines. This is part of the reason why we've always opened our home to those of our friends who may need it for some period of time.[28]

> L.T.: Since having our two little girls, we haven't traveled much and so we thought we'd bring the world into the house, to really invite it in at a time when we could see that the Italian borders were closing. Now, B.T. only arrived in January, I would not say he is part of the family yet but we are doing well, I hope we will be a family for him even though he is already married and hopes to be able to reunite with his wife.[29]

In overlapping family and home, the two interview excerpts offer us ideas about the temporariness of hospitality and the way the physical space of the home is imagined and shaped (Pink 2004; Pink et al. 2017) in people's personal history. Unlike many other participating UFMs, L.T.'s young guest is already married in his country of origin; the host's hopes for kinship, however, are echoed frequently in the other interviews as well. One host jokingly told her young guest to "have babies so I can become a grandmother". For Vesta hosts, the idiom of kinship frequently surfaces in the discussions they hold during their monitoring group meetings. However, what emerges from these discussions is that participants use kinship role terms as a way of re-articulating the boundaries between guest and host, respectively Italians and young unaccompanied migrants.

During the spring 2020 lockdown, this home-family overlap was reinforced to the point of redefining the boundaries of immunity from potential contagion:

> R.V.: I work from home, my partner went back to work as soon as he could, M.M, plays a lot with the kids who literally "climb over him"…he started going to work and has only been here at home for a few weeks. Now that you mention it, I haven't taken any precautions [to ensure distancing] between M.M. and the kids or us, obviously no one comes into the house, not even the grandparents; but I have never thought of the fact that he goes to work as a problem.[30]

28 Online interview conducted on 06/05/2020 by both Authors.

29 Online interview conducted on 07/05/2020 by both Authors.

30 Online interview conducted on 06/05/2020 by both Authors.

These interviewees redrew the boundary of the house (and, during lockdown, the boundaries of the immunity of the family unit) around the nuclear family M.M. has become a part of over time. While epidemiological norms and prescriptions obviously apply to everyone and frame all individuals as possible vectors of virus transmission, in daily practices people distinguish between family members/cohabitants and everyone else when conceptualising contagion avoidance. R.V.'s account of her risk perception delineates the cohabiting nucleus and traces the skin of the community (Douglas 1996) around the house, imagined in its entirety as a physical, emotional and cohabitational space. As the interview extract shows, the experience of lockdown re-drew the primary family unit to include M.M. in relation to risk perceptions. Potential COVID-19 transmission was filtered and recoded through the cultural and emotional lenses of those representing the danger (Lupton 2013). The invisibility of the pathogenic agent and resulting illness certainly reinforced people's perceptions of the importance and necessity of social distancing measures, including in the moral sense of acting responsibly to protect society's most fragile members, particularly the elderly and those with chronic pathologies. At the same time, this same invisibility was re-arranged in particular ways in Vesta homes. By looking at these spaces, we can grasp how the alterity and pathogenicity of COVID-19 have been reconfigured in domestic space and relationships. In this case, hosting relationships represent the lived form of family space that can be reconfigured to include unaccompanied minors on the verge of turning 18.

As these brief extracts illustrate, the driving forces behind the Vesta project are the urge to oppose the rhetoric around immigration and the need to compensate for institutional shortcomings in the reception system. In this project, a formal need intersects and intertwines with locally determined concepts of citizenship, civic and religious values, a sense of belonging to a community, and notions of solidarity and citizenship aid (Fechter, Schwittay 2019). In this historically and geographically situated framework, a specific social culture is expressed through the idioms of active participation, altruism, moral economies and closeness. The third sector plays a central role, serving as a means for organising and negotiating intersubjective space both public and private. Third sector actors operate in a constant state of tension between the spirit of giving and the logics of community welfare, seeking to overcome the universalist and economically oriented aspects of the latter (Dubois 2014) and turn it to different socio-political uses at the local level.

Vesta houses embody the relationships between state, kinship, and subjectivity (Carsten 2018) in unprecedented ways. In his article on undocumented immigrant youth movements in the United States, Nicholls suggests that the process of politicisation is contextually uneven and thus produces contradictory subjects (2021, 467).

Adopting this perspective, we might argue that Vesta houses can potentially be seen as a space of politicisation. These houses constitute a domestic space in which Italian citizens re-articulate and assert migrants' equality by disidentifying with the prevailing Italian politics of migration. As a case study, Vesta allows us to reinterpret the way individual citizens, institutional bodies, and private organisations devise strategies for responding to and acting in the larger historical and socio-political context.

6 Concluding Remarks

Over the last two decades, security politics and bilateral treaties with African countries (Gaibazzi, Bellagamba, Dunwald 2017) have strengthened the external frontiers of the EU. Europe's maneuvering to govern the mobility of women, men and children has contributed to spectacularising the Mediterranean (Bellagamba 2011; Ciabarri 2020) while also making it the most dangerous corridor in the world (Albahari 2015). In this scenario, the issue of unaccompanied migrants' rights has spilled over from purely legal debates to become the object of controversial, if not explicitly discriminatory, reception practices and more general discussions on minors. Thus modified and expanded, this new object of UFM rights has triggered calls for legislative reform and the overhauling of procedures for housing and legally protecting young migrants.

Italian institutions have been weak and inconsistent in responding to the substantial numbers of children and adolescents landing on Southern Italian coasts from 2011 onwards. The result has been a state of true institutional abandonment, delays and timing discrepancies between local areas. At the same time, however, citizens have responded by becoming actively involved as voluntary guardians, foster caregivers and/or, in the Vesta project, by welcoming UFMs into their homes. In the Italian context, the scope of relationships envisaged for these young migrants by virtue of their minor status was that of foster care and guardianship, both formal and substantive. This reconfiguration of ties among young migrants and the local host population has hinged on an asymmetrical relationship between young, unaccompanied migrants and adult Italian citizens. Nonetheless, these relational ties have produced ideas of institutionalised kinship that can be investigated as genealogies of the state Consoli (2021), mediated by norms, third sector subjects, and associations tasked with protecting minors. Through a micro-ethnography of the Vesta project, we have shown how family, home and ideas of solidarity end up being shaped in the experience of living with migrant minors on the threshold of legal majority. We have also attempted to chart the process through which individual citizens re-

code ideas about responsibility and solidarity and, in so doing, transform domestic space into a historical-political space for responding to the mismanagement of migration.

This analysis of interstitial, emerging spaces in which migrants, citizens and institutions reformulate ideas of hospitality and borders, such as occurred in Vesta host homes in response to border politics, does not seek to romanticise domestic forms of reception; rather, our aim is to highlight how polysemic, heterogeneous and multi-faceted the social and political field of migration really is. By reflecting on unaccompanied minors and reception practices that generate and envisage a role for Italian citizens in providing protection, guardianship and hospitality, this essay has examined the relationship between migration processes and ideas about family and reception while observing the public rhetoric that has redefined concepts of proximity, otherness and adulthood. Finally, in an effort to analytically grasp the phenomenology and temporality of migratory processes through critical events, we have also explored certain societal developments, which through measures to contain the COVID-19 epidemic have impacted the reception of unaccompanied minors.

Bibliography

Albahari, M. (2015). *Crimes of Peace: Mediterranean Migration in the World's Deadliest Border.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Ariès, P. (1962). *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*. New York: Vintage Books.

Atlante SIPROIMI (2019). *Sistema di protezione per titolari di protezione internazionale e per minori stranieri non accompagnati*. Roma: ANCI; Ministero dell'Interno. https://www.retesai.it/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/ATLANTE-SIPROIMI-2019.pdf.

Bellagamba, A. (2011). "Introduzione. Quando lo sguardo si sposta sull'Africa". Bellagamba A. (a cura di), *Migrazioni dal lato dell'Africa*. Pavia: Edizioni Altravista, 9-30.

Belloni, M. (2020). "Family Project or Individual Choice? Exploring Agency in Young Eritreans' Migration". *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 46(2), 336-53. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2019.1584698.

Biehl, J. (2005). *Vita: Life in a Zone of Social Abandonment*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Biehl, J.; Good, B.; Kleinman, A. (2007). *Subjectivity: Ethnographic Investigation*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Börjesson, U.; Forkby, S.A. (2020). "The Concept of Home: Unaccompanied Youths Voices and Experiences". *European Journal of Social Work*, 23(3), 475-85. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13691457.2019.1709159.

Carsten, J. (2018). "House-Lives as Ethnography/Biography". *Social Anthropology*, 26(1), 103-16. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/1469-8676.12485.

Cassarino, J.P. (2016). "Readmission des Migrants: les faux semblants des partenariats Euro-africain". *Politique étrangère*, 16(1), 25-37. https://www.cairn.info/revue-politique-etrangere-2016-1-page-25.htm.

Ciabarri, L. (2020). *L'imbroglio Mediterraneo. Le migrazioni via mare e le politiche della frontiera*. Milano: Raffaello Cortina.

Comaroff, J.; Comaroff, J. (2005). "Reflections on Youth, from the Past to the Postcolony". Howana A.; De Boeck, F. (eds), *Makers and Breakers: Children and Youth in Postcolonial Africa*. Oxford: Currey, 267-81.

Consoli, G. (2021). "Genealogie statali? Della 'genitorialità sociale' del 'tutore volontario di minori stranieri accompagnati' e del suo inserimento in una rete istituzionale locale". *Antropologia Pubblica*, 7(1), 29-48. http://dx.doi.org/10.1473/anpub.v7i1.209.

De Genova, N. (2002). "Migrant 'Illegality' and Deportability in Everyday Life". *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 31, 419-47. https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/abs/10.1146/annurev.anthro.31.040402.085432.

Douglas, M. (1996). *Rischio e Colpa*. Bologna: il Mulino.

Dubois, V. (2014). "The Economic Vulgate of Welfare Reform: Elements for a Socioanthropological Critique". *Current Anthropology*, 55(S9), 138-46. https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/full/10.1086/675904.

Ensor, M.; Goździak, E. (2010). *Children and Migration: At the Crossroads of Resiliency and Vulnerability*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

European Migration Network (2010). *Policies on Reception, Return and Integration Arrangements for, and Numbers of, Unaccompanied Minors. An EU Comparative Study*. Synthesis Report. http://doi.org/10.2837/10006.

Fassin, D. (2011). "Policing Borders, Producing Boundaries. The Governmentality of Immigration in Dark Times". *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 40, 213-26. https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/abs/10.1146/annurev-anthro-081309-145847.

Fechter, A.M.; Schwittay, A. (2019). "Citizen Aid: Grassroots Interventions in Development and Humanitarianism". *Third World Quarterly*, 40(10), 1769-80. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01436597.2019.1656062.

Fontanari, E.; Pinelli, B. (eds) (2017). "Refugee Experience in Europe: Subjectivity, Surveillance and Control", special issue, *Etnografia e Ricerca Qualitativa*, X(1).

Gaibazzi, P.; Dünnwald, S.; Bellagamba, A. (eds) (2017). *Eurafrican Borders and Migration Management: Political Cultures, Contested Spaces and Ordinary Lives*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Gardner, K. (2012). "Transnational Migration and the Study of Children: An Introduction". *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 38(6), 889-912.

Gjergji, I. (2017). "L'asilo dei minori. Accoglienza, trattamento e condizione sociale dei minori richiedenti asilo in Italia". *Deportate Esuli, Profughe*, 34, 80-98.

Godbout, J.T. (2002). "L'actualité de l'Essai sur le don". *Sociologie et sociétés*, 36(2), 177-88. http://classiques.uqac.ca/contemporains/godbout_jacques_t/actualite_essai_sur_le_don/actualite_essai_sur_le_don.pdf.

Gozdiak, E.M. (2008). "On Challenges, Dilemmas, and Opportunities Studying Trafficked Children". *Anthropological Quarterly*, 81(4), 903-23.

Hashim, I.; Thorsen, D. (2011). *Child Migration in Africa*. London: Zed Books.

Hess, J.M.; Shandy, D.J (2008). "Kids at Cross Roads". *Anthropological Quarterly*, 81(4), 765-76.

Humprey, R.; Sigona, N. (2019). "The Bureaucratic Capture of Child Migrants: Effects of In/Visibility on Children On the Move". *Antipode*, 51(5), 1495-514.

James, A. (2012). *Key Concepts in Childhood Studies*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
Jiménez, M.; Vacchiano, F. (2011). "De 'dependientes' a 'protagonistas'. Los menores como sujetos migratorios". Ribas Mateos, N. (ed.), *El Río Bravo Mediterráneo: las regiones fronterizas en la época de la globalización*. Barcelona: Bellaterra, 495-511.
Jourdan, L. (2007). "Bambini soldato: vittime o attori sociali?". Rosen, D. (a cura di), *Un esercito di bambini. Giovani soldati nei conflitti internazionali*. Milano: Raffaello Cortina, VII-XVI.
Jourdan, L. (2010). *Generazione kalashinkov. Un antropologo dentro la guerra in Congo*. Roma-Bari: Laterza.
Jourdan, L. (2011). "Altre adolescenze: i bambini soldato in Africa". *Varchi*, 4, 20-4.
Kanics, J.; Senovilla, H.D.; Touzenis, K. (eds) (2010). *Migrating Alone: Unaccompanied and Separated Children Migration to Europe*. Paris: UNESCO Publishing.
Lems, A.; Oester, K.; Strasser, S. (2020). "Children of the Crisis: Ethnographic Perspectives on Unaccompanied Refugee Youth in and en Route to Europe". *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 46(2), 315-35. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2019.1584697.
Lupton, D. (2013). "Risk and Emotion: Towards an Alternative Theoretical Perspective". *Health, Risk and Society*, 15(8), 634-47. https://doi.org/10.1080/13698575.2013.848847.
Mai, N. (2010). "Marginalised Young (Male) Migrants in the European Union: Caught between the Desire for Autonomy and the Priorities of Social Protection". Kanics, J.; Senovilla, H.D.; Touzenis, K. (eds), *Migrating Alone: Unaccompanied and Separated Children Migration to Europe*. Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 69-90.
Marabello, S.; Parisi, M.L. (2020). "Convivere con l'alterità: i legami, gli spazi e il lockdown". *Antropologia Pubblica*, 6(2), 97-116. http://dx.doi.org/10.1473/anpub.v6i2.189.
Mbembe, A. (2019). *Nanorazzismo. Il corpo notturno della democrazia*. Roma-Bari: Laterza.
Mead, M. (1961). *Coming in Age of Samoa: A Psychological Study of Primitive Youth for Western Civilisation*. New York: William Morrow & Company.
Meloni, F. (2020). "The Limits of Freedom: Migration as a Space of Freedom and Loneliness among Afghan Unaccompanied Migrant Youth". *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 46(2), 423-38.
Mezzadra, S. (2004). *I confini della libertà. Per un'analisi politica delle migrazioni contemporanee*. Roma: Derive Approdi.
Morganti, S. (2007). "Il lavoro dei bambini in Bénin". Solinas, P.G. (a cura di), *La vita in prestito: debito, dipendenza e lavoro*. Lecce: Argo, 75-104.
Myers, W.E. (1999). "Considering Child Labour: Changing Terms, Issues and Actors at the International Level". *Childhood*, 6(1), 13-26.
Ní Laoire, C.; Carpena-Méndez, F.; Tyrrell, N.; White, A. (2011). *Childhood and Migration in Europe: Portraits of Mobility, Identity and Belonging in Contemporary Ireland*. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing.
Nicholls, W. (2021). "The Uneven Geographies of Politicisation: The Case of the Undocumented Immigrant Youth Movement in the United States". *Antipode*, 53(2), 465-85.
Pinelli, B. (2017). "Borders, Politics and Subject". *Etnografia e Ricerca Qualitativa*, 1, 5-24.
Pink, S. (2004). *Home Truths: Gender Domestic Objects and Everyday Life*. Oxford: Berg.

Pink, S.; Leder Mackley, K.; Roxana, M.; Mitchell, V.; Bhamra, T. (2017). *Making Homes. Ethnography and Design*. London. Bloomsbury Academic.

Remotti, F. (2002). *Forme di Umanità*. Milano: Bruno Mondadori Editore.

Sanò, G. (2017). "Inside and Outside the Reception System. The Case of Unaccompanied Minors in Eastern Sicily". *Etnografia e Ricerca Qualitativa*, 10(1), 121-42.

Sedmak, M.; Sauer, B.; Gornik, B. (2017). *Unaccompanied Children in European Migration and Asylum Practices: In Whose Best Interests?*. Basingstoke: Taylor & Francis.

Scheper-Hughes, N.; Sargent, C. (1998). *Small War: The Cultural Politics of Childhood*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Seeberg, M.L.; Gozdziak, E. (eds) (2016). *Contested Childhood: Growing Up in Migrancy. Migration, Governance, Identities*. Switzerland SpringerOpen. IMISCOE Series.

Stephens, S. (1995). *Children and the Politics of Culture*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Suárez-Navaz, L.; Jiménez Alvarez, M. (2011). "Menores en el campo migratorio transnacional. Los niños del centro (Drari d'sentro)". *Revista de Sociología*, 96(1), 11-33.

Taliani, S. (2006). *Il bambino e il suo doppio. Malattia, stregoneria e antropologia dell'infanzia in Camerun*. Milano: FrancoAngeli.

UNICEF, CNR-Irpps (2017). *Sperduti. Storie di minorenni arrivati soli in Italia*. Roma: UNICEF.

Vacchiano, F. (2011). "Discipline della scarsità e del sospetto: rifugiati e accoglienza nel regime di frontiera". *Lares*, 27(1), 181-90.

Vacchiano, F. (2012). "Minori che migrano soli. Strategie di movimento e progetti di confinamento". Saquella S.; Volpicelli S. (a cura di), *Migrazione e Sviluppo: una nuova relazione?*. Roma: Nuova Cultura. 99-123.

Veale, A.; Donà, G. (eds) (2014). *Mobility-in-Migration in an Era of Globalization: Child and Youth Migration*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Valtolina, G.G. (2016). "Tra rischio e tutela. I minori stranieri non accompagnati". *Studi Emigrazione*, 53(201), 81-95. https://www.ismu.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Studi-Emigrazione-n.-201.pdf.

Walker, S.; Gunaratman, Y. (2021). "Young, Unauthorised and Black: African Unaccompanied Minors and Becoming an Adult in Italy". *Journal of Sociology*, 1-17. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1440783321993918.