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

edited by
Francesco Della Puppa, Giuliana Sanò

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Abstract

This volume analyses exclusion processes, segregation dynamics and the forms of discrimination of refugees and asylum seekers in Italy, where the reception system is marked by opaqueness and arbitrariness and is becoming increasingly similar to the model of "camps". The numerous vibrant contributions present a fully-fledged system of inferiorization, characterised by labour exploitation, housing discomfort, meagre rights and control strategies, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has led to a sharp worsening of the health, work, housing and administrative conditions. A framework that has found opposition in the daily resistance and in the struggles of asylum seekers.

Keywords   Refugees and asylum seekers. Italian reception system. Migrants exploitation. Migration policies. COVID-19.

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

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Abstract   Refugees and asylum seekers in Italy are 'stuck' because they often end up caught in the legal and social limbo of the reception system. The effects of the pandemic and lockdown measures to avoid transmission have stacked on top of these conditions. This scenario, along with the Italian policy field increases the vulnerabilisation of refugees and asylum seekers for their labour exploitation, but also create a space for media struggle, where political forces and social entrepreneurs clash and manipulate the issue of "asylum seekers". This introductory chapter analyses these aspects, introducing the thematic lines of the volume and presenting its contribution.

Keywords   Refugees and asylum seekers. Italian Reception System. Forced (im)mobility. Exploitation. Social exclusion. Racial discrimination. Struggles.

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1   Introduction

Representing the complexity of the Italian migration policies and reception system is a very challenging task. As the editors of this volume, we discussed on many occasions the risks and possible conse-

quences of such a task. We decided to publish a volume that could offer an overall picture of the living conditions of the immigrants in Italy in the last ten years. We came to this decision after a period of study and research, often carried out jointly, always with these goals in mind: to dismantle the mainstream narrative, the effects of which inevitably affect the lives of migrants; to expose the serious foreigners' rights violations, in terms of law, administration, policy, economy, society and healthcare; to highlight the grey areas in the Italian migration and social policies; to point out the obstacles and limitations to the inclusion of immigrants in the society and at work; to present biography and geographical routes of whom, after reaching Italy, have access to the reception system or are left out of it and face ingrained racism, classism, patriarchate and paternalism of the institutions and their new communities.

But that is not all.

We have gathered in one volume many contributions coming from different areas of expertise because we wished to step outside the academic boundaries (or strictly socio-anthropological). This allows non-specialists to get familiar with these topics, often subject to academic and media polarization, where the former has a far too narrow and specific knowledge and the latter too superficial and simplistic. We believe more and more people should be informed about these topics.

For this purpose, along with the issues in migratory policies and in this multifaceted system, we wanted to include in the volume the statistical accounts, especially regarding health and social systems, as well as the most virtuous examples of the third sector and the people who support and assist immigrants. We also deemed it necessary to report the lives of those who countered the issues and struggles coming from short-sighted and racist policies in migration and economy by breaking the exclusion, harnessing and exploitation mechanisms typical in Italy.

Although not easy nor exempt from second thoughts and questioning, the editorial project you hold in your hands shows at least our will as editors: to collect and, most importantly, give back – to Italy and abroad – a general picture of migrations in Italy, and to observe how our country behaves and is able (or not) to react to very different migration projects that encompass different needs. For this reason, we wanted to deal with contemporary migrations from different areas of expertise and different stances, to open up a debate that could hold together the structural features with the complexity of each migration project, be it a woman or an unaccompanied minor, or one of the countless men in our country who end up caught in the informal economy as flexible, blackmailed, depreciated and zero-cost workforce.

2 Reception or Exclusion?

For over twenty years, Italy has faced the phenomenon of so-called 'forced' international migrations. By virtue of its geographic position in the Mediterranean, this country constitutes, in many cases, the first landing and the transit country for asylum seekers in their flight from wars, political crises, environmental catastrophes and depletion of resources (Ambrosini 2018; D'Angelo 2019; Hasselberg 2016; Queirolo Palmas 2020).

Between the 1990s and the first part of the new millennium, the country recorded the arrival of people from Albania and Kosovo by sea. Fluctuating numbers of arrivals followed this first phase and were dictated principally by Italian policies aimed at counteracting migration. Citizens from the Horn of Africa and the Maghreb arrived in the years 2008 to 2013. From 2011 to 2013, the geography of the arrivals changed, and the numbers increased on account of the 'Arab springs' of the Libyan Civil War and the Syrian conflict. These conflicts and wars led to about 63,000 arrivals from across the Mediterranean in 2013. Subsequently, the period from 2014 to 2017 opened a new phase of arrivals into Europe, and the Italian coast received over 600,000 sub-Saharan immigrants from the Horn of Africa and Asia (Giovannetti 2018). Thus, in these years, marked by hundreds of deaths along the Mediterranean routes towards Southern Europe, the Sicilian Channel became one of the most important migration corridors in the world, certainly the most dangerous (Pinelli 2017).

Since we are dealing here with the so-called 'forced migrations', these numbers have to be read in the light of the political and legal framework which governs and regulates the right of asylum. While 120,000 requests for international protection were counted from 2001 to 2013, it is in 2014 that we see a qualitative leap: the requests for asylum doubled (from 63,000 to 123,600), arriving at over 130,000 in 2017. As regards the results of the procedure for granting protection, from 1997 to 2002, almost 74% were rejected; from 2002 to 2015, the percentage stands at around 30-40%, rising to 50% in 2015 and over 60% in 2017 (Giovannetti 2018).

As we have already pointed out elsewhere (Della Puppa, Sanò 2021), this growing number of 'rejections' – that is, asylum seekers to whom no form of protection was granted – are unlikely to return to their country of origin. A segment of them represents intense *international mobility* in Europe (Della Puppa, Sanò 2021; Fontanari 2019; Kofman 2019; Vianelli 2017). Another part of them remains in Italy, in situations of extreme vulnerability and social, residential and work marginalisation. In the vast majority of cases, those who decide to stay in the Peninsula live in precarious, informal and unhealthy housing situations (Bolzoni et al. 2015; Netto 2011) and work in conditions of extreme labour exploitation, particularly in the pri-

mary sector (Belloni 2016; Sanò 2017; Talani 2018). However, this also implies intense *internal mobility* (Della Puppa, Sanò 2021; Sanò, Della Puppa 2020), from the Northern regions to the Southern ones and, again, back to the Northern regions; from Eastern regions to the Western ones; and from the Alpine areas to the towns in the valleys; as well as daily cross-border mobility (Aris Escarcena 2018; Belloni 2016; D'Angelo 2019; Menghi 2018; Wyss 2019).

It is important to point out that such conditions affect not only migrants lacking regular residence permits but frequently extend even to those who have regular documents (Sanò et al. 2021; Schuster 2005; Sigona 2012; Storato et al. 2021; Wyss 2019). Administrative legitimacy hardly ever coincides with social, working, and housing inclusion for the refugees. On the contrary, the mechanisms of exploitation of migrant labour have intensified in recent years, and this is largely due to anomalies within the reception centres for refugees and asylum seekers. In many cases, these centres tend to be places for workforce informal recruitment (Sanò 2017).

3 Stuck and Exploited: A Model for Europe

Before continuing, we believe it appropriate to dwell on a crucial issue for our reasoning and for the entire volume. As the reader will have noticed, we have distanced ourselves from the expression 'forced migration', a concept that, from our point of view, should be problematised, deconstructed and subjected to criticism. Actually, in the same way, we distance ourselves from the ideological distinction between the so-called 'forced migration' and 'voluntary' or 'economic' migration. This definition – and distinction – of the dominant doxa, suitable for a science of state and a thought of state, is meaningless when compared with the harshness of material relations, as well as social and migration dynamics. To emigrate (and, therefore, to immigrate) is almost always a 'forced choice': a non-choice, determined by structural factors that shape, condition and determine decisions and individual trajectories. Just as it is a *forced* emigration (and, therefore, a *forced* immigration) because of wars, political instability and persecutions, therefore, so is the *emigration* dictated by the depletion of natural and social resources, lack of labour and economic prospects, liberalist policies, dismantling of welfarist protections, growing social polarization, environmental disasters, climate change.

Labelling all kinds of migration as forced can also determine the risk, pointed out by Caroselli and Semprebon (ch. 7) that the "general tendency to consider forced migrants as a temporary population can result into the adoption of temporary policy solutions".

By questioning the possible and real meanings of the adjective 'forced', we realised that if forcing exists, it should rather be framed

within the processes of categorisation, labelling, infantilisation and cohabitation that are put in place when migrants arrive in destination countries. By reversing the point of observation, therefore, one can see that people are *forced* to play the role of the asylum seeker, as otherwise they would be left out of the system or deported; that they are *forced* to live with other people they do not know (forced cohabitation) within the reception centres; that they are *forced* to abide by the rules of the system and be dependent on the operators (relationships of dependency and infantilisation). Based on these elements, we believe that to be correctly understood, the definition of 'forced¡ must be applied to the context of arrival and not so much to the reasons for departure.

As for terminology, refugees and asylum seekers are described by some authors of this volume as 'stuck', due to the fact that often they end up caught in the legal and social limbo of the reception system, waiting to receive a status – and, therefore, a residence permit – for international protection, while enduring and adapting to very limited chances of mobility, work, integration and social life.

Similar in many aspects and circumstances to the "forma campo" (Declich, Pitzalis 2021), the Italian reception model includes physical and legal containment of refuge seekers. But asylum seekers and refugees are equally 'stuck' outside of the reception system, doomed to the uncertainty of social, housing and work conditions we mentioned earlier.

In the last year and a half, the effects of the pandemic and lockdown measures to avoid transmission have stacked on top of these conditions. Such measures applied in reception centres, as we will see later, have promoted the exacerbation of living conditions of its dwellers, exposing them to transmission and further rights limitations (Sanò, Tabar 2021). More in general, the effects of marginalisation, caused by virus containment measures, have affected also who lives out of the reception system. They have been cut out from public support measures and exposed to infection risk, as well as locked up – also without real need – inside repatriation centres indefinitely, in any case way beyond legal limits (Della Puppa et al. 2020; Della Puppa, Sanò 2020).

When the political devices that rule asylum overlap with the consequences of social and health crisis, they have, therefore, the effect of undermining the right to mobility and movement, but also the right to rooting and immobility (Sanò, Della Puppa 2020).

In this regard, it must be noted that the worsening of the living conditions of immigrants in Italy has to be traced back not exclusively to the pandemic, but to 2018, the year when Legislative Decree 113/2018 was approved.

With the implementation of this decree, the issues in the international protection framework in Italy gradually aggravated. Tearing down the second reception system (SPRAR), along with abolishing civil registration and 'humanitarian protection' – a status that would

cover a lot of situations and provided so many applicants with a regular residence permit (Della Puppa et al. 2020; Della Puppa, Sanò 2021; D'Angelo 2018; Felsen 2018; Perocco 2019) – have indeed accentuated housing and working vulnerability of immigrants.

Although we are not convinced by who assigns to SPRAR system (now SAI, Reception and Integration System) a crucial and fully positive role, as we are aware of the grey areas that have always characterised the second reception (Fabini et al. 2019), here we must perform some critical thinking on control and degradation mechanisms typical of the previous reception system, as well as on the present reconfiguration of the precarisation and marginalisation devices for refugees and asylum seekers, ever more victims of 'vulnerabilisation' by society and, above all, labour market (Di Cecco 2019; Dines, Rigo 2015).

As anticipated, the stubborn extraction and exploitation mechanism of workforce contributes heavily in defining the living conditions of refugees and asylum seekers. They turn into and 'army – especially – of backup farmers', even more exposed to blackmailing, flexibility and low cost labour.

Most of the contributions here gathered revolve around the issues posed by Legislative Decree 132/2018, and it is highlighted how this decree have complicated the migration and inclusion processes for migrants. However, for a complete analysis of the right of asylum in Italy, ultimately we must mention the very recent Legislative Decree 130/2020, greeted by main Italian mass media as a "removal of Salvini's decrees".

If submitted to scientific scrutiny, it is clear that the new immigration regulations, approved by the so-called 'Conte 2 Cabinet' – controlled mainly by Five Star Movement and Democratic Party – do not erase anything essential in the previous Law Decrees 113/2018 and 53/2019, with just a few secondary adjustments and an overall validation of the repressive and criminalising stance towards the immigrants – and the social struggles (Della Puppa et al. 2020) – found in there. In other words, it has to be said that CAS, CIE, CPR (for which at most there is a reduction from 180 to 90 days of detention extendable for another 30 days), CARA, Hotspot, and the various detention structures for refugees, asylum seekers and illegal immigrants *have not been abolished* – and there is no plan of doing so. These are all places where, not rarely, systematic violations of human rights are reported. At the same time, the SPRAR system *has not been restored*, the only one that could guarantee minimum results in social inclusion by placing international protection seekers into small structures integrated within the local social fabric, into training courses and employability programs. Although, in our opinion, the SPRAR system does not represent a 'glorious past' to reclaim, as we pointed out in these first pages, it is not equally possible to deny that it was a more effective and embraceable system – despite the coexistence of very

different intervention modalities (Sanò 2018) – when compared to the present one, which is based on the conception of emergency and 'extraordinary' reception that requires to amass high numbers of asylum seekers in large centres separated from the local communities.

As of now, the "reception and integration system", created to replace SPRAR and SIPROIMI, still has unknown and unclear features to allow a scientific validation of the improvement brought about by the new decree regarding second reception. However, we agree with the analysis offered by Giovannetti (2020) on the importance of wording, which stopped aiming at the reception of a specific target (asylum seekers and people entitled to protection) but more generally aims at reception and integration, as apparently shown by the wording SAI.

A further clarification that we deem appropriate, because of its relevance to the issues discussed in this volume, is that the humanitarian protection – which, up until the decrees of the previous Administration led by Lega Nord and Five Star Movement, was the form of protection through which asylum seekers could more frequently hope for a residence permit – *has not been restored*, but simply new instances of 'special' protection has been 'added'.

Similarly, the link between temporary residence permit for asylum seekers and residence permit for workers *has not been abolished*. If an asylum seeker who obtained a regular job contract, thanks to the temporary residence permit, then sees their international protection denied, they will be without residence permit and without a regular job, becoming effectively 'illegal'. It is a condition that affects tens of thousands of immigrants, who have been living and working in Italy even for years, waiting for their procedure to be concluded.

Incidentally, we add that the rule for withdrawal of the Italian citizenship, for the immigrants who obtained it and committed specific criminal offences, *has not been abolished*; the rules aimed at contrasting and discouraging any possible social opposition or revival of trade union struggle and most importantly aimed at striking grassroots syndicalism that organises mainly immigrant workers (Della Puppa et al. 2020) – firstly SI Cobas and ADL Cobas (Cillo, Pradella 2018); the second grade sentencing has not been restored for the asylum request, which the Law 46/2017 had abolished (Della Puppa et al. 2020), thus creating and not changing, again, a clear discrimination of immigrants.

The only slight improvements in the Legislative Decree are an expansion of the instances eligible for residence permits for "special protection", but always subject to arbitrary decisions; the marginally broader *possibility* to convert work permits into residence permits released for other reasons; the restored civil registration of asylum seekers; the reduction of sanctions for NGOs. Regarding this last point, however, what remains implicit is the suspect of implications with 'human trafficking', as well as the criminalisation of rescue at

sea and the possibility that NGO's ships could be forced to obey the Libyan coast guard (Della Puppa, Sanò 2021; Perocco 2019).

So this is how the whole security-based, discriminatory and racist stance of the Italian migration policies, past and recent, is basically reiterated (Basso 2010; Basso, Perocco 2003; Della Puppa et al. 2020; Ferrero, Perocco 2011; Perocco 2012).

If, from one side, the new laws – introduced first by Legislative Decree 113/2018 and then by Legislative Decree 130/2020 – became and are becoming an example of migration and asylum policy for the other EU member states, on the other hand the EU, through Italy, is also relocating and outsourcing its external border, making agreements with adjacent peripheral countries and 'institutions', such as Libya and Turkey. A reinforcement of the system of physical and social borders located outside and within the EU is taking and took place. It is no coincidence that the European Agenda on Migration was launched, in May 2015, to better regulate migration movements, between 2015 and 2020, and defined as "the European response which conjugates internal and external European policy for better managing migration in all its aspects", by the Italian Ministry of the Interior, in 2015. Therefore, for migration policies, Italy proves, once again, to be "a model for Europe" (Basso, Perocco 2003; Della Puppa, Sanò 2021; Perocco 2019).

The policy field, however, is not 'just' one of economic tensions, resulting in the vulnerabilisation of refugees and asylum seekers for their labour *exploitation*, but also a space for *media* struggle, where political forces and social entrepreneurs clash and manipulate the issue of migrants and asylum seekers ideologically to impose a speech hegemony in the national, and increasingly international, political scenario. Refugees and asylum seekers, therefore, are 'exploited' also symbolically, politically and by the media.

It is no coincidence, then, that in this volume are told also the stories of who arrives in Italy by land; stories that generally do not find space within media narrations and representations, which prefer to sensationalise borders that to be reached require sea crossing.

Appointed with the role of modern *aoidos*, the media display indeed a great interest for stories and pictures of people who cross the sea, creating a literary connection, more than historical or emotional, with the epic genre and, particularly, with the idea that the greatest dangers always come from the sea.

Some authors in this volume compensate for the missing interest shown by media for whoever comes to Italy by land, and point out – on many occasions – that it is necessary to observe the stubborn exclusion, marginalisation and invisibilisation mechanisms that affect people reaching national borders through routes that do not include the sea (Caroselli and Semprebon, ch. 7).

These people are legally labelled as 'Dublinati' or 'out of quota'; the latter definition speaks volumes about the exclusion (or expulsion, as

argues Pontiggia in ch. 3) that they are facing and that, in its complete application – from the access procedures to the reception system to the services for the individual – determines effectively the production of subjectivities doubly excluded and certainly more invisible than others.

Apparently, however, this invisibility does not preclude the possibility, for these people, to enact practices of subjectification, respondent to life forms that perceive invisibility as a potential and not just an obstacle to self-determination (Queirolo Palmas, Rahola 2020).

In contrast, in many cases, for example for those who live inside informal camps, invisibility can become a guarantee; it can safeguard a life economy that would be persecuted and criminalised if brought out in the open.

In the description of the grey areas (Avallone, ch. 1) that cross reception and inclusion policies in Italy, the authors of this volume do not forget, however, to clarify the multiple and multiform tactics used by who, immobilised and exploited, tries anyway to overcome and face administrative, legal, economic and social obstacles that punctuate their existence. Therefore, the presence of networks (formal and informal) turns out to be decisive for people without papers, in that it provides them with a social capital that, as in emergency and regularisation measures (Dal Zotto, Lo Cascio, Piro, ch. 14), can sometimes be crucial and decisive. However, from the reports of the authors in this volume that describe the role played by the migration third-sector actors, it is evident that there has been a stark change in the functioning of social nets. Undoubtedly, the institutionalisation and bureaucratisation of reception have contributed to this change, and therefore the routes and migration projects of the individuals also changed. If in the past the migration chains could rely mainly on the aid and support of informal networks, consisting mostly of religious entities, compatriots, friends and relatives already in the country, now who is responsible for facilitating social and working access of immigrants are, almost completely, the third-sector actors (Sanò, Zanotelli, forthcoming). Ultimately, what is proved by the instances in this volume (Marchetti, ch. 2; Marebello and Parisi, ch. 6; Storato, Sanò, Della Puppa, ch. 8) is that in the policies and inclusion processes of immigrants, the institutionalisation and formalisation of the practices represent a crucial role, even after the reception, in the phase that is now generically called 'post-reception'. When the previous migration policies have largely changed to highly implement procedures in the phases and steps that characterise migration projects, and the effects of which are essential in the mechanisms of selection and differential inclusion (Mezzadra, Nielsen 2013) active at every level, from reception to housing and working inclusion practices, it is then perfectly clear that such change aims, ultimately, at replacing any practice and relation of informal support and aid, within and without reception. With this we do not want to discredit the

presence and work of activists and informal social nets, but rather highlight the fact that such practices and relations find, nowadays, every kind of resistance, especially by media, politics and economy (Storato, Sanò, Della Puppa, ch. 8).

Consequently, it seems only right to remark here the centrality of the work done by the informal political and support nets, because considering the economic hardships and political obstacles that they must face – especially in those Southern Italy regions with a welfare system still mostly deficient and unequal – contrary to the mainstream narrative that depicts them as only interested to profit or that do not acknowledge their importance and work, they instead act only for the interest of immigrants and to improve their living conditions, even without the necessary resources, mainly directed to the projects formally acknowledged and, most of all, recognisable. This lack of resources is the effect of a precise government migration policy, to vulnerabilise immigrants, to deny their human and social rights, including the right to mobility.

From the one hand, we aim to highlight the consequences that such political strategies have on migrants, emphasising the fundamental issues of freedom of movement and the abolition of borders, the denunciation of repression and the disavowal of rights to which migrants are subject while entering into Italy and Europe – or into Europe through Italy – and the obstacles placed by Italian and European governments to their mobility. However, at the same time, we would like to recognise the structural causes underlying contemporary migrations (global inequalities, wars, colonialism and neocolonialism, environmental and climatic devastation...) and, consequently, underline how international migrations themselves – from global peripheries towards the metropolises of the world system and within them – do not constitute a generic response to a generic impulse to migrate, but, as we have anticipated, a mandatory choice, since no one leaves their country, family and friends unless somehow forced to do so (Basso, Perocco 2003). Therefore, if the forms of disavowal and denial of the right to immigration and mobility must be denounced, the causes that emigration and mobility impose on them must be denounced even more.

Above all, we want to make it clear that the political devices embedded in the borders and acted upon through the repression of migrants and the criminalisation of mobility are not ends in themselves or the mere denial of a 'civil right', rather they constitute instruments of repression, a tool of submission and discipline, aimed at making migrants accept increasingly worse living and working conditions. Therefore, the issue of mobility (and its denial) must be read in its intimate connection with that of work (and its exploitation), and the political and symbolic dimension must be traced back to the economic sphere.

4 Refugees and Asylum Seekers in the Storm of COVID-19 Pandemic

This volume stems from reflections that emerged during a panel hosted by the *Migration Conference*, organised in Bari, in June 2019. Since that meeting, despite a relatively short period, the planet and the capitalist system that organises its economic and social activities have been deeply and irreversibly marked by the profound changes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic[1] and the consequent – ecological, health, economic and social – crisis on a global scale. As a factor characterising this phase of capitalism, the pandemic will leave nothing 'as it was before' and will constitute a watershed moment in what has been called the "age of migration" (de Haas et al. 2020). Obviously, the social earthquake caused by the pandemic swept also over the refugees and asylum seekers condition and the Italian reception system. Therefore we could not refrain from including an insight on such impact, so we gathered the contributions – sociological, legal, medical, anthropological – arranged in the second section of the volume.

The COVID-19 pandemic, indeed, has exposed the general issues of the Italian healthcare system, partly due to the functioning of the reception services for the most vulnerable groups and specifically to the features of the so-called 'closed communities' (retirement homes, RSA, etc.). The Health Ministry itself included these situations among the most exposed to infection risk, and noted their difficulties in putting into practice physical distancing and the precautions included in the regulations of the DCPCMs (decree of the President of the Council of Ministers), because of overcrowding and limited spaces at their disposal. Similar places are the Centres and projects for reception of asylum seekers and refugees – Extraordinary Reception Centres (CAS), reception centres of the Protection system for protection claimants (SIPROIMI, ex SPRAR) –, also often overcrowded, with forced cohabitation, limited space, issues related to the impossibility of going out to perform preparatory activities for autonomy (e.g., work placements).

Differently from the 'first reception', within which the protocol and guideline adoption valid in the country has been already planned and formalised (landing screening, identification procedures, evaluation of vulnerability), the 'second reception', in particular, appears to be lacking any measure or procedure nationally unified, and they change depending on the context.

Despite relatively little time, much has already been written on the impact of the Coronavirus crisis on migration, migrants and mo-

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1 Here we would like to make a distinction between the pathogen called 'SARS-CoV-2' or 'New Coronavirus', and the disease developed, the 'COVID-19', acronym of 'COrona-VIrus Disease 19".

bility (Della Puppa, Perocco 2021), both from an international perspective (Della Puppa, Perocco 2021; Pastore 2021; Prencipe, Sanfilippo 2021; Sirkeci 2020; Sirkeci, Cohen 2020) and with a specific focus on Italy (Ambrosini 2020; Della Puppa, Perocco 2021; Pastore 2021; Prencipe, Sanfilippo 2021, Sanò 2020).

Many of these studies contemplate, both formally and in their content, the urgency of capturing the emergency and its most immediate effects; they are inevitably unsystematic and fragmented, but despite that it is possible to identify some recurring issues, where the relation between health emergency, migrations and reception system has been observed (Attanasio 2020; Tabar 2020). Among them we mention: mobility limitation (international and national) of people (Attanasio 2020; McAuliffe et al. 2020; Rango, Borgnäs 2020; Sirkeci, Yüceşahin 2020; Zambrano et al. 2020); the increased difficulty in order to access the procedures for international protection recognition and acquisition of residence permits (Agier 2020); a high infection risk in reception and detention centres (Navarrete, Sanchez 2020), due to living conditions in the centres (Agier 2020; Della Puppa et al. 2020, Sanò, Tabar 2021); the impossibility for many migrant workers to move and reach their workplaces because they lack a contract to show in case of control (Samaddar 2020; Marabello 2020; Sanò, Della Puppa 2021); the impoverishment recorded among migrant and precarious workers (Fondazione Leone Moressa 2021; Samaddar 2020); the rise in risks in the migration routes (Sanchez, Achilli 2020); discriminations in the access to prevention and treatment of asylum seekers.

What emerges clearly and upon which all the different researches converge is that what we can frame as a double (health and social) crisis (Della Puppa, Perocco 2021) – as well as an economic crisis and of the capitalist system –, has affected social classes, workers, genders, territories, 'ethnic', national and social groups in different ways, deepening social inequalities and worsening the social conditions of the disadvantaged ones: among the most affected social groups, we find migrants and, among migrants (Fondazione Leone Moressa 2021; Fasani, Mazza 2020; Giammarinaro, Palumbo 2020; Navarrete, Sanchez 2020), especially women (European Network of Migrant Women 2020), but, even more, asylum seekers and refugees (Filippi, Giliberti 2021; Pitzalis 2020; Sanò 2020; Sanò, Tabar 2021).

As Della Puppa and Perocco (2021) already underlined, restricted in their mobility and stranded in countries of departure or transit, huddled in reception centres in precarious conditions and hampered in admission procedures and applications for asylum or international protection, forced to work despite health risks, discriminated against in their access to prevention or treatment, impoverished and more exploited in the labour market, accused of carrying the virus or being immune from it (Della Puppa, Perocco 2020; Pitzalis 2020; Sanò

2020), asylum seekers and refugees are one of the most vulnerable groups at risk of suffering the heaviest consequences of the pandemic.

Both the pandemic and migration reveal the deepest contradictions and social issues of contemporary society, its political organization (Della Puppa, Perocco 2020). If much has been written on the social transformations brought about by migration, as well as, in the wake of Sayad's lesson (1999; 2006), on the ability of the migration to reveal what one has an interest in ignoring, still little has been said about the global change that the pandemic is bringing about, as well as about its social revealing and political unveiling action (Della Puppa, Perocco 2020).

Some aspects of the 'mirror effect' of the pandemic have already emerged. We can give two examples:

1. An even more intense criminalisation of the im-mobility of refugees and asylum seekers, represented as 'infectors', that is manifested in the media and political attack against the reception centres in which COVID-19 broke out, almost always attributable to the Italian social workers who worked there and, above all, to the conditions of massing and absence of security measures that characterise these places. However, this criminalisation is also revealed in their confinement on quarantine ships moored in the ports of the Italian coasts.

2. The reduction to "work fodder" of refugees and asylum seekers and the function of "industrial – or, better, as we already underlined – reserve army", in which they are confined and to which they are condemned, to the point that it is possible to speak of a process of "refugeesation" of the agricultural workforce (Dines, Rigo 2015); as emerged on the occasion of the amnesty provision for illegal migrants (enormously increased thanks to the aforementioned governmental measures – Law Decree 113/2018; Law 132/2018; Law Decree 53/2019), who should have put their health at risk, exposing themselves to contagion, in exchange for a temporary and short-term residence permit, to relaunch the Italian agricultural economy, in crisis due to the pandemic and the first lockdown, during the harvest season (Dal Zotto, Lo Cascio, Piro, ch. 14).

Also the risk of infection that asylum seekers have faced and still face in reception centres without adequate conditions must be traced back to the aforementioned dismantling of the SPRAR system – that advantaged mainly the bigger centres, where many people are amassed, often managed by big cooperatives able to be competitive on the market, especially after the reduction in resources for reception. These centres, besides the fact that they almost never provide real social inclusion programmes, are organised in dormitories with many people, where it is impossible to enact self-quarantine for whoever is under monitoring and therefore shows the first symp-

toms of what might be COVID-19 disease, with serious consequences for vulnerable people (immunosuppressed, sick, torture victims, etc.).

A further note must be said for CPRs, detention centres for immigrants without residence permit and, therefore, waiting for repatriation. Again, they are structures without any basic measure to contain the virus spread. Consequentially, in many CPRs there have been outbreaks, but despite that they have not been closed, instead they kept on receiving new guests. It must be mentioned that the 'guilt' of the immigrants secluded in the CPRs is to not possess a regular residence permit – it is not, then, a criminal offence – and the law provides that, if the repatriation cannot be carried out in the shortest time, it is not possible to strip of any freedom people who did not commit crimes. Given that after the 'first wave' of COVID-19 the borders – especially the Italian ones – have been closed, there has not been reasonable timeframes for repatriations, so the detention of immigrants without residence permit – who often would stay at safer accommodation out of the CPR – was no longer legal.

To complete the picture of the conditions of refugees and asylum seekers in Italy, within the frame of the pandemic, it is useful to recall the arbitrary application of the Civil Protection's ruling (658/2020) regarding urgent food solidarity measures that provided for the population to be helped in case of difficulties in the food supply, for economical issues, for social vulnerability or other reasons. This ruling has been interpreted very inconsistently by the different municipalities: the municipality of Perugia, for example, asked for the requirement of possessing the European residence permit for long-term residents, thus excluding the vast group of people without such papers, including many homeless individuals, and countless refugees and asylum seekers (Sanò et al. 2021; Storato et al. 2021).

Furthermore, it is possible that, shortly, when humanity will have learned how to live with the pandemic and societies will be reshaped by its social-economic effects, the 'virus issue' will be used instrumentally and ideologically in politics and the rhetoric against refugees and asylum seekers. That is, punishing legislation and propaganda against them – temporarily supplanted in the media by the theme of the pandemic – could become even harsher in affecting refugees and asylum seekers, making entry and regular residence more difficult, discriminating them in the labour market and several areas of social life (Della Puppa, Perocco 2021).

5 Structure of the Volume

With the evolution of the health crisis and the economic and social consequences created by the policies and measures adopted to contain the virus, we deemed useful to divide this volume into two sections, in or-

der to stimulate a reflection on continuities and changes in the crisis era. Even though imaginary, this subdivision allows us, indeed, to put on paper that critical continuity line that crosses migrations, making of this field – constantly exposed to media and political tensions – the indicator of socio-economical inequalities and disparities.

The first section contains the contributions from authors who, besides defining the legal-administrative frame where immigrants move or must move, offer at the same time a focus on different local conditions. The result is a kind of blending of propositions and practices more or less virtuous, which reflects an extremely articulated and complex national situation, where besides numerous grey areas sometimes there can be sparks of light.

In the first chapter, Gennaro Avallone describes clearly and thoroughly the features of the Italian reception system, showing how some of the enforced laws and regulations produce social effects on the life of people stationing in reception centres, which turn out to be harmful. With the help of interviews held with migrants and the authors of the campaign 'LasciateCIEntrare', Avallone assesses the asylum right in Italy and finally offers possible solutions, proposing a change of pace for the reception policies, which, according to the Author, must necessarily be reconverted e reoriented to grant housing access as a universal right.

In the second chapter, Chiara Marchetti focuses instead on the project Wonderful World House, built by the cooperative CIAC in Parma to answer actively and in an innovative fashion to the administrative and social exclusion of immigrants that occurred after Law 132/2018. In particular, the Author researches on how, after the general worsening of the material living conditions of immigrants, the third-sector activities could effectively represent a process of community building, not just with the goal of enacting virtuous and voluntary reception activities, but by becoming a practice of social innovation.

In the third chapter instead, Stefano Pontiggia describes the social and administrative dispersions of the homeless refugees and asylum seekers in Milan. The Author, in this case, reflects upon the biographic and geographic trajectories of the people who, once expelled from the reception system, end up living on the street. Particularly, Pontiggia discusses the founding mechanisms of what he defines as 'expulsionism'. Borrowing this term from Sassen (2014), Pontiggia argues that "the term 'expulsionism' is a set of political decisions, daily practices, and bureaucratic communications oriented to manage a population that is perceived as not deserving state support based on specific 'models' (in Geertzian terms) of society".

In the fourth chapter, Devisri Nambiar and Serena Scarabello highlight the issues that the female migrants victims of human trafficking face in their regularisation processes. Through the ethnographic method, the two Authors deal with structural problems starting from

two case studies. With the report on the lives and experiences of two women met on site, Nambiar and Scarabello suggest to reason on the overlapping between being asylum seeker and also victim of human trafficking. By doing so, the Authors challenge the institutions and operators in charge, pointing out the contradictions and stretches that can be generated by the reception and asylum system when based only on general criteria and models, with deep consequences for the women who refuse to play the passive role of the victim.

The fifth chapter deals with the reception system in Bologna, or better said, with a system that earned over time the reputation of 'model of excellence'. The hypothesis of Stefania Spada is that in reality it is not a model at all and to prove it she challenges it by measuring its effectiveness against the effects and consequences of the enforcement of Legislative Decree 132/2018. As opposed to the social innovation experience described by Marchetti, in this case the Author informs us of the flaws in a system that cannot answer to the social problems posed by the decree, or at least not in a way expected from a model of excellence. The recent measures adopted to face the health crisis also confirm Spada's hypothesis. In front of a national and general problem, the Author seems anyway to glimpse and report a decisive ambivalence, sign of the continuity with the social and economical inequalities preceding the pandemic outbreak. While for some, in fact, the health crisis has proved to be a 'blessing', for others, especially for migrants without residence permit, housing and job, it has been a real 'damnation'.

By focusing again on the reception system in Bologna, Selenia Marabello and Maria Luisa Parisi address in the sixth chapter the issue of unaccompanied foreign minors. Starting with an analysis of the legal and administrative conditions of migrants in this age group, the Authors look into the main problems of the reception system intended for minors and, at the same time, explain the potential of a co-housing project (Vesta) which provides for temporary placement of young migrants in the houses of Italian families and friends. As seen with Spada, the present health crisis is an indicator of the issues and grey areas of the reception system in Bologna (and beyond), but unlike that one, Marabello and Parisi show the light, or rather, the change and transformation opportunities that come from the third sector, interpreted as a place of politicisation.

As already pointed out at the beginning of this introduction, in the seventh chapter, Serena Caroselli and Michela Semprebon warn us about the use of a terminology that is actually decisive for the articulation and enactment of practices and policies crossed by a logic mainly of emergency. Thus, along with the attention for the stretch of the term 'forced' – where the effects of its misusage can, from time to time, translate into the adoption and implementation of temporary and precarious policies – they emphasise also the term 'transit', used

instrumentally by local and national politics to legitimise the transitory nature of the solutions and measures activated. Through the analysis of the Autonomous Province of Bolzano, crucial node for incoming and outgoing traversing along the Brennero route, Caroselli and Semprebon report the marginalisation, invisibilisation and exclusion processes that affect people coming to Italy by land and describe Bolzano as: "a 'grey area' characterised by increasing forms of institutional violence, associated on the one side with the control of mobility and a more and more organised and systematic management of the border, as a point of intersection and re-distribution of people in transit, overlapping with stratified historical and linguistic borders; on the other with the limitation of access to asylum procedures and reception as a result".

In the eighth chapter, Storato, Sanò and Della Puppa analyse the role and capacity of the third sector and the civil society in the Trentino region to answer to the uncertainty that characterises housing and social inclusion paths of refugees and asylum seekers in this context. In this case as well, the dismantling of the reception system, enacted after the enforcement of the security decrees, suggests a reflection upon the actual potentialities of the practices and activities executed by the third sector. The interviews and the histories of the operators show, indeed, how the legal and regulatory consequences in these years have not just deteriorated the material living conditions of immigrants, but they worsened also the third sector and civil society activities that support migrants. Even though the effects of Law 132/2018 have dramatically hit reception workers by shrinking enormously their field of action and by reducing the economical and social possibilities of migrants, still what emerges from interviews and field work is new chances of social inclusion are gradually taking shape.

In the last chapter of this section, Martina Pasqualetto and Fabio Perocco focus on migrant struggles and forms of self-determination, reviewing some events occurred between 2011 and 2019. Firstly, the two Authors bring into focus the transformations that followed the progressive development of migrant struggle groups and associations. In tune with what partially said in this introduction, the two Authors reflect upon how the changes occurred in the field of migrations and, specifically, reception institutionalisation and migration projects procedurisation, have radically changed the nature of the struggles pursued by migrants. If in the past migrants used to come together within associations (mainly cultural or religious) or trade unions, nowadays most of the protests against popular and institutional racism take place within reception and detention centres.

The second section of the volume, completely focused on the consequences of the still ongoing health crisis, opens with the chapter of Fabio Perocco. In these pages, the Author looks into the effects of

the Pan-syndemics on racial inequalities affecting health within the migrants. After a description of the causes and general effects triggered by the Syndemic, Perocco reports the data of three international contexts (United States, England, Brazil) to highlight the centrality of the 'race' in establishing and reinforcing health inequalities. Lastly, the Author focuses on the link between health crisis and immigrants, drawing attention to the level of work exploitation and institutional abandonment experienced by migrant during this pandemic.

In the eleventh chaper, Attanasio ponders over the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic for the lives of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. By using a catchphrase repeatedly promoted by media at the health crisis beginning, the author believes that: "We are all facing the same storm – as somebody put it –, but our boats are rather different". Starting from this definition, Attanasio's chapter shows us in practice how the life of migrants in their target countries or along the borders have drastically worsened with the start of the pandemic.

In the twelfth chapter are described, from a specifically medical point of view, the conditions of the asylum seekers and refugees during the first phase of the pandemic. By using statistics, national and international, Salvatore Geraci, Elisa Vischetti, Mario Affroni, Silvia Declich, and Maurizio Marceca provide us, in these pages, with the opportunity of observing how social inequalities affect health inequalities. To this end, the Authors deploy the concept of *Global Health*, an interpretative and theoretical tool capable of reading and holding together the complexity of the elements that characterise the health, including those linked to the field of migration.

Marco Ferrero and Chiara Roverso analyse, in the thirteenth chapter, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the legal condition of asylum seekers. Starting from the issues that structurally compose the reception system and the migration policies, the two Authors look into escalation in the material and health conditions of migrants, evaluating the health and social risks amplified by the bottlenecks and the expulsions the characterised the health emergency.

Dal Zotto, Lo Cascio and Piro, in the fourteenth chapter, deal with the topic of migration policies and, in particular, the emersion and regularisation measures for migrants and asylum seekers in Italy. After a dense description of the measures historically present in the country, the authors bring into focus the recent emersion measure, activated to answer to the economical effects promoted by the health crisis. To do so, they use the data extracted from a qualitative survey on effectiveness of the amnesty and, particularly, on the incidence of regularisation applications among migrants working in the agriculture. What emerges is basically the extremely low percentage of applications filed by migrants working in the farming sector and an almost completely ineffectiveness of this measure.

In the fifteenth chapter, Giovanni Cordova focuses on the impact of migration policies and Coronavirus on the migrants living in slums and informal camps in the Gioia Tauro Plateau. In particular, the Author sheds light on the serious lack of health measures and policies for the slums dwellers, whose hygienic-health and social conditions have been heavily challenged during the health crisis, as they were already structurally unstable, unsafe and precarious.

In conclusion, as editors we would like to thank the Authors (and the anonymous revisers) that worked in the drafting of this volume, which we could be of help to whoever wishes to explore, from different areas and perspectives, the reception and asylum system in Italy.

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

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

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

Summary   1 Introduction. – 2 Presence and Number of Asylum Seekers and Refugees. – 3 The Right to Asylum and the Duty of Reception. – 4 The Reception System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Italy. – 5 Reception, People, Denial. – 6 Conclusion.

1   Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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1 https://www.lasciatecientrare.it/viaggio-nellitalia-della-mala-accoglienza/.

2 Presence and Number of Asylum Seekers and Refugees

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

UNHCR's statistics indicated that there are approximately 79.5 million refugees, displaced persons, and asylum seekers around the world as of 2019.[2] This is a significant increase over the last decade: in 2009, the estimated number was only 43.3 million people. A series of relevant surveys and studies show that in some parts of the world, refugee camps have become newly established cities. Part of the architectural research is increasingly being applied to housing solutions for such contexts, as, for example, Ikea's self-built house, clearly shows (Radford 2015; Muggah, Erthal Abdenur 2018).

The Mediterranean area is particularly involved in the involuntary displacement of people. For example, according to 2018 data, out of the approximated remaining population in Syria of 17 million people, 6.6 million were internally displaced and 5.6 million were refugees abroad (Wainwright 2017; Radford 2015).[3] This is apart from the estimated 350,000 to 500,000 deaths due to the war as of 2019.[4] Currently, at least 5 million Palestinian refugees live assisted by a specific UN agency, UNRWA, as do millions of other refugees on the African continent. In light of this global issue, based on a review of UNHCR data, the European Union, with a population of about 500 million people, hosts around 3.5 million people who are either applicants for international protection or refugees. Specifically, UNHCR Italy's 2018 data recorded a total of 105,624 asylum seekers and 189,243 refugees.

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

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

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

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

tas for self-employment, seasonal, or permanent employment. Notably, Italy has reduced its position as a transit area since 2011 to partially become a country of arrival and also due to the changes in migration policies at a European level. Historically, such changes have coincided with an increase in the number of people arriving in Italian territory in search of international protection who have been forced to make a stopover in Italian territory in accordance with the Dublin III regulation and the hotspot approach adopted at European level since 2015.[5]

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

3 The Right to Asylum and the Duty of Reception

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

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

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

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

[8] Data about 2019 are available at `https://seenthis.net/sites/1633966`.

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

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

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

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

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

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

4 The Reception System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Italy

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

5 Reception, People, Denial

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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13   For a deeper look to this experience, I suggest to watch the anthropological film *Waiting*, available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tW8acIXxx0o.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

6 Conclusion

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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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.

Edizioni
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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).
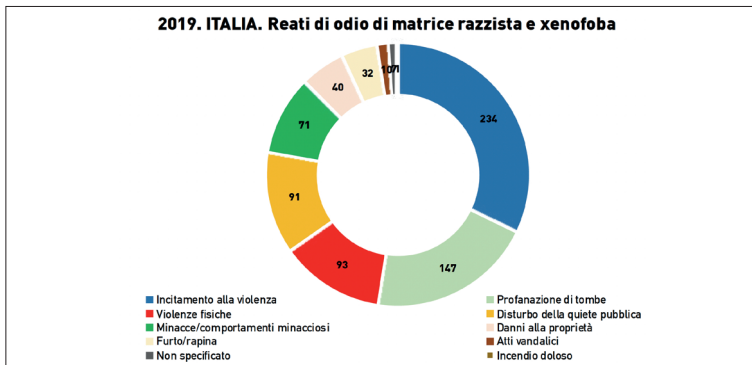
In this social and political environment, generally hostile towards migrants and diversity, forced migrants have increasingly lost their credibility and a possible more favourable attitude than the one expressed towards "economic migrants". Asylum seekers and refugees have been given false hope that 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).
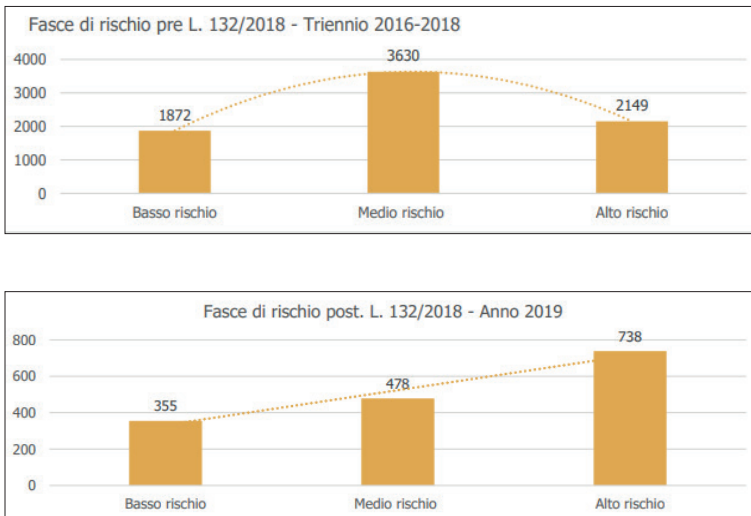
Figure 2   Classes of risks before and after Law 132/2018 (CIAC 2019, 6)

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 for-
eigners 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 vol-
unteer work. It entails a different conception of reception and in-
tegration: 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 innova-
tive practice.

The concepts of direct social action and of social innovation need
further explanation. Bosi and Zamponi describe direct social ac-
tions 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 pub-
> lic authorities or the intervention of other actors (e.g., opponents
> in labour struggles). These forms of action have in common a pri-
> mary 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 it-
self, social innovation looks also at the structures of multilevel gov-
ernance. In fact it refers to local community mobilisation processes
that generate participation and tend to produce governance chang-
es, also triggering collective empowerment (Murray et al. 2010; Mou-
laert et al. 2014). In the words of Campomori and Feraco, we can
recognise a social innovative practice when four conditions are sat-
isfied:

> 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 di-
> mension 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 communi-
> ty itself; another fundamental dimension is that of the realisation
> of an innovative governance, that is a modality of relationship be-
> tween 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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Administrative Disappearances
Undocumented Asylum Seekers and the Italian State

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Abstract   By examining the case of Milan, the paper studies the way the Italian state, in the last four years, has been managing homeless asylum seekers and refugees. It focuses on the frictions among different state institutions and the managerial 'cultures' they rely on. As expulsions from the so-called reception system have been raising, the Milanese municipality-run reception centres closed, and a reorganisation of the Immigration Office brought to the shutdown of a department explicitly oriented to asylum and reception. The analysis makes some dilemmas arise. The first one is related to the way policies interact and collide at different levels. As centralisation and decentralisation are constitutive of every process of state formation, in the case presented here it paradoxically brings asylum seekers outside the reception system to disappear as such. The second dilemma lies at the moral core of the state and raises issues of entitlement to receive aid from public and private institutions. As asylum seekers and refugees are perceived as unwelcomed guests by both the central state and the local authorities, institutions consider themselves not responsible for their care.

Keywords   Humanitarianism. The state. Homelessness. Milan. Asylum seekers.

Summary   1 Introduction: A Death on the Street and the Problem of (In)Visibility. – 2 Looking after Institutions: An Analytical Framework. – 3 Expulsionism as Governmentality. – 4 Disappearing in the Humanitarian Apparatus. – 5 Conclusion: A Couple of Dilemmas.

1 Introduction: A Death on the Street and the Problem of (In)Visibility

Nica Tudor was found dead the morning of 5 December 2019, near a metro station at the North-Western fringe of Milan. The so-called *Piano Freddo*, a municipality-driven plan to provide shelter to homeless people during the winter, had been launched only a couple of weeks earlier. It was a student in her way to the university that, around 8 am, called the emergency number 118 to report the presence of the man.[1] Tudor was in his wheelchair, a couple of wool blankets protecting him against the cold. A 64-year-old Romanian citizen, he was well-known by the operators working in the field of extreme marginality as he had a longstanding 'carrier' as a homeless. A few hours before he died, he had turned down the possibility to be hosted in one of the municipal homeless shelters spread all over the urban territory to face the cold season. "The place was available", a young man[2] working for a renowned humanitarian organisation told me. "We could have accompanied him there, but the man said, 'No, I'm not coming, go away'".[3]

Death on the street is always a failure; nevertheless, what I intend to stress here are the consequences of the episode for some asylum seekers sleeping outside. What happened after Tudor's death sheds light to some dimensions related to an ongoing ethnographic research on the relations among the state, humanitarianism, and homeless asylum seekers and refugees.[4]

Immediately after Tudor's body was found, the news spread to all the agencies putting the work of the Department of Social Policy under scrutiny. A famous TV program broadcasted by the private channel *Rete 4* sent its employees to Milan to produce a journalistic report, thus pressing the City Council to react. Some politicians belonging to the right-wing Milanese parties criticized the whole emergency system for homeless people and denounced the conditions of the night shelters, defining them as inadequate for the task and

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1 https://milano.repubblica.it/cronaca/2019/12/05/news/milano_freddo_clochard_morto_su_carrozzina_molino_dorino-242627122/.

2 Given the delicacy of the topic and the requests of anonymity that I have received, I decided to not mention personal names of interlocutors and associations.

3 Interview, Milan, 20 December 2019.

4 The paper is mainly based on interviews realised between October 2019 and February 2020 among social workers, educators, and social services coordinators working in the reception system, the caring system for homeless people, and the municipality-led institutions. Besides interviews, other data stems from the visits I realised at homeless shelters in Milan and the 'hotspot' located near the Central Railway station, as well as reports and inquiries on the topic by NGOs and private institutions. The research is part of a broader collaboration as a post-doc fellow in Anthropology with the Polytechnic University of Milan.

sites where micro-crime could prosper.[5] The City Council's response was immediate: on the night between 5 and 6 December, volunteers of humanitarian agencies, in cooperation with the local Police and Amsa,[6] headed to a tunnel running under the Central Rail Station to convince some thirty homeless people to accept the accommodation in a shelter. "The situation in the underpasses was degenerating, it had become a sort of camp with a worryingly low level of hygiene", a humanitarian operator told the journalists. "We also had to remove the mattresses so that they wouldn't come back".[7] Among the people 'rescued' from the street and given a bedroom, many were rejected asylum seekers or applicants for international protection who had not found a place in the local reception system for asylum seekers and refugees.

Why were those latter sleeping outside? Weren't they supposed to be hosted within the reception system? What happened that night is beneficial in delineating a peculiar governmentality directed to managing a growing population of homeless asylum applicants, rejected asylum seekers, and refugees moving and living in the urban territory of Milan.

Because, in my opinion, the topic shows a character of history-in-the-making, I choose to apply a narrative (Tedlock 1991; 2004) and reflexive approach to my fieldwork data. Therefore, and before outlining the structure of my paper, I will position myself with regard to the issue at stake. Between 2017 and 2019, I worked as an educator within the Italian reception system for asylum seekers in an urban area North of Milan. As the time passed, I was confronted with a wave of expulsions issued by the local authorities charged with running the system at the local level. I started wondering where the people who left the centre were going, thinking that, in the following years, a growing population of asylum seekers and refugees would have been forced to find shelter without the help of public and private institutions. When, in September 2019, the social co-operative for which I was working decided to reduce the activities for asylum seekers, I thought that the time had come to make my interest an object of research. The paper is a first attempt to systematise the data collected so far.

This contribution will propose insights on different aspects of the issue at stake. The first is related to the role of the state. I identi-

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5 https://milano.corriere.it/notizie/cronaca/19_dicembre_06/clochard-morto-milano-emergenza-500-irriducibili-strada-5f5ce70c-17f2-11ea-addc-85aa5b33ebd7.shtml.

6 Amsa is the company in charge of street cleaning and waste collection.

7 https://milano.repubblica.it/cronaca/2019/12/06/news/stazione_centrale_senza_tetto_salvati_freddo_milano-242718078/. Translation mine.

fy what I call 'expulsionism', i.e., a set of laws, guidelines, and daily practices that have been endangering the right of the asylum seekers and refugees to obtain or maintain some basic protection measures. As I will explain in section 3, this expulsionist dynamic descends from the central Government to be implemented by the Prefectures and Police headquarters (*Questure*) all over the national territory including Milan.

Secondly, at the local level, the response of the Milanese institutions is based on humanitarianism, i.e., the compassionate work of taking care of the bodies and satisfying the most basic needs: eating, having a disease treated, and not dying on the street. I shall analyse how different levels of the Italian state (that is, different institutions) contribute to transform asylum seekers and refugees leaving the reception system into homeless. Lastly, two final remarks will be outlined over the consequences and the effects of such a complex scenario.

2   Looking after Institutions: An Analytical Framework

The fieldwork that I have been carrying out, and which is set out in this contribution, is part of a line of study that looks at the State both as a 'moral' institution and the result of trans-local dynamics and global processes. Didier Fassin (2010, 2013) is perhaps the most prominent exponent in the analysis of the moral role of the State and its ability to define who is worthy of support or punishment; the author also studied how State institutions exercise a mix of compassion and control when addressing the most vulnerable sections of the population.[8] On the other hand, in the last twenty years, anthropology have underlined how the State should be studied as a complex system that, while exercising power over a given territory, is also influenced by transnational dynamics.[9] The outcome of this assumption has been a renovated attention to the state as trans-local, dispersed in the micro-physics of power (Foucault 1977), constantly perpetuated by state officials at the local level, and contested by the communities at the centre of the research.

All those studies, and others focusing on different countries in Africa and elsewhere, remind us that centralisation and decentralisation are core dynamics within state institutions; this is particularly clear in the margins of the state (Puddu 2016). This remark leads us to analyse what lies behind the overt multi-level organisation of the

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[8] I shall return on this topic in the following sections.

[9] Ferguson 2007; Ferguson, Gupta 2002; Hansen, Stepputat 2001, 2005; Khron-Hansen, Nustad 2005; Sharma, Gupta 2009; Trouillot 2001.

state. If studying a 'vertical slice' (Nader 1972) of the state apparatus helps us see how policies and governmentalities affect the life of specific populations, and which effects they produce, looking after those institutions will help us understand their very functioning and the work of those charged with implementing public policies. In the case I present here, looking after institutions means not taking for granted the control of migration by the state (Alpes 2013) and shading light on the frictions, conflicts, and different governmentalities that constitute the work of what we call "the state".

On another level of analysis, the concept of 'battleground' proposed by Francesca Campomori and Maurizio Ambrosini (2020) is useful in grasping the complexities of the policies over asylum seekers and refugees. In their article dedicated to the Italian reception system, Campomori and Ambrosini propose an analysis of state institutions that is both vertical and horizontal. As the vertical line of study is capable of showing the lack of coordination among different state levels (particularly visible in the Italian case), the horizontal approach sheds light on the (often) conflictual relations among public and private players involved in reception programs. Although my contribution mentions some criticalities inherent to the 'horizontal' relationship among public and private players, I have decided to privilege here a vertical approach to the topic.

This analytical framework will help to recognise that there is never one and only way of dealing with immigration: different state institutions can have different ways of tackling it. In the case I present here, it is possible to note a collision among state representatives at the local level (the Prefecture and the Police precinct), the local authorities (the city of Milan), and the private organisations running the homeless shelters and the centres for asylum seekers and refugees.

3 Expulsionism as Governmentality

Analysing change is always demanding, especially when it comes to how societies define themselves in relation to issues of marginality and human rights. Producing theory on social dynamics when they gain momentum requires the researcher to critically reconsider the scientific literature produced so far; this is the case when we think of how the Italian state responds to requests for protection and asylum.

In the last thirty years, a broad literature on refugees and asylum has focused on the legal basis and the daily practices of aid that take place in different regions of the world. This puts into question the categories of humanitarianism and governmentality: many authors have pointed out that the 'national order of things' tends to create the

image of refugees and asylum seekers as victims and to transform a right (i.e. protection) into a concession given to 'worthy' guests. [10]

From the first works of Liisa Malkki on (see for example Malkki 1996), social scientists have shown how asylum seekers' image has been constructed as ambiguous and suspicious; while they are perceived as victims fleeing their country to have their life saved, people forced to migrate are depicted in the public space as tricksters trying to build a better life at the expenses of the host country. In this sense, Italy is no exception. In the last years, analysts and politicians have increasingly spread discourses in which 'good applicants' (i.e. those fleeing the war) were divided by those who were considered as coming to Italy to exploit the country's wealth. The saying 'We cannot host them all' has become part of the public discourse on forced migration, crosscutting ideologies and political positions.

There is also a historic reason behind those statements. Italy ratified the Geneva Refugee Convention on asylum in 1954, embedding in its Constitution the right to asylum for all those prevented from participating into democratic regimes. Nevertheless, the Italian asylum system implemented strictly the 1951 Refugee Convention, which "protects a substantially smaller category: those with a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group" (Fullerton 2015, 22). From there, as the construction of the European Union ran alongside with the closure of its external borders (Papagianni 2016), an ambiguous image of displaced migrants gave momentum (Colombo 2018). To the Italian public, those not falling under the strict categories of victims of war or persecution have become either a threat to national stability or fraudsters.

This public image has affected the measures for reception. Much of the scholarships has referred to the reception centres as camps (Feldman 2015) where cure and control shape the subjectivities of those who have been placed there (Marchetti 2006; Campesi 2015; Schapendonk 2018) and can ultimately produce social marginality (Cuttitta 2017). Within the reception system, control is exerted to produce docile bodies that will be prone to the labour market (Vailati 2011). As Barbara Pinelli pointed out for the Italian case, moral control and surveillance shape the daily life of the asylum seekers through a mix of assistance, control, and abandonment (Pinelli 2017). In her words, "surveillance and the intent to control is strictly related to the moral and disciplinary project" (Pinelli 2015, 12) implemented by humanitarian agencies and set up by local and national authorities. Accord-

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[10] Candea and Da Col 2012; Kleinman and Kleinman 1996; Scheper-Hughes 2002; Malkki 1995; Fassin 2005, 2006; Fassin and Rechtman, 2009; Beneduce 2010.

ing to this literature, in those 'permanently temporary zones' (Rahola 2003) time concurs in socialising their guests to waiting, being patient, and avoid contesting the authorities.[11]

I first relied on this literature when I started researching on those asylum seekers and refugees expelled from the reception system. If the rationale of the reception centres was to produce docile migrants capable of entering the labour market and following the normative integration path that had been set up for them, then, I argued, those expelled from the system were the ones whose 'initiation' to the hosting society had failed. Yet, as the research went on, I noticed that expulsions could tell me something different. At least since the end of 2018, expulsion decrees were reaching people who found a regular job and could therefore be considered as having a 'successful' integration path. This made some questions arise: Why were asylum seekers expelled because of their work? If the expulsions did not respond to a logic of control, which governmentality (Foucault 2005) did they implement?

Before attempting an interpretation of this emerging logic, some data about the scale of the phenomenon are necessary. When I started my research in the Fall of 2019, my first aim was to assess the number of people expelled from the local reception system in the last three or four years and compare the data with those referring to the broader national context. I found that it was not possible to gather precise information on the quantity of people sleeping outside, and that for different reasons.

First, Milan has become more and more a place of transit for people moving around the country and an attractive destination for those who entered the reception system in the surrounding provinces. Milan is perceived as having a vital and diversified economy if compared to the national average; people come here to find shelter after spending the summer in the Southern agricultural fields or to find a place in the gig economy as delivery men. Many others pass through the city heading North (at the border between Italy and Switzerland) or west (to Ventimiglia and, from there, France). Besides those people, asylum seekers and refugees formerly living in the surrounding provinces of Monza, Como, Lecco, and Bergamo move to Milan searching for employment opportunities and some hospitality, especially on winter. At the local level, the lack of centralised databases is a longstanding issue (Marras 2008).

Furthermore, there is not a national database counting the asylum seekers and refugees expelled from the reception system, and the

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11   For an analysis on time and control in the refugee system, see also Griffiths 2014.

local Prefectures[12] are not eager to release such information; therefore, experts, researchers, and social workers can rely only on little more than their perception of the phenomenon.

Nevertheless, some enquiries shed light on the phenomenon. A report realised by the Openpolis research centre has estimated that around six hundred thousand undocumented migrants would be living in the Italian territory; over forty thousand of them would be rejected asylum seekers expelled from the reception system during 2019 (Openpolis 2019). According to another study published on the Italian magazine *Altreconomia*, the Italian Prefectures would have released around one hundred thousand expulsion decrees on a national scale in four years. The journalist Duccio Facchini, who has realised the enquiry, states that a mapping among the 106 Prefectures has brought to light about forty thousand expulsions in the years 2016-17; however, since only sixty Prefectures have released their data concerning that span of time, it is likely that, in that period, the expulsions have been at least sixty thousand. For the same reason, the article states that, since only forty-nine Prefectures have released their information concerning the years 2018-19, the twenty thousand expulsions detected over this period could be forty thousand if parameterised on the total number of the Prefecture headquarters. Therefore, as mentioned above, the journalist makes an esteem of at least one hundred thousand people expelled from the reception system in four years (Facchini 2019). Even if it is not correct to assert that the totality of those expelled from the reception system find themselves without shelter, the enquiry of the magazine still depicts a growing social issue.

Expulsions have a legal basis in the Directive 2013/33/EU of the European Parliament and the Council, which set the standards for the reception of applicants for international protection on the continent.[13] Article 20 states that "Member States may reduce or, in exceptional and duly justified cases, withdraw material reception conditions". Among those 'exceptional cases' figure: abandoning the place that the local authorities have reserved for the applicant without informing those institutions; not attending the audition at the Territorial Commission for the assessment of international protection; or not submitting an application as soon as reasonably practicable after entering the first EU Member State. Other motivations can lead

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12   The prefectures are a peripheral body of the Ministry of Interior that represent the government on the territory of the Province or the metropolitan area. They are directed by a Prefect charged with the general task of ensuring the coordinated exercise of the administrative activity of the peripheral offices of the State, as well as exercising important functions in the field of public order and security, immigration, civil protection, relations with local authorities, social mediation, and the administrative penalty system.

13   https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32013L0033.

to a reduction or the complete withdrawal of the material reception conditions, such as violence, disrespect toward the norms of the reception system, or false declarations over one's economic condition. However, the Directive also warned the EU member states against endangering the applicants' access to the health sanitary system and decent living standards.

The way the EU Directive have been applied in Italy tells us something about the interrelations among different levels of power, on the one hand, and the possibility of adjusting the law to the specific situation, on the other. As we will see, as policies 'descend' into the various institutional levels, they mutate; from a set of directives aimed (at least theoretically) at protecting people, they become instruments of control and creation of the 'good' migrant.

The Italian government, then led by the centre-left Democratic Party along with some moderate right-wing parties, transposed the Directive in 2015 through Legislative Decree 142/2015.[14] The Decree did not foresee any possibilities of graduating the measures to withdraw reception, thus providing the Prefectures with a powerful instrument for control and surveillance within the reception system. At first, local state representatives started using the expulsion decree (or the threat of expulsion) as a tool to divide the 'good' asylum seekers, i.e., those who respect the norms, study the Italian language, and perform a certain level of autonomy, from the 'bad' ones. Any behaviour considered as not respectful and deferent to the Italian institutions would end up with the withdrawal of the reception measures.

I define this dynamic with the term 'expulsionism'.[15] The focus on the expulsion of people from well-being, welfare programs, and protection is not new; a well-known systematisation has been proposed by Saskia Sassen in her book *Expulsions* (Sassen 2014). Sassen refers to it as a set of emergent logics linked to processes of augmented complexity in economics, finance, and technology. The brutality of expulsions is a by-product of political economies that contribute to shape a world where economic growth coexists with a sharp deterioration in living conditions at a global scale.

The persistence of expulsions from the Italian reception system can be interpreted considering Sassen's insights; nonetheless, it is also possible to find specifics in the case I present here. What I refer to with the term 'expulsionism' is a set of political decisions, daily practices, and bureaucratic communications oriented to manage a population that is perceived as not deserving state support based

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[14] https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2015/09/15/15G00158/sg.

[15] A similar concept, 'expulsionscape', has been used by Pozzi (2019a; 2019b) in his survey on evictions in Milan.

on specific 'models' (in Geertzian terms) of society. Even though the logic did not change drastically, the drivers of its implementation have been changing in the last four to five years. A shift has been occurring in the actions that the Italian state implements when dealing with asylum seekers and refugees: a shift from a governmentality based on conduct control to one mostly oriented towards economic control.

As, at first, expulsions were mainly motivated by the guests' behaviour, in the last two years the reason has generally been different. I argue that a 'cultural' switch occurred in the way the central Government (and especially the Ministry of internal affairs, in charge of the asylum apparatus) see the issue. As Renato Ibrido and Andrea Terlizzi (2019) rightly claim, the Italian reception system is affected by fragmentation on both the legislative and the governance levels, which gives space for the central Government to manage migration policies based on specific perceptions of the phenomenon.

Just to briefly outline the change, I argue that, during the period when Marco Minniti was the Minister of Interior between December 2016 and June 2018, the withdrawal of the reception measures was mainly motivated by 'misbehaviour' and disrespect of the norms. That depended on the fact that the Minister interpreted the arrival and the presence of asylum seekers as a matter of internal stability. 'Control' was the keyword of a political action that, in his words, had succeeded in 'avoiding a democratic emergency'.[16] I directly experienced this governmentality between 2017 and 2018; at that time, I was working for a social cooperative engaged in the Italian reception system.

When Matteo Salvini took his place as Minister of Interior in June-July 2018, a different rhetoric gave momentum and became hegemonic. Along with other politicians, his political party Lega Nord stressed the idea that a crowd navigating the Mediterranean Sea or crossing on foot the Italian North-Eastern border was 'invading' the country in search of economic opportunities; among those people, according to Salvini, only a minority was composed of 'real refugees', defined as people fleeing the war. As asylum seekers were perceived as coming to Italy 'on vacation', the NGOs and social co-ops charged of taking care of them were accused of participating to a 'business' at the expenses of the state. The political consequence of this rhetoric is Law Decree 113/2018.[17]

The legislative decree revoked the so-called humanitarian protection, a form of legal status granted to those whose experience does not fit with the categories of political asylum enlisted in the 1951 Geneva

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16 https://www.repubblica.it/politica/2017/08/29/news/minniti_sui_migran-ti_ho_temuto_per_la_tenuta_democratica_paese_-174164861/.

17 Law Decree, 04/10/2018 no. 113, G.U. 03/12/2018.

Convention. A reduction of the powers of the SPRAR system (the protection system for asylum seekers and refugees), which saw its functions reduced,[18] and a draconian cut in public funds also endangered the work of the organisations and public institutions working in the field. The most immediate consequences of this political shift are two. First, those who had obtained the so-called humanitarian protection were not only impeded to enter the SPRAR, but also expelled from the reception centres in which they had been living. Secondly, the asylum apparatus was severely underfunded and growing numbers of expulsion decrees were mostly issued after checking the working position of the guests.

I found qualitative data that validated my hypothesis at the beginning of February 2020, as I met an educator working in the Milanese reception system. She had been working in a massive building opened in 2016 to host up to three hundred asylum seekers. Until the end of 2018, the Municipality had been directly running the building along with a few others in the city. The municipal management, independent of Prefecture control, implemented a smooth control protocol for the guest supervision.

Things differed when the centre passed under the direct responsibility of the local Prefecture. The woman told me that, after the end of the municipal management, "rules changed and became very strict, especially since the Salvini Decree passed".[19] The Prefecture asked the social co-op running the centre for the guests list and cross-checked it with the local Revenue Agency. Those who were employed, had been earning a salary higher than the social allowance (458 euros per month) and exceeded the minimum annual income of about 7,000 euros, were considered as no longer entitled to receive assistance from the state. People started leaving the centre. "In a few weeks, we have seen the numbers dropping from three hundred and twenty guests into two hundred and nine" she told me. "I think that, in a couple of days, there will be two hundred and six people. They leave [the centre] every day".[20] She confessed me the fear that, if things would go on like this, the guests would have been less than two hundred by the end of February.

I asked her if the expulsions were issued only for those who signed a permanent work contract. "No, it depends on the income" she re-

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18   When I began the research, in 2018, the security decree then converted into law (no. 77/2019) was in force, which had modified the requirements for access in second reception, reserving it only for protection holders, minors, and vulnerable persons (SIPRO-IMI). Subsequently, in the Fall of 2020, the security decrees (I and II) were modified by the entry into force of the new law (no. 173/2020) which re-established the criteria for entry into second reception and changed the denomination from SIPROIMI to SAI, *Sistema di Accoglienza e Integrazione* (Reception and Integration System).

19   Interview, Milan, 6 February 2020.

20   Interview, Milan, 6 February 2020.

plied. "They[21] sent us the names of the people who, in 2019, exceeded the salary cap of 458 euros per month for a certain amount of time, then they asked the guys to send work contracts and paychecks".[22] In case it turned out that some had been receiving a salary exceeding the national social income, plainclothes policemen sent by the *Questura* notified the withdrawal of the reception measures directly to the facility hosting the asylum seekers. The effect is immediate. The managers of the centre generally give the guests three days to pack their bags and leave. Left alone with a few hundred euros in a city where the average rent for a small apartment is 1,000 euros per month, and where Italian citizens generally do not rent rooms to migrants, these people end up asking the homeless shelters for help.

The dynamic inaugurated under Minister Salvini has not changed even when Luciana Lamorgese, formerly the Prefect of Milan, has been chosen as the new Minister of internal affairs after the political crisis that hit the central Government in the summer of 2019.[23] This dynamic is not typical only of the city of Milan, even if it has some peculiarities here; since it has been detected in the surrounding provinces, I can argue that a new logic, based on a political economy of fund shortages, has been siding an already effective governmentality oriented to create docile migrants.

The political nature of the expulsions from the reception system are more evident right now, after the COVID-19 pandemic that hit violently the Northern Italian regions, especially Lombardy. An episode sheds light on their trans-local dimensions. At the beginning of the Fall 2020, I met in Monza a former coworker of the times when I was engaged into the reception system. She told that, during the lockdown occurred in the spring of the same year, expulsions had been suspended. Yet, "as the lockdown was over, they [The Prefecture] have made the pending expulsions operational" she said. Before leaving after having lunch together, the woman told me she had an appointment at the City Council to assist a woman who had been granted international protection and was about to enter the SPRAR/SIPROIMI system. "She's a good girl, polite, and hard worker. She has become proficient in Italian language. You know, she has a job but during the lockdown she has lived on her layoff. She was lucky: in case she had a paid job, the [SPRAR/SIPROIMI] system wouldn't have accepted her query".[24]

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21   The chief of the Immigration Office at the Prefecture headquarters.

22   Interview, Milan, 6 February 2020.

23   Law Decree 113/2018 has been slightly changed by the current Minister of Internal affairs Luciana Lamorgese. https://www.internazionale.it/notizie/annalisa-camilli/2020/10/06/modifiche-decreti-sicurezza-salvini.

24   Field notes, Monza, 24 September 2020.

4 Disappearing in the Humanitarian Apparatus

The CASC, a help centre located not far from the Railway Central Station in Milan, is a three-room space on the ground floor of a former warehouse built under the railroad bridge. People can easily reach it from the railway station in a twenty-minute walk. Before opening under the bridge, the CASC was located on the other side of the tracks, closer to the station, and served as an emergency shelter and info point during the so-called *Emergenza Siria* (Syria Emergency) that exploded in 2013 (see Denaro 2016). Two years after the war erupted, the first Syrian asylum seekers came to Italy; as the weeks passed, the small groups and families turned into a crowd composed by thousands of people. Many reached Milan heading to the Central Station. The presence of a growing population made it necessary to set up a space where it could be temporarily hosted and receive the first information on asylum procedures and the Italian reception system. The city council led and funded the service, even though its actual management had been assigned, after a public call for participation, to a massive and well-known humanitarian foundation.

About two years ago, the service the CASC was supposed to provide was redesigned to tackle issues of extreme marginality. Two new social co-operatives took the place of the former one and brought in different specialists: educators working in the so-called 'filter', a room where those in need can submit their request, and social workers charged with designing and ensuring the follow-up of individualised interventions aiming to help the applicants in domains such as housing, access to psychological or psychiatric services, or school-to-work programs.

I visited the centre for the first time in October 2019 looking for information about the upcoming *Piano Freddo*. I was not aware of the changes occurred at the service; I expected to find cots lying on the floor, and the sight of a completely different situation surprised me. "The working space belongs to the city", a head of service told me. "There is such a complex organisation chart here".[25] The head of service briefly described the structure of the CASC. The two teams worked jointly but referred to different coordinators, one for the educators and the second for the social workers. Besides them, a social worker directly sent there by the city was charged with working as a transmission hinge between the service and the municipality; a fourth coordinator, hired by the city council, had started working there only a few days earlier.

After the reorganisation imposed by the Department of Social Policy, the CASC has found itself at the core of a complex and po-

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25 Interview, Milan, 10 October 2019.

rous network of state agencies operating at the district level.[26] Some three hundred beds are available in homeless shelters open all year-round. The aim of the operators at the CASC is that of creating a contact between the applicant and the district where s/he lives, collecting information about the person, and, eventually, designing an individualised social intervention tailored to the needs of the applicant.

However, the chances homeless asylum seekers and refugees have to receive a long-term help from the CASC and the local institutions are extremely limited. "Yes, we also deal with asylum seekers", the head of service told me during the interview. "Mostly, it is about people who have been sent back to Italy in accordance with [the] Dublin [Regulation]".[27] The problem, the man told me, is represented by those undocumented who seek help at the centre. "If they lack [residency] papers, there is nothing we can do. Theoretically, one has some rights, but how can one access the service without documents? The only reference is the police headquarters".[28]

Documents are maybe the biggest issue when it comes to homeless asylum seekers and refugees. As already stated, Milan is destination for hundreds of people leaving the reception system, whose administrative position differs greatly. Undocumented asylum seekers are part of that larger crowd. The chances of being enrolled in one of the programs implemented by the Department of Social Policy strictly depend on the type of documents one has and the peculiar rules the city council adopted.

Usual residence is a prerequisite for being enrolled in social programs. Under Italian law, residence is defined as the place where a person has his or her normal home. That address on identity documents is the essential prerequisite for exercising fundamental political, social, and civil rights. Access to schools, kindergartens, or local health services is linked to it. However, homeless cannot prove they have a usual residence, since they live in places that cannot be recognised as such. In order to partly overcome these problems and guarantee equal rights to all citizens, the so-called fictitious (or virtual) residence has been active in Italy for years. That is essentially a residence address which does not correspond to the actual place of residence; still, it allows people living in a precarious housing situation to access the services in a given territory. Four urban dis-

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26   Milan is structured into what have been called Municipi, urban districts composed by one or more neighborhoods each served by sanitary, social, and educational institutions. The presidents of the Municipi are elected.

27   Interview, Milan, 10 October 2019. For a critical analysis of the Dublin Regulation, see Brekke, Brochmann 2015; Bugge 2019.

28   Interview, Milan, 10 October 2019.

tricts in Milan implemented the service, which, however, is hard to access for homeless asylum seekers and refugees.

When I was trying to understand the functioning of the institute of fictious residence in Milan, I found the existence of a principle of rootedness being a prerequisite to access the registry office (Gargiulo 2019). The municipality-led social programs addressed to homeless people (such as the Housing First program)[29] require the applicants to document the existence of a continuous relationship (i.e., at least six months) with the territory in terms of interests, relationships, and affects through a report redacted by the institution looking after the potential recipient of the benefit (generally, social workers at the CASC).[30] However, only those with long-term residency papers can start such a continuous relationship with an institution. If we look at the population this paper describes, it means that refugees and people who received international or national protection are included, while those still waiting to know if their application will be accepted are excluded.

The consequence of this situation is that the only social program that everybody, almost theoretically, can access is the *Piano Freddo*. That, the head of service at the CASC told me, is the 'great divide' that places different activities into specific periods of the year: whilst the dynamics presented above take place during the warm season, the *Piano Freddo* usually lasts from November through March. The latter is open to all the homeless population on the Milanese territory, including undocumented asylum seekers. "This is what we do during the winter", the head of service told me. "From now to March, from an administrative point of view it's all about emergency".[31]

People can activate a contact with the CASC in two ways. The first option is going directly to the centre asking for help; there, an educator will interview the applicants, schedule a medical visit, and reserve a place for a week in a transitory and less-than-formal 'night shelter' located under the Railway Central Station. After the medical exams, a bed within the emergency housing system operating during the winter will be available. Nevertheless, people can be inserted in the list even when they are found sleeping on the street or when a citizens report a case at the emergency phone number opened by the city council: in that case, an emergency procedure will allow the homeless to find a place for the night. The following day, there

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29 Differently than other, more 'scalar' approaches, the Housing First program is intended to help homeless people by providing them with an accommodation in a flat (usually a public property). There are no deadlines, and the person included into the program is 'shadowed' by a social worker.

30 For an analysis of the problem of residence and the consequences for homeless, see Gargiulo 2019.

31 Interview, Milan, 10 October 2019.

will be the interview at the CASC. Those cases are considered as predominant over the others. After obtaining a place, the applicants are asked to sign a code of conduct that, if not respected, will end up in losing the right to reside there.

As I proceeded in the research, I started thinking of Didier Fassin's (2010) definition of humanitarianism. According to him, the concept indicates a mixture of care, cure, and control. The specific set of humanitarian practices enabled by the city of Milan does not seem to fit this definition. In Milan, humanitarianism seems more based on care, cleaning, and concealment. The preoccupation of the local authorities seems that of 'cleaning' urban spaces from homeless, especially when the phenotype of the people found on the street is clearly non-white; an example is the police putting concrete barriers in places where homeless people (among whom, undocumented migrants) sleep at night. Furthermore, what happens next is that those people are put in half-hidden rooms with few indications for those arriving from the street, such as the metro station under the Central Railway Station. As a young man working for a humanitarian organisation, who was present the night of 5 December 2019 told me, "these initiatives clearly respond to a need of making those people not visible anymore". According to his experience, the places for the warming centres were chosen with the intent to hide people 'in plain sight'. "They are there, but hidden" he told me. [32] On the contrary, as many interviewees told me, police do not control identity documents on the streets. When outside of the boundaries of reception, and despite the will of the operators, people simply disappear and face great difficulties in accessing the reception system.

It is the case of a young man from Pakistan I meet in one homeless. The man was among the people removed from the street on the night between 5 and 6 December 2019. After entering Italy at the North-Eastern border after spending over a year walking through the Balkans, he was given a train ticket and some information about the protection system in Milan, where he arrived on mid-August 2019. Without any reference, he slept outside for months until December. When he found a place in the shelter, he had not submitted any asylum application yet. An educator working in the centre, who is also active in a reception centre for asylum seekers in Milan, took care of the case and drove the man at the Police headquarters. For some reason, the Police accepted the submission but refused to forward the file to the Prefecture. Since the man had come to Italy by land instead of crossing the Mediterranean Sea, she had found out, there were no chances for him to be sent to a reception centre. I met the woman just a few days after the trip to the *Questura*.

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32 Interview, Milan, 20 December 2019.

Her working experience in two different services had gave her a particular stance toward the functioning of the social services for asylum seekers. She did not understand why applicants for international protection or refugees would stay in a warming centre. "The problem" she told me, "is that now there are people here who don't even have the C3[33] or have just received it, while in the seven apartments where I've been working there are four available places".[34] The woman felt like she was actually carrying out the work of a reception centre and wondered whether that was the task of the shelter. Things had changed around August 2018, she told me. Previously, an agreement among *Questura*, Prefecture and the city council permitted those entering Italy on the ground to contact the CASC, which produced a document that the Police headquarters relied on to formalise the request for protection. The Prefecture would then evaluate the person's inclusion in a reception centre. The process had been working for a while until the Prefecture stopped it.[35]

In fact, the years between 2017 and 2019 are the time span for a major change in the organisation of the Milanese social services, especially those dedicated to asylum. As we have seen, a first change is the passage of the city-led reception centres for asylum seekers under the responsibility of the local Prefecture; a second change is represented by the end of the agreement regulating the administrative condition of those asylum seekers entering Italy by land. A third, major event is the reorganisation of the Immigration Office and the new tasks the CASC has received. I talk about that with a social worker, hired by the city, who has been strictly cooperating with the CASC.

She started working for the Immigration Office in the 1990s, in a time when there were no desks explicitly dedicated to asylum. At the beginning of 2000s, local wars and political crisis erupted in Europe and Eastern Africa. People from Somalia, Albania, former Yugoslavia and other countries fled to Italy by the thousands. The pressure on the Immigration Office in Milan led to the creation of two specific desks, one dedicated to asylum and the second open to 'economic' migrants. Back then, the Italian reception system was not operating the way is does nowadays (Van Aken 2008). Therefore, the shortest way to seek protection was directly addressing the head of *Questura*; that was made possible by the Legislative Decree 286/98, which, on Article 18, sets up the measures for what had been called 'special

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33 C3 is the document the applicants receive after submitting their asylum application at the Police precincts.

34 Interview, Milan, 16 December 2020.

35 Interview, Milan, 16 December 2020.

protection'.[36] "Milan issued hundreds of residency papers for special protection" she tells me. "We used to prepare a report and submit it to the *Questura*, which granted the protection".

In 2017, the functions the two desks had been performing were centralised in a newly unified Immigration Office. The idea was that, once granted protection, the former asylum seekers would become long-term residents with the same issues as those whose migration path was rooted in economic reasons. However, the new organisation did not last for long. During 2019, the Immigration Office was newly reorganised according to three main functions. One desk was charged with managing the SPRAR/SIPROIMI system over the urban territory, the second one was dedicated to family reunions and voluntary repatriation programs, and the third one, run by the CASC, started focusing on extreme marginality and the emergency.

Why this decision? "In my opinion, that is a consequence of the Salvini Decree" one of the heads of service at the CASC told me. "You know, the Decree has made it useless to work with the asylum seekers on the long run, because the great majority among them will become irregular".[37] The new SPRAR/SIPROIMI desk, according to the man, would operate exclusively within the boundaries of the reception system. Therefore, the only institution a homeless asylum seeker or refugee can address is the CASC, with all the problems this solution brings with it. As we have seen, its activities depend on seasonality and offer different services in different periods of the year. While, during the warm season, it provides medium- and long-term inclusion programs directed to European citizens and those entitled with international protection, the centre offers shelter during the winter. As a result, since the operators at the CASC, when working for the *Piano Freddo*, deal with homelessness, asylum seekers and refuges approaching the centre cease to be as such to simply become homeless. This emerged clearly during a workshop I directed at the CASC on early February 2020. After explaining the first research data, I tried to understand whether there were any peculiarities in receiving a query from a man or a woman leaving the reception system. "We just simply treat them as homeless" one operator responded.[38]

I think that here lies a paradox in the way authorities in Milan tackle the issue of homeless asylum seekers and refugees. The decision of keeping the *Piano Freddo* open to anybody seems a reaction to the expulsionist logic inaugurated by the central government in the last two-to-three years; nevertheless, given the current legal and political framework and the choice of the city to shut down the asylum

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36   https://www.camera.it/parlam/leggi/deleghe/98286dl.htm.

37   Interview, Milan, 13 October 2019.

38   Field notes, Milan, 5 February 2020.

desk and other services for asylum seekers and refugees, this happens at the price of a homelessisation of the people who have left the reception system. Those latter disappear as applicants for protection or refugees to resurface as people without shelter; in this sense, the humanitarian response the city council has been implementing ('no one must die on the street') contributes to the dismantling of asylum as an individual right that includes measures aimed to give people some material protection. That humanitarianism can endanger and even erode the refugee protection is not new to social scientists; in this sense, its coexistence with a set of practices which violate its essence would be a feature of the Global North after the fall of the Berlin wall (Chimni 2000). What is striking here, if we look at the way local and central authorities deal with asylum seekers in Milan, is that the economic-humanitarian apparatus I described is, paraphrasing Alessio D'Angelo (2019), a homelessness factory.

5 Conclusion: A Couple of Dilemmas

The data presented in this contribution are preliminary to a broader research; nevertheless, I argue, the effort to "look after institutions" helps highlight two central dilemmas related to the way the Italian state deals with immigration and undocumentedness.

The first dilemma is about the complex intertwining of top-down decisions, policies promoted by different players, and local practices. As we have seen, all those initiatives may appear consistent (if we look at the central government) or contradictory (if we focus on the local level). Both assumptions contain some truth. As we have seen, it is possible to recognise a set of indication and directives that connect supra-national institutions with the work of those engaged in its implementation; at the same time, a closer look at the Milanese city council makes it clear that professionals and workers try to cope with a situation that is not always easy to understand. Furthermore, the "frictious" relationship among levels of government makes room for professionals and state representatives to act with a certain degree of autonomy while, at the same time, they are required to strictly follow rules and procedures. This leads to a situation where a city council can challenge state instructions with the idea of helping people, but with the paradoxical result of enhancing those indications they are intended to fight back.

The second dilemma is closely linked to the moral issue of the unequal condition of people's life (Fassin 2017) and the state's evaluation of a life worth saving. At the foundations of this dilemma lays an economic issue: Who is in charge of dealing with the population living outside the reception system? Who is responsible for funding the social programs dedicated to the protection of those people? On

the one hand, the central government has been stepping back from its tasks through a policy of control and expulsions aiming to cut the ministerial funds. On the other hand, the withdrawal of the central government means neither a privatisation of the service (Hibou 2004) nor a way to 'reject into death' (Mbembe 2003), since the people excluded from the reception system are reluctantly taken over by the services of the Milanese municipality (which is, therefore, forced to use the municipal funds). This happens in the very moment when the Department of Social Policy has been reducing the services for asylum seekers and refugees. The city's reluctance has been clearly expressed by the social worker the city council had sent at the CASC. After my workshop at the centre in early February 2020, she approached me with an expression of disappointment on her face. "You must understand" she told me "that the management of those people does not pertain to us. Asylum seekers are a matter of the Prefecture, they should deal with that!".[39] Once again, the effect of this friction among different state institutions is the process by which those leaving the reception system can find a little help only when 'framed' as homeless, thus transforming the material and legal protection in a scarce resource that people have to fight for.

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Women Victim of Trafficking Seeking Asylum in Italy
An Ethnographic Perspective on the Regularisation Processes

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Abstract   This study, drawing on ethnographic observations of the regularization processes of two migrant women victim of human trafficking and who claimed for international protection in Italy, aims at contributing on the debate on the intersection between the asylum system and the anti-trafficking projects, focusing on how it concretely works in a specific local context and highlighting open challenges and critical issues. The first woman is hosted in a reception centre for asylum seekers, the second one in a shelter of the anti-trafficking project in North-East Italy. During their migratory trajectories, both women were recruited and transported in order to be sexually exploited and both (self-)identified, at different stages of their regularization process, as victims of trafficking. In our analysis, we will focus both on the positioning of the asylum seeker women and on the perspective of the operators, trying to understand in which situations these perspectives converged or diverged, in term of choices, power hierarchies and strategies of resistances.

Keywords   Forced migrant women. Trafficking in human beings. Referral system. Socio-legal operator. Gender-based violence. Credibility assessment.

Summary   1 Introduction. – 2 Women Seeking and Holding Asylum in the Italian Context: Changing Trends and Evolving Challenges. – 3 The Intersection of Antitrafficking Programmes and the Asylum System in Italy. – 4 Gladys: The Challenges Related to Late (Self-)Identification as Victim of Trafficking. – 5 Abena: The Difficult Narration of Experiences of Gender-Based Violence. – 6 Conclusions.

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1 Introduction

The intersection of asylum and trafficking in human beings is an issue that has been largely debated at juridical international level and, in Italy, the overlapping experiences of forced migration and exploitation emerge since the first decade of 2000, especially in the trajectories of West-African migrant women victims of sexual exploitation, but also in cases of forced migrant men exploited in agriculture (Degani 2011). From 2011 onwards, the issue of identification of potential victims of trafficking and exploitation among asylum seekers and refugees acquired increasing relevance, with the growth of mixed migration flows to Italy (Baldoni et al. 2014). This changing phenomenon, while challenging the rigid categorisation and distinction of trafficking and smuggling categories, also urged to reinforce the collaboration of the anti-trafficking programmes and the international protection systems. Crucial issues at the intersection of these two fields are indeed related to the process of identification and regularisation of potential victims of trafficking, but also pertain the strategies to support the beneficiaries' empowerment processes, and the evaluation of the social inclusion programs, both from the beneficiaries and operators' perspectives. The UNHCR guidelines (2021), published in 2016 and recently updated, facilitated and pushed to reinforce the collaboration between the two, clarifying the juridical framework and providing operational guidelines for the cooperation between institutions involved in the asylum and the anti-trafficking fields.

This chapter aims at contributing at the debate of the intersection of the two systems, focusing on how it works in practice in a specific local context. Drawing on ethnographic observations of one of the authors, who has worked for several years both in the asylum and anti-trafficking system as socio-legal operator, it focuses on the regularisation processes of two migrant women who sought asylum, that lasted several months between 2018 and 2020. The first woman was hosted in a reception centre for asylum seekers, the second one in a shelter of the anti-trafficking project, in North-East Italy. During their migrant trajectories, both women were sexually exploited and (self-)identified, at different stages of their regularisation process, as victims of trafficking, but they also expressed their need of asylum. In our analysis, we will focus both on the positioning of the asylum seeker women, and on the perspective of the operators who are

in charge of supporting the regularisation process – referred to as legal or socio-legal operators, they can be present in the asylum and in the antitrafficking projects – trying to understand in which situations these perspectives converged or diverged, in terms of choices, power hierarchies and strategies of resistances. The methodological posture here adopted, which implies a positioning in the field and in the writing process both as women, socio-legal operators and anthropologists, constitutes the specific perspective through which the women's experiences have been analysed. This perspective focuses on the women's feelings and choices in the several steps of their self-identification processes both as victims of trafficking and as asylum seekers, but also on their space of action within highly-complex legal procedures, in which several actors are involved and which imply a continuous negotiation of strategies aimed at guaranteeing some form of protection.

2 Women Seeking and Holding Asylum in the Italian Context: Changing Trends and Evolving Challenges

As in other European countries, from 2015 onwards the number of asylum requests in Italy has significantly risen, reaching 130,000 applications in 2017, the highest figure in the past twenty years. Data on international protection in Italy has shown that a significant proportion of asylum seekers are women, both within reception centres and as applicants of international protection. Even taking into account the reduction of applications since 2018, the percentage of women among asylum seekers gradually increased, from 15% in 2016 (18,000) to 23.8% in 2019 (11,000) and only slightly reduced in 2020 (21%, 5,000 in total) (ISMU 2020). The quota of women sheltered in SPRAR/SIPROIMI[1] has also increased: while from 2010 to 2014 the percentage decreased steadily each year (from 24% to 12%), in 2016 the trend reversed, until in 2019 19.5% of the beneficiaries were women, mostly due to the flows from Nigeria and Somalia. Women are also the main beneficiaries of projects sheltering people with specific vulnerabilities: minor age, mental health issue, single-parent families, physical disability (SIPROIMI 2019). Finally, as for the results of the asylum request procedures, between 2016 and 2019 the status of refugee was granted to an increasing number of women, although

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[1] In Italy, from 2011, a double-track reception system for asylum seekers and refugees was established: the ordinary (SPRAR, then renamed in SIPROIMI and now SAI) and the extraordinary (CAS, *Centro di Accoglienza Straordinaria*, 'Extraordinary Reception Centre'). For a more extensive analysis, see Semprebon and Caroselli contribution in this book. We here report the data available for the SPRAR/SIPROIMI system, while the data relating to the CAS system are not easily accessible.

the percentage was substantially lower than in other forms of protection, when a protection was granted. However, it is significant to note, that the percentage of recognition of refugee status is higher among women than men (26% compared to 7% of men in 2019) as well as the rejection quota is higher among men (69% of men were denied any form of protection, compared to 50% of women) (ISMU 2020).

Interestingly, in the period from 2017 to 2018, Italy ranked second among the EU-27 Member States – in which a total of 14,145 people were registered as victims of trafficking – by number of registered victims and the second with the highest proportion of female victims (after France, and UK in the EU-28) (EU Commission 2020). Among the registered victims with EU citizenship in the EU-27, nearly three quarters (74%) were female. As for the non-EU countries of citizenship of victims, the one with the highest share of female victims (92%) is Nigeria, which has also the highest proportion of victims of sexual exploitation trafficking (68%). In 2017, nearly half of the victims with Nigerian citizenship were registered as victims in Italy (and nearly one quarter in the United Kingdom) (EU Commission 2018).

The increasing attention on the specificity of female experiences in forced migration at an international level, and relevance on the gender approach in term of analysis of hierarchical and political dimension of social processes – which, as often emphasised, is not the mere recognition of the feminisation of migration flows (Pinelli 2019) – is found also in the literature on forced migrants in Italy. The main focuses in the analysis of female subjective experiences in the Italian context can be found at the intersection of reception centres and the procedure of asylum request. Scholars stress how power hierarchies, which emerge at the landing points, with the first actions of control and identification, and continue in the control measures carried out in the reception centres, are based on and legitimised by urgency and emergency (Sanò 2017; Sanò, Spada 2018) and when women are involved their effect have some peculiarities (Pinelli 2017a; 2017b; 2018). The processes of othering and the circulation of stereotyped and racialised imaginaries on migrant women may impact on the daily life relationship between operators and women in reception centres (Toffanin, Pasian 2018) and their autonomy, empowerment and future trajectories, also in terms of labour inclusion. The difficulty in appreciating and supporting women's agency may indeed lead to a 'failure' of the so-called integration project – as defined by the reception structures programme – thus increasing the risk of social marginalisation for women, which may also enhance the exposure to trafficking and exploitation (Caroselli 2018). In case of asylum seekers who are also mothers – often lone mothers – other challenges may come into play in the social arena of the reception centres and, more generally, in the relation with local social services (Della Puppa et al. 2019). By reproducing an approach that create a dependency cul-

ture and by imposing gender models considered, from their perspectives, more appropriate to the inclusion of mothers in a local sociocultural context, social services may interfere not only in parenting practices and relationships, but also in the migrants' self-perception as women and mothers (Pinelli 2011; Marabello 2017; Taliani 2019).

As for the specific experience of the asylum application procedure, the socio-anthropological literature focuses also on the analysis of the refugees' strategies to speak up in the relation with the institutional actors involved in the assessment (Sorgoni 2011; 2013; Eastmond 2007; Vacchiano 2005; 2011). It stresses how the labelling processes inherent in the asylum recognition – which directly questions the humanitarian approach of institutional practices (Fassin 2008; 2012) – leads to a dialectic of "conformity and conformation" between asylum seekers and state institutions (Serughetti 2017; Zetter 1991; Van Aken 2005). The process of assessment of consistency and of internal and external credibility of asylum seekers' narratives is based on social and juridical categories, which establish whether one deserves some form of protection. These labels categorise people as 'victims', representing them only on the basis of their needs (Malkki 1996, 24), as well as labelling them as 'true' or 'false' refugee, which lead refugees to performative acts, in order to meet these ideal-types identifying who is eligible for protection. The labelling process may be also based on gender stereotypes, which can, for instance, divide women into "vulnerable" or "dangerous" (Freedman 2015), thus reproducing the classic binary opposition of negative and positive stereotypes assigned to migrant women from the Western society (Bimbi 2011). As all other labels assigned to refugees, also the categories of 'vulnerable' and 'victim of human trafficking', often applied to women, do not always match their sense of agency or self-identification (Giudici 2016; Pitzalis 2020; Serughetti 2017) and may produce "biographical borders" that allow or impede the access to rights, jobs, mobility (Mai 2016).

By adopting a gender approach, the literature on forced migrant women experiences provides, indeed, some crucially relevant analytical and theoretical lenses, that bring the focus on the political and hierarchical dimension of mobility processes, underlying the importance of considering the relation between subjects and forms of power in a specific social, historical, political and economic context (Scott 1991; Butler 1997; Pinelli 2019). It also fosters a reflection on gender-based violence and the importance of the concept of intersectionality, which is rooted in the black and postcolonial feminist approach and which calls for a perspective on social phenomena that takes into due consideration the many intersections between race, gender and social class, but also age, sexual orientation, disability in individual experiences of discriminations (Crenshaw 1989; 1991; Hancock 2007; Walby 2012). As noted by various authors, this perspective proves to be a valuable tool for understanding gender violence,

and its connection to the different symbolic, structural and political aspects of the migration experience, both in the context of origin, transit and arrival (Pinelli 2019; Ribeiro Corossacz 2013; Semprebon et al. 2021). Scholars point out that, in the trajectories of forced migrant women, violence should be considered as an "experiential continuum" (Scheper-Huges, Burgois 2004; Freedman 2015; 2016) both in temporal and geographical terms. The experience of violence in the countries of origin and of transit adds, indeed, to the structural violence (Farmer 2004) implicit in socio-legal eligibility in the countries of destination, i.e., the extent to which women have access to certain services. This structural dimension is particularly evident in the experiences of trafficked and exploited asylum seeker women, and calls for a political and legal recognition of violence, occurring both in private and public spheres (Pinelli 2019), which is still difficult to legally identify (Boiano 2014; Rigo 2016).

3 The Intersection of Antitrafficking Programmes and the Asylum System in Italy

From the legal and procedural point of view, the intersection of the anti-trafficking programmes and asylum systems in Italy came gradually into practice. Women victims of trafficking can not only be granted the Art. 18 (Legislative Decree 286/98)[2] residence permit, but also international protection. Until few years ago, this was not as evident because, in the common practice, the two systems were completely disconnected, despite the first guidelines of the UNHCR dating back to 2006 and pointing to the fact that membership in a 'social group'[3]

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[2] Art. 18 (Legislative Decree 286/98) gives people who are victims and potential victims of trafficking the right to be issued a residence permit 'for social protection' and the right to access protection and labour inclusion program, not only whereby people report their exploiters to the police (judicial procedure), but also if they do not so and yet have been identified as victims of trafficking and exploitation (social procedure) by competent stakeholders. For in-depth and historical analysis of the antitrafficking projects in Italy see: Castelli 2014; Degani 2019; Semprebon et al. 2021.

[3] "Membership of a particular social group" is one of the five grounds enumerated in Art. 1A (2) of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. It is the ground with the least clarity, since it is not defined by the convention itself. It has been invoked with increasing frequency in refugee status determinations, with States having recognised women, families, tribes, occupational groups, and homosexuals, as constituting a particular social group for the purposes of the 1951 Convention. The 2002 UNHCR guidelines adopted a definition, that incorporated both the 'protected characteristic' and the 'social protection' approaches: "A particular social group is a group of persons who share a common characteristic other than their risk of being persecuted, or who are perceived as a group by society. The characteristic will often be one which is innate, unchangeable, or which is otherwise fundamental to identity, conscience or the exercise of one's human rights". The interpretation and the application of this ground is still a highly debated issue both at academic and juridical level.

concerns also gender, and that gender membership can be associated to forms of discrimination in terms of abuse, harassment, violence, which includes also trafficking.

Both the European and the Italian legislation have gradually taken account of the phenomenal changes that have been taking place regarding the aforementioned overlapping between the systems of trafficking and international protection.[4] In 2016, UNHCR and the Italian National Commission for Asylum published specific guidelines, updated in 2021, targeting in particular, but not only, Territorial Commissions for the Recognition of International Protection,[5] on the referral and identification of people victims of trafficking, especially in the international protection procedure. The National Anti-Trafficking Action Plan, adopted for the years 2016-2018 (the new Plan has not been published yet) by the Italian Department of Equal Opportunities,[6] in transposition of the 2011/36/EU Directive (Trafficking Directive 2011),

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4   Victims and potential victims of human trafficking were not explicitly mentioned in the list of vulnerable people indicated by the EU directives, until the 2011/95/ EU and 2013/33/EU (called 'Qualification and Reception Directive'), in which trafficked persons have been explicitly included in the list of vulnerable people, with specific needs. Upon transposition, Italy has addressed the need for harmonisation of the anti-trafficking and the international protection systems and an important change was introduced for example with the coming into force of Legislative Decree 142/2015, transposing the EU Directives 2013/32/EU and 2013/33/EU.

5   The Territorial Commissions for the Recognition of International Protection (Commissioni Territoriali per il Riconoscimento della Protezione Internazionale) are administrative bodies, under the Ministry of Interior, competent to examine asylum applications and to ascertain if a person has the requirements for international protection. The Territorial Commissions are established under the responsibility of Prefectures; the law foresees the creation of 20 Territorial Commissions and up to 30 sub-Commissions across the national territory. Legislative Decree 220/2017, entering into force on 31 January 2018, reformed the functioning and composition of the Territorial Commissions: each Territorial Commission is composed by at least 6 members, in compliance with gender balance. These include: 1 President, with prefectural experience, appointed by the Ministry of Interior; 1 expert in international protection and human rights, designated by UNHCR; 4 or more highly qualified administrative officials of the Ministry of Interior. In 2018, 250 specialised members were appointed by public tender and another 162 were added during 2019. Following the 2017 reform, interviews are conducted by officials of the Ministry of Interior and no longer by UNHCR. The decision-making sessions of the Commission consist of panel discussions composed by the President, the UNHCR-appointed expert and two of the administrative officers, including the one conducting the interview. Under the Procedure Decree, the decision on the merits of the asylum claim must be taken at least by a simple majority of the Territorial Commission, namely 3 members; in the case of a tie, the President's vote prevails. Throughout 2020, EASO deployed 208 different experts in Italy, also in support of Territorial Commissions, with file preparation and support with Country of Origin Information research. Recently, EASO moved its main support to Tribunals for the first degree of judgement (see also EASO operating plan to Italy: `https://www.easo.europa.eu/sites/default/files/OP–Italy–2019_0.pdf`).

6   The main goal of the National Plan is the definition of national strategies of intervention against human trafficking and serious exploitation and victims' protection, through the coordination and the harmonisation of the systems of interventions conducted by the national, regional and local actors involved in anti-trafficking field.

has also addressed the need to reinforce the collaboration between the anti-trafficking and international protection system, both in the identification and in the assistance of potential victims of trafficking. It clarifies that victims of trafficking may also be asylum seekers, and accordingly to the needs expressed, may be assisted in one system, or another. Following Art. 1 of Legislative Decree 2014/14, it also introduce methodologies of referral between the two system, included the National Referral Mechanism.[7]

The decision about which regularisation path to follow is ultimately the trafficked person's choice, while the operators involved in the process should understand the different paths, recognise which could be the attractive and the undesired factors in each path for the single case and consider that the two paths could not be, to a certain extent, mutually exclusive. The concerns and the debate among operators about how to consider every single situation at the intersections of the two regularisation processes and systems are still relevant, and the pieces of information that the operators give to the person, and the ways they are made comprehensible, are an important element in the person's choice.

Art. 18 has constituted and still constitutes an important juridical instrument capable of simultaneously pursuing the objective of combating crime (whether the trafficked person collaborates with the judicial authorities or not, since freeing a person from the control of a criminal organisation weakens it and it reduces its income) and of the protection of victims (Castelli 2014; Degani 2019; Semprebon et al. 2021). On the other hand, international protection can be the most appropriate solution in certain cases: the person who has suffered trafficking may have a well-founded fear to return to the country of origin due to the trafficking that characterised her/his migratory path, as well as for other reasons related to the refugee status or the subsidiary protection. Moreover, being persecuted in the country of origin can lead the person to experience trafficking as a (more or less conscious) way to flee the country or as an element of vulnerability used by traffickers in the recruitment, with the aim of exploiting her or him.

The recognition of the international protection by the Territorial Commission is not based on the adhesion to the anti-trafficking protection and inclusion programme, conversely it is a necessary requirement for the granting of a residence permit pursuant to Art. 18.[8]

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[7] As defined by OSCE-ODHIR (2014, 15), "a National Referral Mechanism (NRM) is a co-operative framework through which state actors fulfil their obligations to protect and promote the human rights of trafficked persons, coordinating their efforts in a strategic partnership with civil society".

[8] Art. 27 of D.P.R. 394/99 includes the social assistance and integration program and the foreigner's adhesion to it among the documents that the *Questore* must necessarily acquire for the issue of the Art. 18 residence permit. *Questore* is the head of the *Questura*.

The possibility that an asylum seeker identified as a victim of trafficking does not adhere to the assistance referred to Art. 18 has raised, and still raises, many concerns regarding the possibility that the refugee status can be granted to people who have not completely cut the ties with criminal organisations, hence favouring the organisation who can continue exploiting its victims without concerns for their legal status or perhaps granting a legal status to a person involved, in some degree, in the criminal organisation. However, these concerns, which can be shared in order to provide adequate protection for victims, cannot be a sound reason for a denial of international protection and must, in any case, leave room for consideration of personal situations and of many variables. Relevant reflections include the observation that many forms of marginalisation, including the irregular presence in the host state, can be used to increase exploitation and control over the victim, as well as the consideration that a victim of trafficking can find the strength to escape the exploitation network thanks to his/her own regularisation in the territory.

The concrete cooperation between institutions, that includes also *Questura*[9] and Law Courts, is still challenging: there is, indeed, a variability of referral practices at a local level, that should be monitored, implemented and formalised, in order to favour an early identification and effective protection of potential victims of trafficking and serious exploitation (Nicodemi 2017; Santoro 2018). The empirical studies on the intersection of the two systems in Italy are still very few (Baldoni at al. 2014; Semprebon et al. 2021). A recent research, conducted in the specific context of Veneto Region (North-East of Italy),[10] provides an in-depth analysis on the concrete cooperation of two systems, increasing from 2016, both in terms of informative activities held by antitrafficking operators in reception centres for asylum seekers and refugees, and in terms of a collaboration between antitrafficking programmes and the Territorial Commissions (Semprebon et al. 2021). Following UNCHR guidelines, when the Territorial Commissions identify indicators connected to trafficking and severe exploitation, they have to offer asylum seekers the possibility of meeting an anti-trafficking operator and to consider whether to start a protection programme. In these referral processes, some discordances between approaches of the antitrafficking operators and the procedures of the Territorial Commissions emerged. For instance, while the Territorial Commissions need to focus on the coun-

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9   *Questura* is the office of the Dipartimento della Pubblica Sicurezza (Department for Public Safety), with provincial competence, and it responds to the Ministry of Interior.

10   In the framework of the INSigHT project (Building capacity to deal with human trafficking and transit routes in Nigeria, Italy, Sweden), EU/ICMPD-Mobility Partnership Facility, coordinated by SIIMM UNESCO Chair, University IUAV of Venice. https://www.insightproject.net/.

try of origin and, in particular, on the reasons why a person has fled their country, the antitrafficking operators focus on the present situation of the person, to understand whether there is any on-going situation of risk. Another critical issue raised by antitrafficking operators is the request to identify a person as a victim of trafficking in a defined span of time, as requested by the Territorial Commissions, while identification is considered by antitrafficking operators as a process and persons may not be ready, in such a time frame, to disclose openly about their traumatic experiences.[11]

4 Gladys: The Challenges Related to Late (Self-)Identification as Victim of Trafficking

The issue of the early identification of victims of trafficking is still a crucial (Giammarinaro 2018) and, as the story of Gladys here shows, in case of late identification several juridical actors, such as lawyers and judges, may come into play, thus forcing asylum seekers and operators to a continuous positioning and decision making processes. Moreover, the uncertainty connected to a late identification process and the shifting legal framework may preclude the participation of women in a legal procedure that may grant them a permit of stay or even the recognition of the refugee status.

Not long after Gladys had arrived in Italy in 2016 she applied for asylum and, she has been hosted in several reception structures for asylum seekers in Veneto, before arriving in a CAS project for single women and women with children. When she entered this programme, she had already appealed against the decision of the Territorial Commission.[12] During the first months in the new reception centre, she took part in informative workshops held by anti-trafficking operators. The operators remember her sitting in the front row during the meeting, firmly concentrated and showing a high level of self-control: her eyes were emotionless and, in the following days, she never shared her thoughts on the workshops with the operators.

Accidentally, some crucial elements for her asylum request emerged in the following months. While sorting through the medical documents received by the previous reception structures, an operator found out that in a gynaecologic check-up report there was a mention of Female Genital Mutilations (FGM): aware of the rele-

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11   The new UNCHR guidelines were written also taking in considerations all the critical issues related to the referral practice, also revising indicators of trafficking.

12   Here a description of international protection procedure in Italy: `https://asy-lumineurope.org/reports/country/italy/asylum-procedure/procedures/regu-lar-procedure/`.

vance of this document, he took it to the socio-legal operators. They verified that the medical report was very generic: it referred to a general gynaecologist visit, and the report of the FGM was not very clear (and included some misspellings in the Italian language).[13] At the same time, while acknowledging that Gladys had always told that she wanted to manage her asylum claim with her lawyer, without involving the operators, they decided to inform her on the relevance of FGM in international protection procedures. Gladys was actually surprised when the operators asked her whether she had ever talked to the Territorial Commission or to her lawyer about her FGM experience: it was clear that she did not know, and she had not been told in her long experience in different centres, that FGM can be considered a form of violence and persecution as a member of a social group, thus an important basis for her own asylum claim (UNHCR 2002; 2019; Caroselli 2018). This event raises the issue, highlighted by some scholars (Marchetti 2016; Bolzoni et al. 2015), of the lack of homogeneity in the reception facilities standards, also in terms of legal support, across the country and in local regions, and across different types of structures, such as SIPROIMI and CAS.

Gladys accepted to have a new gynaecologist exam, which was planned by the operators with a doctor who used to collaborate both with asylum and anti-trafficking contact units. Gladys was accompanied by the socio-legal operator who explained to the gynaecologist the use of medical/psychological certificate in the asylum application (Fassin, d'Halluin 2005; Costantini 2015). The gynaecologist certified the presence of FGM, describing them as incisions, explaining that they were not deep and that she could not see signs of stitches.

At the end of the visit, when the operator told Gladys to take the document to the lawyer, she asked them to read it once again. Having the certainty that the gynaecologist observed that the FGM were slight, she told the operator: "She is right, and this is actually why I left my country, but I never told anyone because of the oath". She told the operator that her boyfriend's father, when he found out that her FGM were not profound, asked her to undergo a more incisive mutilation even though she was pregnant. She refused, was repudiated, and she ended up alone, since she was an orphan, having to raise her son all by herself. After some years, she found "someone who would make me travel",[14] while asking her to keep their agreement secret, and she considered it an opportunity to improve her situation, one of poverty and marginality.

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[13]   The generic use of term 'circumcision', instead the technical term Female Genital Mutilation. Moreover, there was also a misspelling in Italian language: *circoncizione* instead of *circoncisione*.

[14]   Expression often used when referring to the Madam.

Gladys confirmed to the socio-legal operator that she was still in contact with the Madam, and that she was still paying her, thus confirming the ongoing exploitation. In an improvised meeting, after some informal comments on the phenomenon of trafficking, Gladys described her personal experience and showed she was starting to trust the operators. Once informed, Gladys accepted to talk with the antitrafficking operators and she also showed the free toll antitrafficking number card,[15] that she had always kept with herself, since the moment in which the Territorial Commission gave it to her during the interview. She had always had the feeling that the contact number could have turned out useful, but only in that moment – in which the self-identification as victims of several forms of violence, from FGM to trafficking, was becoming clearer and stronger – she was starting to understand how. Until that moment, she had never clearly realised the legal eligibility of her violence experiences, and all her efforts were on negotiating and resisting the pressure of the Madam, without involving the asylum operators. She, indeed, negotiated both the distance and the payment: she had never joined her, negotiating the possibility to pay back her 'debt' sending small amounts each month while staying in the reception centre. She was informed on the possibility of collaborating with judicial authorities but she said that she did not want to report her trafficking experience, as she was afraid of the consequence on her son in Nigeria. She stated that she was not afraid for her safety in Italy at the moment and that, for the time being, she did not intend to enter a protected shelter run by an antitrafficking organisation, which would mean moving once again. Instead, she confirmed she wanted to continue with the international protection application and she asked, primarily, support in that.

At that point, the interlocution between the lawyer supporting her appeal, and the socio-legal and antitrafficking operators started. Based on the emergence of new elements the operators considered presenting a reiterated asylum request, discussed with the lawyer advantages and disadvantages of a reiterated request or of proceeding with the appeal and informed Gladys about the possible choices. The lawyer suggested continuing the procedure in court and presenting before the hearing the elements on the two new claims, related to FGM and trafficking. Eventually, the court date was anticipated and Gladys decided to adhere to her lawyers' position and explain her experience to the judge. Before the hearing, the antitrafficking project presented a report on the evaluation process. A few months later, the court released the judgement, where Gladys was recognised

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15 https://www.osservatoriointerventitratta.it/il-numero-verde-800-290-290/.

a humanitarian protection[16] and refused the refugee status, on the ground that the lawyer had not asked for it, while depositing the appeal nor during the hearing, despite the dialogue with the socio-legal operators and the antitrafficking project, and the judge felt not compelled to examine the possibility.

The operators had an exchange with the lawyer and organised a meeting with Gladys, in order to discuss the outcome of the legal procedure. At that time, she was already working, albeit without a regular contract and she was pregnant. The lawyer and the socio-legal and antitrafficking operators had different view on the best strategy to support Gladys' regularisation process. The lawyer suggested to accept the result, unless she wanted to proceed with a further level of appeal which would have few chances of success, while the operators supported the option of presenting a new request for asylum because of the strong elements for a refugee status that had not been evaluated. On the latter possibility, while the operators were exploring the immediate consequences of the choice, the *Questura* also took position. It claimed that Gladys should have renounced to the permit for humanitarian protection and receive a new permit as asylum seeker, while the legal consultant of the operators maintained that her right to humanitarian protection, and to such a permit, would not be questioned by a new request for international protection.

The uncertainty related to the permit of stay was not the only crucial issue impacting on Gladys' choice. The possibilities of accessing reception centres was also an issue. In case of a reiterated request, indeed, the reception in CAS centres is not granted; as Gladys was also recognised as a victim of trafficking, the antitrafficking pro-

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16 Humanitarian protection is a residual form of protection, granted to citizens of a third country whose request for international protection was denied but who anyhow were found in objective and serious personal conditions that did not allow their removal from Italy. Law Decree 113/2018 had abolished the status of humanitarian protection: the government justified the abolition of humanitarian protection with the need to limit the issuance of this residence permit, circumscribing the humanitarian reasons to certain hypotheses and introducing, for this purpose, some new residence permits that can be released directly by the *Questura* in 'special cases' (*casi speciali*): for those in need of medical care, for victims of domestic violence or serious labour exploitation, for those coming from a country that is in a temporary situation of disaster and for those who have performed acts of high civil value. Law Decree 130/2020 and Law 173/2020 reintroduced the need for territorial commissions to consider, in rejecting international protection, the existence of constitutional and international obligations, and changed the substance of the special protection (*protezione speciale*) permit that can be granted when the hypothesis of non-expulsion or refoulement rises. This permit is granted for a duration of two years and is renewable, upon favourable opinion by the Territorial Commission, and convertible to labour residence permits. International protection permits for both refugee status and subsidiary protection, instead, are granted for a period of 5 years. In Gladys's case, since she had sought asylum prior to the abolition of humanitarian protection, her asylum was granted even though in the meantime the protection was abolished and hence she had the right to have a substantially equivalent permit of stay.

gramme decided, exceptionally, to allow her to stay on a transitional basis, in a protected shelter, until the final response of the Territorial Commission. The antitrafficking programmes, in fact, normally do not host lone mothers with children, because the funding for children is not included by the National Antitrafficking Plan, even though some projects add funding and start specific projects for lone mothers with children (Semprebon et al. 2021; Semprebon, Caroselli 2021). Moreover, in that period, normative changes occurred with Law Decree 113/2018,[17] which excluded people with permits for asylum seekers or for humanitarian reasons from the access to SIPROIMI project.[18] Therefore, even though SIPROIMI did have the resources for taking care of single and two-parent families, Gladys could not ask for reception because of her legal status.

In the middle of all the efforts carried out by operators in order to sustain her right to international protection, and to explain her the relevance that the refugee status may acquire for her and her family inclusion path, she decided to give up. Gladys explained that she considered it too painful to repeat her story in the framework of the asylum procedure and that she could not accept again a new condition of uncertainty, in relation to the permit of stay and the reception facilities. She, thus, decided to leave the reception structure and move to her boyfriend's house. As for the exploitation, at a cer-

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[17]   Law Decree 113/2018, implemented by Law 132/2018, had brought a drastic change to the design of the Italian reception system, with consequences still affecting the accommodation system even if the law, in 2020, has again reformed it. It included the reorganisation of the reception system, with the abolition of the SPRAR and the creation of the SIPROIMI (Protection System for Persons with International Protection and Unaccompanied Foreign Minors), which differs from the SPRAR as it is provides access to refugees, holders of subsidiary protection and unaccompanied minors only, while asylum seekers, are destined to lower standard CAS structures, thus conceived as first reception centres for asylum seekers. Moreover, the tender specifications schemes for the first reception services had drastically lowered the costs of the first reception phase, eliminated services and provided for a negligible number of operators compared to the number of persons accommodated. In the meanwhile, SIPROIMI expanded its target group to holders of other permits: victims of exploitation or trafficking, victims of domestic violence, health reasons, victims of labour exploitation, calamities, acts of particular civil value. Law Decree 130/2020 has again conceived the reception system as a system for both asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international and special protection, even if organised in progressive phases with differentiated services. The accommodation system (former SPRAR, from 2001 to 2018, then SIPROIMI, from 2018 to 2020) is now called SAI (Reception and Integration System).

[18]   SIPROIMI, as the previous SPRAR and the subsequent SAI systems, decentralises reception activities throughout Italy. It is based the voluntary participation of local municipalities, that implement the local reception and integration projects in strong collaboration with NGOs. Municipalities are also free to choose the type of reception services to be provided in their area and the recipients to be supported, that may include individual adults, but also families, single pregnant women, unaccompanied minors, and people suffering physical or mental health disorders; however, they are required to respect specific guidelines and standards in order to be funded.

tain point she interrupted the payment. She seemed to have found a way to be safe, threatening to report the Madam and his brother (the one in charge of collecting Gladys' money) to the police in case they would still ask her for money.

From the procedural and juridical point of view, the case of Gladys could have been important in that it could have brought different agencies and actors together, interacting in order to assure the access to international protection, but people do not always agree to play this role, finding the struggle for their right for asylum no longer reconcilable, at a certain stage, with the search for some form of stability.

5 Abena: The Difficult Narration of Experiences of Gender-Based Violence

Another important issue that often emerges in the intersection between anti-trafficking and asylum is, thus, gender-based violence and the difficulty in recognising it both by social operators and within the framework of asylum application. Even though several reports and guidelines state that gender-based violence (which includes domestic violence, genital mutilation, rape, forced pregnancy and forced abortion, trafficking in human beings, forced marriages, sexual slavery) is considered a push factor that can lead women to leave their country, as well as a risk forced migrant women may be exposed to during their migratory pathway (UNHCR, UNFPA, WRC 2016; Freedman 2016), the experience of Abena, described below, shows some of the difficulties that operators and asylum seekers may encounter in supporting its recognition in the asylum request process. This effort implies, indeed, a continuous negotiation between individual social, cultural and legal needs and institutional requests, within which socio-legal operators often play a crucial role.

Abena is a woman from a West African country, aged 40 and with a biographical experience characterised by multiple forms of violence. She is an asylum seeker and she has been hosted in an anti-trafficking shelter since she was identified as victim of trafficking for sexual exploitation. When she was 17 years old, she was forced to marry an aged man, who died a few years later and thus, according to the tradition of her context, she was married to his son, a very violent man. She had a child from the first husband and two from the second. In her effort to escape her condition of violence, she asked for help to different institutions and social actors, from her parents and friends to the health centres and the children's schools, but she never found effective support. She tried defending herself by attacking the man, she was charged guilty in court, served the sentence and sent back to his house by her family. After many years and several attempts, she took the initiative to escape to another city, leav-

ing her children to her parents. In this period, she started a relationship with a woman: she did not feel the need to find a definition for her sexual orientation, but it led her to recollect and interpret feelings she had experienced since adolescence. Unfortunately, a few years later the husband traced her and in the same period her partner's parents discovered the relationship between the two women, and the situation became seriously dangerous for her. She escaped to Italy with a tourist visa, thanks to a family member who was already living there. When she arrived, this relative asked her to prostitute herself in order to pay the expenses of the travel and the family-related permit of stay that would be requested, as well as for other debts dating years back.

At that point, Abena escaped once again and was referred by an association to a lawyer who suggested her to apply for asylum. In the formalisation of international protection,[19] the lawyer registered a form of vulnerability related to the violence incurred, that implied a priority hearing at the Territorial Commission. Simultaneously, the lawyer also referred the case to the antitrafficking project, that started the evaluation of Abena's experience of trafficking and exploitation.

The collection of Abena's narration and the reconstruction of her experience was a long process, given the complexity of her story. Her asylum request is based on three interrelated claims: domestic violence (including forced marriage and intimate partner violence), human trafficking and sexual orientation. On the one hand, it was indeed challenging to explore and document the specific tradition of forced marriage in her country of origin[20] as well as the interconnection of the forms of gender-based violence and her recruitment, on the other hand her experience of trafficking was unusual and not connected to the most known routes and criminal networks. Nevertheless, the antitrafficking operators recognised a very present risk of exploitation and offered her protection in the project's shelters.

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19   That consists in filling the so-called C3 form, that includes personal data, other background and migratory information and the possibility of declaring 'specific needs' or being identified as 'vulnerable person', as defined in a non-exhaustive list in Law Decree 140/05, transposition of EU Directive 2003/9: "minors, disabled persons, elderly persons, pregnant women, single parents with minor children, persons for whom it has been ascertained that they have undergone torture, rape or other forms of serious psychological, physical or sexual violence". The form is filled in *Questura* and transmitted through VESTANET system (the informatic system and case database managed by Ministry of Interior) to the Territorial Commission, that subsequently summons the asylum seeker for the hearing. The possibility of (self-) identifying a person with specific needs is meant to have consequences in the access to specific shelters and to a prioritised and faster procedure of assessment of international protection.

20   This tradition has been documented, by socio-legal operators, with COI (Country of Origin information). For more information on COI see https://easo.europa.eu/information-analysis/country-origin-information#:~:text=Country%20of%20Origin%20Information%20(COI,in%20the%20field%20of%20asylum.

When dealing with the regularisation processes, after the meeting with the socio-legal operators who informed her about the two non-exclusive options of Art. 18 and the international protection, Abena clearly recognised herself in the definition of refugee, since she was aware of the impossibility of going back to her country, as well as the risk of forced marriage also for her daughter and a need for a permit that could facilitate family reunion. Moreover, she knew she would never report the relative who trafficked her to Italy and, even though informed about the possibility to receive Art. 18 even without collaborating with judicial authorities, she decided to proceed exclusively with her asylum request.

The operators and Abena, thus, asked the Territorial Commission to postpone the interview, in order to continue the evaluation process and avoid to the Commission the need for the referral procedure for potential victims of human trafficking, which includes suspending the interview and summoning the woman a second time. Within the complexity of the events Abena was narrating, the claim related to the sexual orientation was a challenging issue in the asylum procedure. As Carnassale (2020, 191) clearly exposes in his works, it is often difficult to legitimise claims of asylum seekers related to sexual orientation or gender identity, as it is difficult to recognise and it is easier to misunderstand their experiences and discourses. Abena told the operators that the lawyer who helped her formalising her asylum request, had suggested her to see a psychologist who could declare whether her homosexuality was innate or if it was related to the violence she had experienced. Once contacted, the lawyer confirmed her suggestion on the method to support the authenticity of a claim that is difficult to prove, and on the usefulness of a document issued by an Italian mental health professional. Abena, anyhow, did not follow the lawyer's suggestion nor the operators who took charge of her regularisation agreed it was appropriate. Presenting a document that could be ambiguous, as it can be read as an attempt to certify something that cannot be certified and objective, risks to distract from the person's first-hand narration. In fact, the grounding expression, contained in the Geneva Convention, that relates the refugee status to a 'well-founded fear' of return, stresses the importance of the subjective perception of the risk of persecution, within an objective context. Eventually Abena showed, during the meetings preceding the interview, to understand the context in which she would have to retell her story, the need of the Commission to understand elements related to persecution and the importance of narrating both events of sufferance and romantic moments with her lover. Her narration was clearly expressing her fear of return, with its subjectivity and referring to elements that could be found in renowned international reports on the country's context, and no written document regarding her sexual orientation was eventually presented.

On the day of the audition, Abena managed to position herself with the subjects who were present from the first moments. The explanation of the rights of asylum seekers and of the procedures was conveyed by the interpreter, without the presence of the member of the Commission, based on a written summary prepared for the purpose. While listing the reasons for persecution that fall within the refugee definition, the interpreter added that domestic violence is not included: Abena specified that she experienced domestic violence and that her story cannot be understood without that element, and the interpreter amended and told her to "tell everything". The interview proceeded in the presence of the official, Abena answered the initial general questions and then narrated her story starting from her childhood until the present days. The interview lasted six hours, during which Abena refused to take breaks. Responding the initial questions on the composition of her family, while naming her children Abena started crying and she continued during the whole interview. In a particularly sensitive part of her free narration of her vicissitudes, the functionary told Abena that she did not need to go into details, that could have been asked later if necessary, but Abena answered that she was willing to explain everything she went through if that could help her release from her burden. Eventually in the evening, after Abena had explained chronologically the events, giving elements sustaining all the three claims but at the same time exposing all the present actors to her sufferance, the interview was closed.

A few months later, Abena received a notice from the Commission which was not the decision on her asylum request: she was summoned for a second interview. According to the procedures related to credibility assessment, as was explained later to the operator by members of the Commission, the asylum seeker's narration had to be evaluated according to its external credibility (in relation to reports by international organisations or by specialised institutions) and its internal consistency.[21] The latter should be evaluated in two ways: in the free narration and through the responses to specific questions. In the first meeting with the Territorial Commission, only her own narration had been collected, so the members intended to ask her specific questions. During the second interview, conducted by a different official and with a different interpreter, Abena was asked questions related only to one of the claims, as the refugee status can be based also on a single claim. In particular, the Commission explained that they intended to explore the context of domestic violence within which, several years earlier, Abena had committed the crime against her husband, to understand

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[21] See https://www.unhcr.org/51a8a08a9.pdf.

if it could be considered an exclusion clause for the refugee status.[22] The official, hence, asked details about particularly violent events that were impressed in her memory, about the effects on the children who had witnessed, and about her suicidal thoughts. She also asked about the miscarriages that she had as consequences of her husband's attacks, how she realised that she was having a miscarriage and what concretely she saw. The exposure of the violence experienced by Abena turned, during the two interviews, into further violence.

All the actors present during the two interviews expressed, in different manners, the pain of witnessing the suffering and the second interpreter, a man, apologised for his difficulties in translating, explaining that he was aghast, not being used to hearing such stories. Abena showed, all along the process, different reactions. After narrating her experience with the anti-trafficking operators, exposing it in the Commission for the first time was for her an exhausting experience, but she saw it as an opportunity of freeing herself once and for all, thus giving a personal meaning to the procedure and re-signifying the setting. When she was summoned a second time, though, she considered also other difficulties she was having with housing and work, feeling that bigger things were beyond her control and, no matter how hard she tried, she was powerless. Also, she perceived being considered 'non-credible' as a violence and this lead to a negotiation by the socio-legal operators and the cultural mediators that took charge of the regularisation process and accompanied her along it. The operators, indeed, were aware that these credibility assessment procedures were a form of trauma implementation and re-victimisation for Abena, and they had to position themselves between informing her of the actual possibilities of a refugee status she would be granted by going through it and legitimising a violent act.

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22 The exclusion clauses are carefully enumerated in the 1951 Convention, and describe those situations in which persons who fulfil the positive requirements of recognition as refugees are nonetheless constrained from being recognised as such, by reason of serious transgressions committed, in principle, prior to seeking asylum. The primary purposes of these exclusion clauses are to deprive the perpetrators of heinous acts and serious common crimes of such protection, and to safeguard the receiving country from criminals who present a danger to that country's security. Art. 1F of the 1951 Convention specifies the categories of excludable acts and crimes: crimes against peace, war crimes and crimes against humanity, serious non-political crimes, and acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations. These acts may include: genocide, murder, enslavement, extermination, torture and persecution committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack against any civilian population on national, political, ethnic, religious or racial grounds. See `https://www.unhcr.org/publications/legal/3f7d48514/guidelines-international-protection-5-application-exclusion-clauses-article.html`.

6 Conclusions

The migrant trajectories of Gladys and Abena are marred by a spiral of violence experienced in different relational contexts, located in the countries of origin, transit and arrival. Domestic violence, genital mutilation, forced marriage, persecution because of sexual orientation, trafficking, and sexual exploitation have slowly emerged and become explicit in front of all the actors involved in the evaluation process of their asylum request. At the same time, while the multiple dimensions of their experiences of violence (Speed 2014; 2016) became increasingly clear, their political and juridical recognition was not completely defined, when the late identification of the indicators of violence – included the ones related to trafficking and sexual exploitation – hampered the access to the refugee status. Other forms of violence, in their stories, are less visible and explicit: the economic one, that makes them dependant from violent men in their country of origin, from whom they both managed to escape, after some attempts, only by relying on traffickers, and the violence – as it was perceived by the women themselves – resulting from the long processes of evaluation of their asylum request. The condition of uncertainty produced by the bureaucratic timing in the evaluation process (Caroselli, forthcoming), the perception of being considered 'non-credible' and the repeated narration of biographical painful experiences, several times and to several different actors, were difficult to sustain for the two women. In the case of forced migrant women victims of trafficking, the timing and the actors that may come into play are, indeed, multiplied, since several institutions and specialised operators are called to analyse biographical experiences and identify indicators of trafficking and the actual risk of exploitation. In this complex framework, the adhesion of Abena and Gladys to the regularisation path or to the inclusion programmes proposed by operators was not to be taken for granted: their agency, indeed, emerged in autonomous and unexpected ways (Pinelli 2019), which included also the refusal of the juridical logics and the empowerment strategies proposed by operators and institutions, and the decision to prefer to embody the role of 'mother' and 'wife', as an alternative to being the 'beneficiary' or 'asylum-seeker'. Their choices, in our perspective, must be collocated in continuity with their continuous positioning, all along their stories of migration, acted in relation to exploitation networks, but also to institutional actors. As they were able to negotiate a space of action within trafficking networks and violent relationships, similarly they evaluate what was convenient and sustainable for them, within the strict path of the regularisation processes and of the local socioeconomic structures. As feminist scholars stressed, women's agency does not necessarily follow the 'Western-based' idea of female emancipation (Abu-Lughod 1993; Mahmood 2001).

Going back, in conclusion, to the intersection of antitrafficking and asylum field, we have seen how several institutional actors, such as Territorial Commissions, *Questura*, lawyers and judges, may come into play, with different perspective and competences, and the strong impact of their action on women's life trajectories, and future perspectives. Although the cooperation and the dialogue among all these actors has been reinforced, also with the tool of the National Referral Mechanism, there is still room to improve and to share methodological strategies, especially in this a socio-historical moment characterised by increasing exclusionary practices of national policies (Della Puppa, Sanò 2020, Della Puppa et al. 2020; Gargiulo 2017) and by fragility of antitrafficking programmes (GRETA 2019). As stressed by several experts, this cooperation should be oriented to favour the early (self-) identification of victims of trafficking among forced migrant's flows – in order to prevent exploitation and effectively contrast criminal network. Nevertheless, strengthening cooperation among the systems requires also taking into due consideration the intersections of different dimensions of violence, vulnerabilities and disadvantages – included the economic ones – when building a relation with women and when evaluating their credibility and trafficking indicators. From this perspective, we agree with scholars that stress the importance of the concept of intersectionality – as an approach that may point to the intersection between race, gender and social class, but also age, sexual orientation and disability, in individual experiences – at the operational level, thus adopted by the whole spectrum of professionals cooperating in support of women exposed to persecution, violence and exploitation (Degani, De Stefani 2020), as well as in their identification and evaluation as victims of trafficking and refugees. But we also believe that this effort of disseminating an intersectional approach at operating level should be accompanied by the recognition of the lived hierarchical and power relationships between forced migrants, operators and institutions involved in these fields. Power hierarchies should be, indeed, systematically considered and deconstructed in the process of self-reflexivity of all these actors, starting from operators of the asylum structures and antitrafficking programmes and socio-legal operators, that appear as those who are in the position to mediate the needs of all these actors, maintaining the focus on the women's past and present lived experiences, as well as on their aspirations for the future.

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The Capability of 'Models' to Withstand Change
The Bologna Area in the Wake of Law 132/2018

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Abstract   This essay aims to reflect about the impact of the recent Italian Law 132/2018 and its effects on the reception policies for asylum seekers in the area of the Metropolitan City of Bologna. Starting to the fact that the system of developed in Bologna is considered a model of excellence, this contribution aims to examine its ability to deal the erosion of rights for asylum seekers provided by recent legislation. Will the integrated territorial system of reception and services react to the restrictions in access and protection imposed by Law 132/2018? The contribution is intended to give back the evolutions of the territorial system, trying to bring out the ambiguities and the founding causes of the criticalities that have become structural. Is it appropriate to speak of a model? If so, with what risks arising from the bureaucratic action that characterises the system at the apical level? A last paragraph will also be dedicated to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the territorial reception system, having affected the dynamics exposed in the essay.

Keywords   Reception system. Fundamental rights. Asylum seekers. Welfare. Model. Bologna area. Law 132/2018. COVID-19.

Summary   1 Introduction. – 2 A Critical Analysis of Law 132/2018. – 3 The Origins of the 'Bologna Model'. – 4 The Bologna Model and the Impact of Law 132/2018: A Real 'Crash Test'. – 5 The 'Model' Narrative under a Magnifying Glass, i.e. the Creation of Structural Weaknesses. – 6 And Now? Blessed COVID vs. Damned COVID.

1 Introduction

Will the system survive? This was the question circulating among social services workers in the Bologna area in the autumn of 2018, when the so-called 'Security Decree' was announced.[1] Everyone who had experienced/enacted/managed/endured the reception system in whatever way wondered how the new legislation would impact all the hard work carried out over the years to develop a reception system worthy of the name. The system for identifying and processing applicants for international protection has indeed been built slowly,[2] and constant legislative modifications[3] have made workers' unflagging efforts to meet European standards even more laborious. Not only has the system been subject to constant change, there are also deep-seated critical issues stemming from both older regulatory dictates[4] and improper interference by the Minister of Interior Salvini beginning as early as the beginning of the summer 2018.[5] The new legislation had been trumpeted[6] for months before becoming law. Professionals in the sector feared its pragmatic consequences because many knew it would represent the disintegration of the system and the erasure of all they had achieved over the last twenty years. The Metropolitan City of Bologna area, and the Emilia Romagna region in general, has gained recognition over time as a virtuous example of a reception system. Since 2012 the label 'Bologna model' has been

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1 Decree 113/2018 converted into Law 132/2018. For a detailed commentary on the modifications introduced by Law 132/2018, see https://www.asgi.it/decreto-immigrazione-sicurezza-1/. For a critical analysis see Masera 2019.

2 It was only in 2015, with Law 142, that Italy finished implementing the main revision rules set by the Common European Asylum System. Before this change, there was no real organic system in this field. For more information, see https://www.asgi.it/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Scheda-BREVE-recepimento-direttive-asilo_pubblicazione-sito_1-ottobre1.pdf.

3 Law 46/2017 proved to be particularly delicate in terms of recognition procedures, annulling applicants' second chance for appeal and allowing the possibility to replace a hearing before a judge with the video footage of the hearing before the Territorial Commission. For a critical analysis, see Gargiulo 2018.

4 The crime of illegal immigration, introduced by Law 94/2009, has always created problems from the point of view of implementing international protection legislation, undermining the possibility for applicants to access the status recognition procedure; in fact, the crime of illegal immigration triggers a short circuit resulting from the absence of documents to/from entry.

5 A Ministerial Circular dated 4 July 2018 was sent to the Territorial Commissions, asking them to issue fewer residence permits for humanitarian reasons; this represented serious interference by the Minister of the Interior in violation of the Commissions' independence.

6 Since issuing the circular on 4 July, the Minister of the Interior did not miss any chance to threaten the system with an imminent change in the direction of greater restrictions; the term 'trumpeted' is intended to underline the Minister's usual style of communication.

used to emphasise this system's success in setting up a reception system whose elements are distributed throughout the area and ready to implement integrated projects together with various local actors and service providers.

In an attempt to answer the opening question, this chapter maps a part of the (ongoing) process of constructing/demolishing/reorganising the reception system for international protection applicants in the Municipality of Bologna area according to the precepts of Law 132/2018.

To do so, my discussion is organised into four parts: the first focuses on the most salient and problematic aspects of the new legislation while the second is dedicated to charting the evolution of the Bologna area reception system, focusing on the specific characteristics that have distinguished it as a model. In the third section, I try to outline the material impact of Law 132/2018, considering both the effectiveness and the efficiency of the local reception system.[7] The fourth section offers a critical reflection on the concept of 'model' in view of the ambiguities that continue to appear in the local area.[8] Given how seriously the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the reception system, I also offer a concluding section outlining its most critical repercussions in the Bologna area in the initial emergency period (up to June 2020).

The reflections presented in this chapter derive from long-term ethnographic research[9] focused on the protection of the fundamental rights of international protection applicants in the Emilia Romagna region.

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[7] I evaluate the concrete impact of the legislation by problematising four intertwined facts, identified as central in the local process: the impossibility for international protection applicants to be listed in the municipality's registry lists, the history of the Mattei Centre, the behaviour of the managing organisations in relation to the new tender conditions, and the historical link between civil society and workers in the reception system.

[8] It should be noted that, even at the moment of writing (end of June 2020), the overall impact of the new law cannot really be quantified because some processes are still ongoing. First among these is the definitive exclusion international protection applicants categorised as 'ordinary', without vulnerability indexes, from reception programmes. Furthermore, the COVID-19 emergency has 'frozen' the situation, having extended the deadline for reception projects (originally set for 30 June) to 31 December 2020.

[9] The research started in 2010 and is still ongoing. This chapter has been updated to June 2020. Given length limits I cannot fully specify all the steps and turning points in this research, but I will outline the main methodological lines. The analysis was based on daily ethnography, semi-structured interviews, informal dialogues, document ethnography, and interviews with privileged informants working in the reception and territorial protection system in various roles, as well as a long-term diary as an active member (Adler 1991) of the system from August 2009 to March 2015.

2   A Critical Analysis of Law 132/2018

Much has already been written about Law Decree 113/2018.[10] To avoid unnecessary repetition, I intend to address the most salient aspects of Law 132/2018 through an analysis of the October 2018 hearings in the Senate. In the process of converting the legislative decree into law, the chambers were inundated with hundreds of amendment requests. 'Trepidation', 'illegitimacy', 'unconstitutionality', 'inadequacy', 'instrumentality' and 'unreasonableness' were the terms most used by the organisations trying to intervene in the debate[11] in an effort to field arguments to support these requests by concerned parties. On the basis of specific data and experience, all of the experts and organisations involved in the discussion asked lawmakers to 'rewind' the process and 'reassess' the draft legislation before its final conversion into law. However poorly and hastily framed and written,[12] the proposed package of rules was sure to be extremely effective in impacting the material conditions of existence of all the people seeking international protection and hosted by the reception system more generally. And such implications were not limited to the individuals directly addressed by the legislation; they were much further-ranging, beginning from the contradictory – almost oxymoronic – relationship between the declared objectives of the new legislation and the real effects it would produce. The new rules denied applicants for international protection access to reception services, limiting their chancing of obtaining any form of status recognition while at the same time reducing their capacity to claim fundamental rights;[13] in so doing, the law allowed the Minister of Interior

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10   See the articles (in particular since 2018) in *Questione Giustizia* and *Diritto, Immigrazione e Cittadinanza* available, respectively, at: https://www.questionegiustizia.it/riviste; https://www.dirittoimmigrazionecittadinanza.it/. See also Santoro 2018; Omizzolo 2019; Amnesty 2019.

11   My discussion here covers the hearings of 15, 16, 17 October 2018. These were attended not only by professors from various universities, with experience in this field, a representative of ISTAT, the Prefects, the President of the Prevention Measures of the Court of Rome, and the Police Union, but also by third-sector and private social organisations, specifically Ciak-Parma, the Asylum Table (which brings together 20 organisations), UNHCR, IOM, ARCI, the Community of Sant'Egidio, Oxfam, UNICEF, Emergency, ANCI, Caritas, Centro Astalli, Acli, CILD, Libera and the National Coordination of Welcoming Communities.

12   As many observers have pointed out, there were no grounds to justify an urgent decree (Articles 72 and 77 of the Constitution), unless the aim was to circumvent the democratic discussion guaranteed by the ordinary legislative process.

13   Space limitations prevent me from commenting in detail on all the changes introduced by the new law but, for the purposes of my argument here, it is worth pointing out the main ones that have affected the reception system indirectly (accelerated border procedures; the list of safe third countries; the abrogation of the permit for humanitarian reasons) and directly (banning international protection applicants from being

to grant form to the 'immigrant problem', materially constructing it as a privileged vehicle for his relentless pursuit of electoral support. The application of his proposed law would create enormous pockets of irregularity, both in migrants' status (thus condemning them to invisibility) and in the operation of a separate, extraordinary channel of reception, exempt from the regular system's reporting, monitoring and standards.

Indeed, such illegality and unconstitutionality were immediately apparent in Art. 5, c. 6 of Legislative Decree 286/98, whose abrogation of certain procedures violated Articles 2, 10 and 117 of the Italian Constitution,[14] thus paving the way for a significant increase in appeals (potentially at the European level as well). In addition to the direct attack on constitutional Article 10, therefore, the proposed law also dismantled the SPRAR system of decentralised reception – replacing it with SIPROIMI[15] – in favour of large centres[15] and direct allocation,[16] with new tender contracts[17] in which fewer resources were allocated to integration activities. What most worried social workers, however, was the measure excluding those applicants for protection defined as 'ordinary' (i.e., not vulnerable or belonging to categories attributed additional protection). This exclusion would eliminate the opportunity to take preventive action by identifying and dealing with various kinds of problems.[18] At the local level, pro-

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processed in the dedicated structures, with these latter restricted to status holders and minors; cancelling automatic registration for protection applicants, with the result that they cannot access local social and health services).

14   These are the articles of the Constitutional Charter specifying the obligation to recognise the inviolable rights of man (both as an individual and in social collectivities) and that internal rules must comply with those of generally recognised international law, specifying that the legal condition of foreigners is regulated by law in accordance with international rules and treaties and, finally, the binding nature of the Charter itself as a primary legal source.

15   Which are not obliged to meet minimum standards of quality and economic transparency, contrary to Directive 2013/33/EU.

16   With direct assignment, i.e., without dedicated calls for tenders, it is no longer possible to assess the managing body's ability and preparedness to implement suitable projects.

17   See Virzì 2017 for an analysis of the critical structural issues of the new tendering procedures for awarding reception service provision contracts.

18   There is not enough space here to examine in detail the importance of preventive-type reception projects; however, it is important to underline that the eliminating reception for ordinary protection applicants precludes the protection of many migrants during the extremely lengthy waits for the status recognition procedure and makes it impossible to identify physical and psychological injuries resulting from the migratory journey. Moreover, it makes it impossible to recognise types of vulnerability other than those categorised and, potentially, any conditions that might become worthy of some form of legal protection not included in the two cases of international protection narrowly defined (political refuge, subsidiary protection). In short, this move represented an attempt at invisibilisation with important implications for the protection of the primary, fundamental rights of all individuals.

posed Article 12 eliminating the automatic registration of asylum seekers in the municipal population register constituted a further attack on the system's ability to protect and care for asylum seekers.[19] What might seem to be nothing but 'bureaucratic nonsense' actually represents a channel of unwarranted discrimination in violation of Article 3 of the Italian Constitution[20] in that it obstructs applicants in the local area from exercising their fundamental rights, *in primis* the right to health. Additional elements, such as the prevalence of a logic of detention (with doubled durations) and the implementation of accelerated procedures at the border together with restrictions on access to the reception system, reveal the legislator's underlying rationale: that most applications for international protection are instrumental and manifestly baseless, and therefore that most of the people seeking international protection are 'fake refugees', economic migrants not worthy of recognition or, consequently, of protection and reception.

Law 132/2018 is the second-to-last act (followed by Law Decree 53/2019, the law approved by the Senate on 5 August 2019) in the *suspicious regulatory interventionism* that has characterised the management of the migration phenomenon from the beginning.[21] Even while replicating the rationality characterising the specific legislation in this field through deep continuity with the past,[22] it is unique in its capacity to profoundly erode the current rule of law, operat-

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19 Although the research is updated to June 2020, it is necessary to insert an episode that occurred immediately after writing. The Press Office of the Constitutional Court issued a communication on 9 July 2020 pronouncing the Law Decree 53/2019 article relating to municipality registration unconstitutional, for two reasons: its intrinsic irrationality, in that the norm in question does not facilitate the pursuit of local surveillance and safety that is the declared purpose of the security decree; and unreasonable disparity of treatment, since it makes it unjustifiably more difficult for asylum seekers to access services that are also guaranteed to them. The press release is available at http://images.go.wolterskluwer.com/Web/WoltersKluwer/%7Bb301c170-810e-42c3-9f20-318e7caca314%7D_corte-costituzionale-comunicato-9-luglio-2020.pdf. In the near future, it remains to be seen if municipalities will bring their daily practice into line with this verdict (in particular for applications rejected before the Court's decision).

20 "All citizens have equal social dignity and are equal before the law, without distinction of sex, race, language, religion, political opinions, personal and social conditions".

21 For a detailed mapping of the legislation and policies implemented since 1989, see Giovannetti, Zorzella 2020.

22 There is an interesting tendency to focus on clearly problematic norms while obscuring the precedents that have enabled them to appear legitimate. While the reforms introduced by Law 189/2002 are easy to critique, it is more difficult to identify the many counterproductive elements that were already included in the first single text of 1998, Law 40/1998. It is as if only the tip of the iceberg was visible, while its foundations and the enormous layer of ice below the water level remained invisible. In the same way, immediately – even before its conversion into law – the distortions introduced by Law Decrees 113/2018 and 53/2019 were found, but it was hard to admit that many of the processes exasperated by the former Minister of Interior had been released by previous regulations, *in primis* the Law 46/2017 and the Memorandum with Libya dated 2017.

ing almost impertinently, brazenly, to consolidate stereotypes and criminalising imagery and, in so doing, producing widespread social insecurity.[23]

The new law has indeed displayed impressive operational and strategic efficacy in its ability to take certain distortions of thought and forms of inefficiency (chaos, professional leeway, differential treatment, stereotypes, acceleration, and securitisation) and render them systemic. Specifically, the proposed legislation undermines a clearly subjective right – recognised, not granted, by the law – by legitimising practices that prevent workers from meeting obligations set forth by primary legal sources.[24] In so doing, it would destroy the reception system as it had been created over the years. As the various interlocutors speaking at a Chamber of Deputies hearing in October 2018 pointed out, the new law would have weakened the system's capacity to safeguard applicants for international protection in terms of both recognition and reception, with serious repercussions for everyone involved, workers and migrants alike.

The concern shared by the organisations called to participate in the hearings thus became 'fear' and 'profound anxiety'[25] for those enacting the system on an everyday basis. In the next section I will try to describe the evolution of the Bologna area reception system and then the impact – not yet complete – of Law 132/2018 on this system.

3 The Origins of the 'Bologna Model'

In recent years the term 'Bologna model' has been used to indicate the reception system for international protection applicants developed in the Bologna metropolitan area, a system characterised by small-scale centres spread out throughout the territory and the integration of services with their respective institutional and social providers so as to implement projects ensuring the effective and efficient care of migrants.

Before reflecting critically on the underlying pitfalls of the model concept as a paradigm of action and basis for evaluating projects, it makes sense to first chart the stages through which the Bolognese

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23 Openpolis uses the formula 'safety of exclusion' in two 2019 reports (Openpolis 2019a; 2019b).

24 Mainly undermining constitutional guarantees, and in particular those established in Legislative Decree 142/2015, which adopts European directives. A particularly controversial issue is the introduction of safe third countries which, although provided for by European legislation, changes the burden of proof for the applicant.

25 Terms used by lawyers and sector professionals in informal conversations in the period running up to the introduction of the new law.

system evolved up to the approval of Law 132/2018, contextualising it in relation to the wider regional context. i would like to clarify, however, that the critical analyses proposed here are not intended in any way to disrespect all those whose daily work of managing institutions and social work professionals has engaged in tackling critical issues in the effort to ensure a high quality service. Rather, my humble intention is to 'support' this work of uncovering the system's weaknesses, critical points that affect its participants personally. In fact, although some management and planning systems have been created in recent years that deserve the status of models, I seek to show that, alongside these, there are others that have benefited from this overall definition without really deserving it. As will become clear in the course of this chapter, I also propose to focus on the structural weaknesses that prevent, or at least hamper, the creation of models in the full sense of the term.

Like the national asylum system that grew out of activity in the voluntary sector after the 1990s crisis generated by the Yugoslav wars, the regional system of protection for international protection applicants developed gradually and spontaneously. It was only the physical presence of migrants with different legal statuses[26] that drove the local government to take care of them. In the first years of 2000 when the national system took its first steps,[27] dedicated networks and services began to develop in the regional area, particularly Parma, Ravenna[28] and Bologna. These were mostly voluntary projects launched by religious and secular organisations, as well as migrant communities themselves.

Increasingly structured services began to develop[29] in keeping with the *modus operandi* typical of the region, namely social cooperatives dedicated to safeguarding disadvantaged people working alongside the charitable organisations – usually religious – that nor-

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26 Coordinated projects by voluntary organisations and dedicated services were launched in the region in keeping with the earliest rules regulating the stay of non-citizens in the local territory. In fact, although diverse migratory flows had been coming into the region, and its bigger cities in particular, since the Seventies, it was only in the Nineties that dedicated programmes for asylum seekers were established. These were mostly run by religious organisations, Caritas in particular.

27 The first National Asylum Plan is dated 2001. The following year, SPRAR (Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees) was created, with 2,500 ordinary places (gradually reaching 3,000 by 2012). Following the 'North Africa Emergency' in 2010, 25,000 further places were set up.

28 For a critical analysis of the reception system developed in the Ravenna area, see Sorgoni 2011.

29 Services have always arisen in response, sometimes belated, to the problems of everyday life. For a detailed mapping of the system's history and changes over time, please refer to the annual reports produced by the SPRAR-SIPROIMI system, available at https://www.sprar.it/.

mally provided services for migrants.

These services, created to compensate for the yawning gaps in public welfare services coverage (mental health, disability, social exclusion), have helped to reinforce the role of private social sector actors as dedicated service providers and boosted their institutionalisation.[30]

With the beginning of the new millennium, professionals in this sector developed a new awareness of the importance of service quality. They realised they had to break with the humanitarian logic of 'doing good regardless of skill level'[31] and become specialised services instead. This transition was actually rather complex and littered with obstacles, many of which have yet to be fully overcome.[32] One of the first of these was the difficulty of having work in the field of reception recognised as a skilled profession, and indeed this process remains incomplete. Nonetheless, this transition paved the way for the development of increasingly well-informed and competent services with the competencies to implement dedicated projects at higher and higher levels. Another noteworthy aspect of the recent historical process is the regional choice to develop integrated services rather than investing in dedicated services. A diverse array of skills can be embedded in these integrated services so as to meet the needs of a 'multicultural' population of residents and thereby prevent such programmes from being ghettoised and stigmatised as 'second-class' services. It was in this context that the foundations of today's system were laid in the early 2000s.

The current integrated system (SPRAR) was institutionalised in

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30　What Donati (2001) has defined as a welfare mix has developed in the local area, i.e., an interrelation among different service providers: public, private and third sector.

31　This was the mantra of the early 2000s among services for migrants, a sort of 'anyway, it's better than nothing' logic. This way of thinking stalled the technical improvements needed to produce competent and appropriate projects.

32　I remember that in 2004, during a meeting of the work group coordinating local welfare programmes (in which I took part, as I was carrying out Voluntary Civil Service in my municipality of residence under the auspices of Caritas), there were two main kinds of actors chosen as migrant services providers: either recently-established institutional actors that had never dealt with the phenomenon before, or – almost punitively – organisations that had previously made mistakes in their respective sectors of structured services. In general, specific projects for migrants were perceived as thorny problems or even sources of 'disturbance'. This logic of playing to the lowest common denominator in entrusting services and planning affected the development of many organisation that have become important players in the services for non-citizens sector over the years. These were years of improvisation, dominated by the need to 'plug the holes'; more or less anything was fine, and the most important consideration was doing something (not the quality of the service). Immanence and contingency have always dictated the evolutionary processes of service structuring. However, the area of migrant services shows even more clearly that, even with the best of intentions, providers without adequate training and the right motivations run a high risk of making mistakes and causing damage in the long term (forming what could be called 'system failures' or 'structural weaknesses').

2004 through the "Memorandum of Understanding on Asylum Seekers and Refugees" aimed at setting up qualified and widely distributed reception services, thus facilitating access to local welfare systems. The first example of a structured network was the *Emilia Romagna terra d'asilo* (Emilia Romagna land of asylum) project launched in 2005, coordinated until 2009 by the Province of Parma and then by the region. In 2011, following the so-called 'North Africa Emergency',[33] policymakers drafted the "Pact for the reception of applicants for international protection in Emilia Romagna" in an effort to move beyond the prevailing logic of emergency response and safeguard fundamental rights.[34] Finally, the SPRAR project was activated in 2017 by the Metropolitan City of Bologna. By coordinating with Bologna ASP and third sector partners, SPRAR has generated synergies between the reception system and other services in the area while also providing dedicated services.[35] Following this reformulation and reallocation of management responsibilities,[36] the region also set up additional specific programmes for the protection of vulnerable subjects: Start-ER, SPRAR DM-DS,[37] and a service for unaccompanied minors. The goal was to create an integrated network capable of jointly administering projects, so as to use a multidisciplinary approach to identify situations of vulnerability while still at an early stage and thus match up services with users in a way that was tailored to their specificities and needs.

This goal of establishing an integrated system was reaffirmed on 20 May 2019 through an agreement between the Emilia Romagna Region and ANCI[38] subsequently adopted via Regional Council res-

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33 For more information on the impact of the so-called 'North Africa Emergency' created by the Arab Spring events on the local reception system, see https://www.cittametropolitana.bo.it/sanitasociale/Engine/RAServeFile.php/f/Documenti/DossierENAcompleto.pdf.

34 Between 2011 and 2012, following the Arab Spring and war in Libya, the number of migrants crossing via the Mediterranean route started to increase substantially. Only after this significant change – significant both quantitatively, in terms of the size of the flows, and qualitatively, in terms of their mixed composition – planners began to set up the system at the regional level.

35 The Bologna metropolitan SPRAR project aims to continue the strategy of integrated reception through programmes co-designed by institutions, public authorities, the private social sector and local communities.

36 For instance transferring the good practices enacted in individual local areas to render them systemic, i.e., practised at the regional level, thus extending beyond the capacity of individual municipalities and provinces.

37 Start-ER is the acronym for the project *Salute Tutela e Accoglienza per Richiedenti e Titolari di Protezione Internazionale in Emilia Romagna* (Health Protection and Reception for Applicants and International Protection Beneficiaries in Emilia Romagna) launched in 2017; SPRAR DM-DS is the acronym for the project dedicated to asylum seekers with mental or physical health issues, launched in 2018.

38 Acronym for the 'National Association of Italian Municipalities'.

olution no. 812.[39] This agreement laid out experimental actions that would be taken to improve the quality and efficiency of the reception and integration system for applicants and beneficiaries of international and humanitarian protection. The last key step in this process of structuring the system at the regional level was the accreditation of *Centri di Accoglienza Straordinaria* (CAS, 'Extraordinary Reception Centres') centres within SPRAR. This accreditation began in 2017 in conjunction with the birth of the metropolitan SPRAR (what has been called the 'SPRARisation process'). The aim of this move was to raise the level of reception provided regardless of the type of reception officially recognised to the managing organisation: even a small, extraordinary centre could provide widespread reception by reproducing the standards of the SPRAR system in terms of management and project implementation.[40]

Thanks to this process of erecting and organising services laboriously carried out over the years, it has become more and more common to use the label 'Bologna model' to indicate integrated, mutually reinforcing activity on the part of institutions and managing agencies, two actors that are theoretically indistinguishable from the point of view of their objectives.

The Mattei Centre (informally referred to as 'il Mattei') also played fundamental role in this historical process as one of the first reception centres; indeed, this institutional space can be considered a functional (or dysfunctional?) lynchpin in the development of the entire regional reception system.

The centre's institutional status and function have changed over the years, but its appearance remains the same: the former Chiarini barracks in the San Vitale neighbourhood on the outskirts of the city were identified in 1999 as a suitable place for creating a Temporary Residence Centre for irregular migrants awaiting expulsion. In 2000, management of the centre passed from the Municipality of Bologna to the region, and the latter allocated funds to convert the former bar-

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39 The experimental project *Emilia Romagna terra d'asilo*, due to expire in December 2020, is aimed at both ensuring the technical coordination of SIPROIMI projects – including work tables on specific issues – and effective communication to spread good practices. It is also designed to monitor the impact of the regulatory changes.

40 This is not the place for an in-depth reflection on this aspect, but this point is interesting because it represents in itself a way of rethinking the classic emergency-response logic. In spite of the emergency conditions stemming from large numbers of clients in need, this *ex post* accreditation process shows that it is possible to provide a different type of reception services. The capacity to provide such services obviously depends in part on the organisation's experience and competence in dealing with the phenomenon and meeting people's needs, and represents a sort of innovative re-orientation in service provision beginning from an awareness of problematic elements (the structural weaknesses of large centres and their consequent failure to achieve set objectives).

racks into a CPTA[41] with room to serve just over 90 users. In January 2002, just before the renovation work was completed, a large group of activists burst in to the Mattei to dismantle the fixtures that had been installed, hoping that this protest might drive the institutions to realise that the space, more similar to a prison than a temporary accommodation centre, was not suitable for detaining migrants.[42] This direct action delayed the opening of the centre by a few months; it ended up opening in May 2002 but from the beginning it garnered criticism for its massive and sweeping violations of the fundamental rights of its detainees.[43] Over the years, several protests have targeted this facility.[44] In the meantime, it has been converted into an Identification and Expulsion Centre. The centre was closed in 2013, but reopened in July 2014 as a regional HUB for 'sorting' applicants for international protection.[45] In an attempt to adhere to the narrative of the Bologna model and thus create a space of first-stage reception, the centre in its function as a HUB is represented – and in part reconfigured in practice – as capable of overcoming the problems stemming from the physical structure of the facility; it is therefore framed as a 'good centre' despite the structural logic of detention underlying its design and its large dimensions.[46] It could be said that centre's structural deficiencies have been compensated for by its functional purpose: a large, first-stage reception centre the existence of which allows planners to set up a second facility according to parameters of quality and efficiency. When the Law Decree 113/20218 came into force, therefore, the centre was run using practices conceived to rectify the negative image that had distinguished it for years.

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41 Acronym for 'Temporary Residence and Assistance Centres'.

42 https://www.bibliotecasalaborsa.it/cronologia/bologna/2002/assalto_al_cpt_di_via_mattei.

43 https://www.meltingpot.org/Bologna-Un-anno-dall-apertura-del-CPT-di-via-Mattei.html#.XqllrWgzbIU.

44 The main protests by external actors took place September 2004 and March 2007; protests carried out by internal actors, the detained migrants themselves, included a hunger strike in April 2005 as well as demonstrations and escape attempts in September 2010. For more information, see https://www.meltingpot.org/Bologna-Violata-la-zona-rossa-del-CPT-di-Via-Mattei.html#.XqlmhWgzbIU. The main focus of protests has been the conditions under which migrants were detained, primarily overcrowding, and a lack of respect for people in vulnerable situations, as well as violent repression by law enforcement (the most well-known is the police action that took place at the beginning of March 2003).

45 The centre in its 'new institutional form' was designed to accommodate a few hundred people, but in 2015 the number of detainees exceeded one thousand. Despite the change in the function of the facility, the problem of overcrowding in the centre has been worsening over the years and has always represented its main problem, together with the fact that the building is physically set up for control and detention rather than real reception.

46 http://www.givemeshelter.it/tag/centro-mattei/.

On Saturday 8 June 2019, however, something happened that was unthinkable for the Bologna area. It came as a surprise even though several closures of large reception centres had been carried out in various parts of the country in the previous weeks, closures that even caught the attention of mass-media daily news outlets. That morning in June, sector authorities were informed that the Mattei Centre was about to be shut down. The justification given for this closure was that the facility needed to be renovated, and so the 162 'guests' present at the time would be subjected to obligatory transfer.[47] In this case as well, however, civil society and reception system managing organisations spoke out in protest and were able to prevent the forced displacement of migrants, managing to preserve the continuity of the reception and integration projects that had been launched in the area.[48]

The story of the Mattei Centre thus speaks to resistance – on the part of civil society and actors in the local system – against state moves to shift the governance of migrants detained in the centre. This aspect is quite significant in that such local resistance has become a salient feature of the narrative on the 'Bologna model'. Such tension has never really evaporated over time; rather, actors have remained always vigilant and ready to point out potential problem areas. Indeed, the issues surrounding the Mattei Centre clashed with the institutional – but at the same time 'embodied' and consequently enacted by many participants – formula of *Emilia Romagna land of asylum*. The intertwined story of the Mattei Centre and the development of the local reception system seem to reveal a persistent ambivalence characteristic of the local area (ambivalence that can be seen clearly in the reforms imposed by Law 132/2018): inclusion and integration on the one hand, but confinement and detention (along with differential inclusion [Mezzadra 2007; Mezzadra, Brett 2013; Mezzadra, Neilson 2013] more generally) on the other, as I try to describe in the next section.

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[47] https://www.rivistailmulino.it/news/newsitem/index/Item/News:NEWS_ITEM:4781; https://www.cgilbo.it/2019/06/12/hub-mattei-cgil-bologna-bella-pagina-di-storia-fatta-di-solidarieta-e-integrazione.

[48] For the details of this case, see the chronological report written by 'Le lavoratrici e i lavoratori dell'accoglienza di Bologna' (The reception workers of Bologna), available at https://www.meltingpot.org/Bologna-Tra-lotta-e-accoglienza.html#.XrK-TpagzbIU. Only 35 people hosted in this centre have agreed to be transferred to the Caltanissetta centre.

4 The Bologna Model and the Impact of Law 132/2018: A Real 'Crash Test'

Before outlining the processes taking place in the region since the approval of Law 132/2018, it is appropriate to describe the context in which this reform was implemented. Indeed, the shifts introduced in 2017 by Law 46/2017 already generated a substantial local protest movement called 'Bologna Accoglie-Nessuno è illegale' (Bologna Welcomes-No one is illegal). As the events surrounding the Mattei Centre illustrate, civil society and reception system workers worked together more and more over the years to denounce the system's failures with an eye to improving it. On 27 May 2017, thousands of people marched to protest the security-oriented logics and racism of migration policies (the city of Bologna did not participate).[49] In 2017 critics of the system began to build bottom-up networks to resist the restrictive changes of Law 46/2017, and there networks have gained strength over time, especially after Law Decree 113/2018 was approved. In 2019 the protest group grew into a more institutional form and took on the name Rete Bologna Accoglie. In this latter form, the group organised a series of demonstrations in downtown Bologna (especially in front of the Prefecture) to protest cuts to the reception system.[50]

System workers and supporters knew that the 'structured' character of the Bologna system would allow it to hold up longer than others before breaking down.[51] However, they were also aware that pre-existing structural deficiencies,[52] together with the new rules, would seriously undermine the system's capacity to provide decent and effective services; in short, they feared that the 'model' might crumble and all the resistance they had been exercising 'from below' in their daily work be undercut.

In winter 2018-19, when I conducted a series of semi-structured

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[49] https://labasbo.org/2017/05/10/bologna-accoglie-no-one-is-illegal-marcia-per-laccoglienza/; https://labasbo.org/2017/05/29/marcia-no-one-is-illegal-a-bologna-stiamo-costruendo-una-strada-diversa-per-accogliere-tuttie/. The signatories and member associations participating in this call to protest are listed at http://www.tpo.bo.it/azioni/appello-alla-partecipazione-alla-marcia-del-27-maggio-per-una-bologna-accogliente-e-solidale/.

[50] For further information, see: https://www.redattoresociale.it/article/notiziario/migranti_le_proposte_della_rete_bologna_accoglie_per_condizioni_di_vita_dignitose_; https://www.edizionilalinea.it/nuovosito/it_it/intervista-rossella-vigneri/.

[51] This terminology was used by the coordinator of reception services for unaccompanied minors, part of the city of Bologna's international protection service, in an interview conducted 19 September 2018.

[52] "I think that the problem, the potential failure, is not having thought about a system and already designed it in a way that is universal for all Italians … the problem is that we do not have a real model" (Coordinator of a reception centre for women, interviewed on 6 December 2018).

interviews with various system professionals (coordinators, service providers, psychologists, lawyers, social workers) for research on vulnerability,[53] the sentiment pervading their accounts was "worry". They were palpably afraid of what effects the new law would have and especially its repercussions for clients considered more 'vulnerable': they expected these individuals to be thrust once again into a state of (institutional) invisibility.[54] The account of a coordinator of a SPRAR women's reception centre clearly convey the law's local impact for reception system workers:

> This is a job that you do, if you have a great passion, that is, you do it because you believe in what you do […] In my opinion, at this moment, workers are asking themselves 'what does this mean' and 'what will happen'? And what will happen to the relational work they have done, work in which they have invested so much competence, so much welcoming humanity.[55]

To understand this feeling of anxiety, we must consider the period when the law was passed: in this moment, the local system was already struggling with the elevated number of asylum seekers and their increasingly complex conditions.[56] Every innovative step forward to ensure solid and effective services had been taken laboriously from the bottom up, with workers struggling day after day to overcome the system's critical weaknesses. The fact that the Bologna area provided quality services, especially as compared to other local areas, meant that it had become an attractive destination for more and more users. This led to a system overload. "We pay the price of being good enough, because especially complex cases come to us because other local areas know that we try to do things right and we have a good network of services", explained the coordinator of a service for unaccompanied minors who I interviewed in September 2018. On one hand, the attractiveness of local services reflects

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53 See for instance Spada 2020 for the results of this research.

54 In offering services and projects that are effective in terms of their high standards, the main strong point of the local system was its ability to identify the most vulnerable individuals: "The local network has the ability to recognise an instance of vulnerability or condition of need … this ability allows us to do a good job. Of course, this does not mean that vulnerability increases due to the inability of the network; it is exactly the opposite. This ability shows that there is a network that knows exactly how to look and what for" (Coordinator of services for unaccompanied minors, interviewed on 19 September 2018).

55 Coordinator of a reception centre for women, interviewed on 6 December 2018.

56 See the report drawn up by InMigrazione, *Reception of refugees: an ordinary emergency of July 2017.* https://www.inmigrazione.it/it/dossier/accoglienza-rifugia-ti-unordinaria-emergenza. Here, the point of view of system workers is provided for the Emilia Romagna region as well.

positively on the Bologna-area system and reinforces its image as a model, as this attractiveness stems from the competence, developed over time, in dealing effectively with complexity. On the other hand, it was already a factor of stress even before the recent regulatory reform. The new law therefore struck the system at the exact moment when it was beginning to be more consolidated and – in some cases – to exceed the established minimum standards. Indeed, the main cause of anxiety among service providers was this potential of the new legislation to impact their possibilities for improvement.

The idea that emerged from my informal conversations with various figures in the regional reception system is that the new decree represented a point of no return. Before Law Decree 113/2018, workers saw a space of opportunity for acting from below to pursue forms of improvement. They felt they were able to 'act in the margins of possibility' to overcome system weaknesses, despite the difficulty.[57] After the introduction of the law, however, there was an awareness that this space had been drastically reduced. Some actors feared becoming involved in the process: for example, in the spring of 2019 several managing organisations ceased to participate in the calls for tenders.[58] The new regulations prevented or at least profoundly curtailed their ability to act appropriately, and it would have been impossible for them to go on offering services without undercutting the standards achieved locally in the last few years. "Accepting the new conditions would be taking a step backwards; they ask us to do things that do not correspond to the mandate, our role or the vision of the organisation. We will probably lose our jobs but we will be able to sleep at night. It is a joint struggle, we as workers pay together with the refugees… albeit to a different degree… for the impact of unjust laws that go against the protection of rights", one worker said in an informal conversation in February 2019. Many people involved in the reception system judged the new norms to fall below a minimum acceptable threshold, both legally and morally. Their consequent refusal to 'make a deal' became one of the main forms of resistance to the impact of the legislation.[59] Such acts of resistance therefore represented a new ingredient in the narrative of the 'Bologna model'. Despite everything, the model was trying to resist and not succumb to these

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57   For a critical analysis of the possibility of 'going beyond' and creating spaces for change from below, see the issue of *Antropologia Pubblica* available at the following link: https://riviste-clueb.online/index.php/anpub/issue/view/12.

58   https://www.redattoresociale.it/article/notiziario/accoglienza_bando_cas_quasi_deserto_a_bologna_una_sola_offerta.

59   Regarding this point, it should be stressed that not all managing organisations had true freedom of choice. In an informal conversation (8 May 2020) with a coordinator and social worker employed in services dedicated to vulnerable asylum seekers, she observed, "Who can afford the privilege of saying no?".

changes. Some actors were able to pose this kind of resistance (saying no to the new tender conditions because they were considered in violation of quality standards); for everyone else, anxiety reigned. People feared that the new law would frustrate their efforts and dismantle their relationships. The network they had built risked falling apart under this destructive pressure, and the repercussions of this dismantling were felt even before the new law took material effect: "there is a whole portion in which local authorities will be alone, in the sense that, in that area, they will no longer be able to rely on a form of reception as it is [offered] today, integrated. There is considerable, considerable apprehension about that".[60]

A key concern was the issue of adding applicants for international protection to the city population registry. Article 4, § 1-*bis* of Law 132/2018 states that "a residence permit for asylum application does not constitute grounds for inclusion in the population registry". The City of Bologna registry office initially acted on this change through inaction rather than refusing applicants: to avoid potentially recording a refusal to register, it preferred to not accept applications for registration in the first few weeks of Law 132. The *diktat* managed to prevail shortly afterwards, however, when the office began to openly refuse applications. It took a legal challenge by two local associations (ASGI[61] and Avvocato di Strada), filed on the same basis as the case in the City of Florence, to bring about a different interpretation of the rule.[62] According to this verdict, authorities were instead required to include applicants for protection in their registries. This point was key because international protection applicants' inclusion in the population registry rolls is crucial for the enforceability of their fundamental social rights; it is the administrative act that makes reception system projects substantial.

The behaviour of local institutions (both the city registry office and the prefect) ended up clashing with the narrative of the Bologna model, in that this imaginary assumes that all the parts of the system collaborate harmoniously and follow shared logics. The application of the new law instead revealed the rift between top system decision-makers and those who enact it in daily life. In this case, the rhetoric of the model seems to have concealed controversial strategies on the part of the institutions, strategies which drove and fuelled the resistance and change local workers had been carrying out from below over the years. The Mattei Centre was reopened at the beginning of November 2019 as an Extraordinary Reception Centre. This

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60   Coordinator of a reception centre for minors, interviewed on 6 November 2018.

61   Association for Juridical Studies on Immigration.

62   In reality, only the simplified registration procedure introduced by Law 46/2017 had been abrogated.

shift went nearly unremarked as compared to the public outcry over past changes in its function and its being made over as an institution. The new status of the centre seems to underline the rift mentioned above. Now that it no longer serves as a hub for organising material reception of protection applicants, the centre almost represents a new low standard that also drags down the (few) other local authorities trying not to diminish the levels of protection they provide. With a capacity of 200 beds, the new governmental reception centre is run directly by the Prefecture and offers no integration programmes, employment guidance, language instruction, psychological support or any form of legal guidance or preparation for Territorial Commission hearings. As such, it is objectively at odds with the local philosophy of wide-ranging reception and fundamental rights protection. The question is, therefore, how such ambivalence will influence not only the material conditions of reception and access to protection for the migrants it houses, but also the city's standing as a 'model' for the virtuousness of its services: in a press release from November 2019, ASGI suggests such developments are a betrayal of the 'Bologna model'.[63]

How then to evaluate the impact of these new regulations on the City of Bologna? This area has proved itself a 'land of welcome', resistant and deeply aware of the ethical implications of working in the reception system. Sector professionals have adopted strategies to prevent all their work from being undone, although they have had to deal with significant forms of institutional reorganisation and a general reduction in protection. The crisis triggered by the application of Law 132/2018 may thus pave the way for rethinking the system and overcoming ambivalences.[64] Indeed, many sector actors are aware that they must 'move ahead' rather than simply trying to return to the way things were before Law Decree 113/2018 When the system began to erode, structural weaknesses were brought into greater focus. During the regional presidency election campaign that ended with the 26 January 2020 elections, the migrant issue was rendered almost wholly[65] invisible, transforming it into a sort of taboo

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63 https://www.asgi.it/asilo-e-protezione-internazionale/bologna-tra-disce-il-proprio-modello-di-accoglienza/.

64 "An anthropology of bureaucracy (similarly to the anthropology of modern law and more generally, the state) should take into account the double face of bureaucracy, as a form of domination and oppression as well as of protection and liberation, and all the ambivalences this entails" (Bierschenk, de Sardan 2019, 244).

65 Except for the letter from mayor Merola sent to the Minister of Interior Lamorgese in December 2019 in which the mayor requests a derogation from the new law so as to retain in the reception system the individuals already housed in local programs (according to the new legislation, they would have been excluded). The rationale was to avoid a sudden, uncontrolled outpouring of people potentially entitled to international protection from the system, thereby triggering widespread problems of safe-

subject. As this development illustrates, the local area is current-
ly facing its own duplicity and ambiguous dual nature, beginning to
question its assumed identity as a welcoming system with the ability
to almost automatically integrate migrants. As I have tried to dem-
onstrate in this chapter, there are grounds, at all levels of system
governance and production, to question the validity of this assump-
tion taken in an absolute sense. Unlike what the narrative would
suggest, the Bologna model actually appears to be laboriously con-
structed from the bottom up by workers as they oppose dysfunction-
al choices made by the system's top management and institutional
heads. In other words, the 'Bologna model' narrative that even lo-
cal institutions hold up as a point of pride appears to be a misappro-
priation of bottom-up efforts. On the contrary, the narrative almost
seems to serve as a sort of shield against possible critiques, and as
such it is instrumental in reproducing a *myopic archetype* which is
in turn useful for maintaining the *status quo*. In fact, system work-
ers know just how fallacious and counterproductive this rhetoric, de-
rived from/patterned on the logic of 'ideal models', really is. In the
next section, therefore, I shall try to explain the short circuits un-
derlying this rhetoric.

5 The 'Model' Narrative under a Magnifying Glass, i.e. the Creation of Structural Weaknesses

If the aim is to consider in its entirety and complexity the process,
described above, that generated the 'Bologna model', it makes sense
to reflect on the concept of 'model'. The main characteristics appar-
ently qualifying developments in the Bologna area for label of model
are the development of diversified projects and the attempt to over-
come critical issues and raise the quality of the services being of-
fered. The Bologna-are reception system can thus be described as
an active and productive (even propulsive) system. However, it seems
slippery – and counterproductive – to immediately consider it *avant-
garde* (a term that appears frequently in the model narrative). Indeed,
avant-garde refers both to prevention (proceeding with an eye to safe-
ty) and the capacity to diverge from established logics. The *avant-
garde* usually represents a break with what came before if not an ac-
tual revolution. It does not refer to the nature of ongoing 'processes',
often stemming from the need to 'keep up'. Moreover, individual local

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ty. Merola's request was accepted in January 2020, extending the deadline of the dero-
gation to 30 June. https://www.redattoresociale.it/article/notiziario/migran-
ti_anche_a_bologna_prorogati_i_percorsi_ex_sprar. At the time of writing, the
end of May 2020, the deadlines have been further extended to December 2020 due to
the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

reception systems have often had to contend with structural under-development at the national level, filling in the gaps and compensating for the incapacity of higher-ups. The result is the fragmentation and lack of consistency characterising today's systems, elements we recognise as intrinsic features of the Italian reception system.

In truth, given the constant regulatory updates and varying intensity and composition of migration flows since the beginning of the second decade of the 2000s, 'keeping up' has always been necessary. This state of affairs has generated specific trends, first and foremost that of awarding seals of quality to projects generically identified as 'virtuous'. However, practices are labelled as 'good' based not on accurate assessments of their impact and effectiveness or, most importantly, their transferability, but simply on the mere fact of having a project. Up to 2012, just 'doing something' was seen in a positive light, regardless of the actual adequacy of interventions and programmes. In fact, the English term 'best practice' began to circulate to refer to the diverse array of programmes implemented immediately after the so-called North Africa emergency. Moreover, the logic of emergency-response favoured this process, as it is more focused on quantity than on the quality of services. Something was being done and, at least until the first decade of the new millennium, that was seen as enough.[66]

I believe it was this 'interested self-referential' attitude that gave rise to the problems that then became structural, making matters even more difficult for those trying to pursue competence and self-awareness. In fact, defining as a model something that is not yet a real model has a paradoxical effect: it impedes the refinement of practices, making it difficult to identify problems and thus take them seriously. This leads to underestimating critical issues and thereby generating a lower standard of quality. The self-referential application of the 'model' label by projects that judge themselves to be such has brought the standard down, in keeping with the 'anyway, it's better than nothing' idea. In so doing, it has hampered improvement and implicitly contributed to consolidating an imperfect *status quo*. It

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66   "- It doesn't seem to me that accommodation in a disused old hotel, out in the middle of the countryside, in a small village badly connected to the cities and therefore to services, can be the right solution... we should think about creating, proposing, other solutions... - That is there and I think it's too much. We can't put them in the centre of the city either; people would get scared, we have already had problems with the village caffe, where they are not well received. We are making a good impression, because we have prevented the problem from exploding; we are managing it and we are making money off it, too. That facility used to be inactive, now it becomes a way to produce a profit for the cooperative and therefore to fund more hours for mediation and social workers. To do things right if we rethink it later, if we have the money to do it". (informal conversation with the coordinator of the cooperative for which I was working, an organisation that provides services in the Bologna area, fieldnotes, July 2012).

has been like benchmarking (Camp 1991) in reverse. As opposed to continuous comparison with the 'strongest competitors' in the sector through repeated assessments, programmes found it very easy to do better than nothing or the bare minimum. This tendency is also caught up with the economic aspects of service provision: as noted by Folgheraiter (2007, 43 fn. 21) the commodification of aid also entails an unconscious interest in reproducing a problem rather than resolving it. Indeed, what Illich (2008) has defined as the 'disabling professions' proceed (more or less consciously) by setting up a system that works against its own aims.

Merton's (2000, 406; 414) reflections on bureaucracy also shed light on this landscape. Like bureaucracy in general, the reception system – especially in its upper management – has turned into "an administration that almost completely avoids public discussion of its techniques", and its officials develop a "pride of trade that induces them to resist changes in established practice". His analysis of Western bureaucracy's dysfunctions (403-21) finds that there is a "trained incapacity" which generates a dysfunctional vicious circle. The rhetoric of best practices can be considered a manifestation of this process. Using Veblen's concept of trained incapacity (407), Merton "refers to that condition in which a person's professional skills", being out of synch with a changed, flexible and new context of action, "act as obstacles or difficulties".[67]

This "more or less serious inability to adapt" (408) turns adherence to the organisation's operating rules into a general systemic dysfunction. "Adherence to the rules, originally conceived as a means, becomes an end in itself; here the well-known process of 'transposition of goals' occurs, so that an instrumental value becomes a final value" (410). This process produces the "'virtuous' bureaucrat, who does not forget only one of the rules with which his activity must comply and who is therefore unable to assist most of his clients" (411). What Merton underlines here is that professional preparation and role training can become an 'inability' to act appropriately in the system. Such inability has obvious repercussions for the objectives of the service and, therefore, the material life conditions of the people defined as service users and beneficiaries. These problems substantiate critiques of welfare: as Rodger (2004, 218) has pointed out, the welfare state has become a "monument to hypocrisy: a self-referential system that pretends not to know that all those who can afford it will do without its assistance; and that those who cannot afford it will remain trapped in a system that abandons them to themselves,

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67 Precisely because of the ever-changing 'nature' of migration flows, the context in which the system of migration governance operates will always display these characteristics.

while pretending [...] to assist them".

The reception system for international protection applicants has not been able to clearly deviate from this dysfunctional welfare logic while undergoing institutionalisation.[68] According to this logic, the subjectivity most functional to the operation of the system is one that is subjugated, dependent, and quite often domesticated.[69] The institutional (but also commonly used in informal speech) notion of 'appropriate user' and 'deserving beneficiary' is based on the same logic as medical institutions with their differentiation between 'good and bad patients'; such differentiation is made based on their docility and loyalty to the system, as well as their degree of gratitude.[70]

> In the field of social services, the theory [is] that there is always a dysfunction linked to a role conflict underlying users' requests for help: this is very true in the field of services for to migrants. The social worker proposes a service that is framed and circumscribed by cultural frames stemming from social representations, codes and languages that invite a certain kind of reading of reality, one that is often in stark contrast with the imaginary and expectations of the beneficiary who finds himself being channelled into a programmed circuit of assistance with predetermined times and spaces in which he is required to accept a pact of cohabitation. (Tarsia 2018; transl. by the Author)

The instrument through which the dysfunctional logic of welfare is transposed to the field of reception is the Welcoming/Reception/Hosting Pact, a document jointly signed by the 'guest' and managing agency. This signing of a document labelled as a pact – in formal terms, a contract – creates ambiguity in terms of rights and duties. While a contract establishes obligations between the two parties, a pact is more about trust in the good will of the other party. Amplified by the deep power disparity between the two signatories, this apparently subtle point generates a circle of expectations, and con-

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68 For a critical analysis of the reception policies (as a whole, not just for asylum seekers) enacted in the local area, see Tarabusi 2014.

69 For a critical analysis of the logic of reception camps as social technologies with specific products (i.e. domestication), see Malkki 2002.

70 "The unrequited gift makes the one who accepted it [...] inferior, especially when accepted without the intention of returning it" (Mauss 2002, 117). The implicit values of hospitality presuppose the gift, which takes place in condition of power asymmetry, will be returned. This logic gives rise to the term used to identify the migrants in the circuit: The term 'beneficiary' refers to someone enjoying concessions, quite often a real privilege, thus removing the sphere of rights and the associated sphere of legal obligations. The same approach has been further institutionalised in the rhetoric of the 'deserving beneficiary', if he or she is willing to do socially useful work (in return for a 'gift' of hospitality that obviously needs to be paid back).

sequently legitimacy of behaviour, which is unique to the field of reception. Signing should entail reciprocal empowerment. In this case, however, it entails only the so-called beneficiary's obligation to act appropriately while moving along the educational path of integration. The always-immanent threat that reception services might be withdrawn unequivocally illustrates users' disproportionate share of duties. Indeed, it is the incapacity/non-docility of the beneficiary that signals the failure of the process, as if the system for its part had no obligations beyond simply "doing what can be done in a system of constraints".[71] This point brings us back to the habit of taking minimum standards and holding them up as an example of going above and beyond the call of duty, thus signalling a shift from the legal level of meeting minimum requirements to the moral level of (potentially underserved) self-congratulations.

The standardisation and depersonalisation of relationships,[72] amplified by the intercultural character of the encounter, produces infantilisation and dependence.[73] In so doing, it reproduces the welfarist logic of aid. Although this logic is demonised in official discourse, it tends to be reproduced – sometimes unconsciously – through everyday tools and practices in this sector.[74]

This brings me to a last point, namely the use of the English term 'best practice' to talk about good practices.[75] This vocabulary is often used for specialised projects, primarily those for so-called vulnerable individuals. Good and best do not mean the same thing, but the pervasive use of English terminology to 'elevate the tone' of projects

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71 From the account of a social worker in the metropolitan area (interviewed on 29 November 2018).

72 "Another aspect of the bureaucratic structure, the emphasis on the depersonalisation of relationships, also has its influence on the 'trained incapacity' of the bureaucrat. The bureaucrat's personality is built around this norm of impersonality. This fact, together with the tendency towards 'categorisation', caused by the dominant role assumed by the general and abstract rules, are the cause of conflicts between officials and the public or clientele. As officials minimise personal relationships and tend to categorise, it follows that the peculiarities of individual cases are often ignored" (Merton 2000, 415).

73 "In practice these institutions, which would like to treat users as complete human beings, make the blatant mistake of denying that users themselves are competent to enter into the merits of their dependence" (Sennet 2004, 177).

74 In this process, a paradox occurs: migrants are only recognised if they can prove – according to our logical terms – that they are real victims. The system takes them in charge for only this reason, but then it expects them to be capable (but not too capable) victims, increasing the risk of victimising them a second time. For an analysis accompanied by concrete proposals to 'reverse the trend' of this phenomenon, see Faso, Bontempelli 2017.

75 This slippage can be seen in the report produced by the Ministry of Interior in 2017, at page 7, where the two terms are used as synonyms. Report published at https://www.interno.gov.it/sites/default/files/rapporto_annuale_buone_pratiche_di_accoglienza_2017_ita_web_rev1.pdf.

has – often and quickly – concealed this conceptual slippage. In retrospect, this error might actually be seen as instrumental: it is common practice to strategically use foreign terminology, deploying the authority of specialised Anglophone terminology to increase disorientation and lack of clarity in projects and interventions.[76] In fact, such slippage between 'good' and 'best' occurs not only in the translation between Italian and English, but also in the – instrumental – debasement of standards described above, a slippage that, by casting practices as already the 'best', tends to hamper efforts at improvement.

It is this level, therefore, that contains the space which has given rise to the structural weaknesses of the reception system. Indeed, the system often resembles a lottery,[77] creating "precarious service workers for temporary users" (Ferrari 2017, 31). It is the precariousness of both workers and 'beneficiaries' that constitutes the *file rouge* of the relationship underlying the latest regulatory shift. Faced with a *law that creates vulnerability*, the local area will be called upon to make ever-greater efforts, both to further improve quality standards and to act with *meticulous and always vigilant resistance*. Such resistance has been subjected to intense pressure as a result of the health emergency caused by the spring 2020 COVID-19 outbreak, as I seek to outline in the brief concluding section.

6 And Now? Blessed COVID vs. Damned COVID

In his 5 March 2020 speech, Italian Prime Minister Conte made an assertion that went on to become central to the pandemic debate: "We are all in the same boat". Just a little more than two weeks later, Pope Francis – almost as if replying to the PM – said that "the storm unmasks our vulnerability. No one can save himself".[78] Both statements reflect the same intention: to raise awareness of reciprocity and focus on the importance of solidarity in the face of a common, shared situation of fragility. There is a profound difference between the two statements, however. Prime Minister Conte's words are inaccurate and, paradoxically, risk generating unwanted, contrary effects. It is not true that we are all in the same boat. In the storm currently raging, there are those sailing in a safe boat and those simply at the mercy of the waves, without even the luxury of a life jacket.

In the last few weeks, countless scholars from various disciplines

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[76] See also the name of the SPRAR communication service for Bologna: Bologna Cares.

[77] See https://www.oxfamitalia.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/La-Lotteria-Italia-dellaccoglienza_Report-Oxfam_8_11_2017_Final.pdf.

[78] These are the words of the Pope during the *urbi et orbi* blessing for Easter 2020.

have spoken out on the pandemic. At times, they have sought to underline the often-overlooked or concealed aspects that contribute to constructing the material conditions of existence that exploded in the lockdown. There has been talk of privilege, differential treatment, psychological impact, and the collapse of pre-existing systemic weaknesses. At the same time, the narrative of 'we will get out of this better' also informed such reflection: many have sought to identify some good, individual and collective, that might come of the crisis. The slogan *#iorestoacasa*, 'I'm staying home', became a fetish of responsibility and respect, but it also unmasked systemic fragilities. What about those without homes? Those living in conditions of forced proximity? Those subject to further restrictive measures?

We have all experienced for the first time the impact of restrictions on our personal freedom and the importance of technological tools for staying in touch with our 'kin' (regardless of blood ties). We have also drudged from some drowsy memory the destructive power of the logic of individuals as vectors of contagion, exacerbating perceptions of insecurity and fear. Have we really understood, however, how much individualism and the selective exclusion of categorical us/them logics represent a failure of the system?[79]

I therefore conclude by reporting the information I gathered in June 2020 about how this pandemic has impacted the Bologna-area reception system. During various phone calls and virtual meetings, I began to discern two distinct interpretative logics. There were those saying "blessed COVID", and others saying "damned COVID". The coronavirus pandemic seems to have reified the ambivalence discussed above. While it may have had some positive effects, it has also generated problematic points in keeping with the past.[80]

Indeed, the measures adopted to contain the epidemic have reinforced "what was already in the air. It blew up exclusion mechanisms and made it possible to reconfigure in inclusive terms".[81] For instance, the choice to postpone the deadline on reception projects scheduled to expire in June can be seen as a move in the direction of inclusion. The need to limit movement as much as possible, together with the need to exercise surveillance, has led to extending the pro-

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79 The experiences of a group of tourists from Veneto and Lombardy who were turned back from entering the Mauritius islands at the end of February 2020 are a helpful illustration of this. In the tourists' words, "It was a nightmare", "Why just us, what about the others?", "We Italians were treated like refugees, it sucked".

80 It is no coincidence that the 17 March 2020 'Cura Italia decree' outlines its "Provisions on immigration" at Art. 86-*bis*, showing that legislators frame the phenomenon of migration exclusively through a securitarian logic (Art. 86 is devoted to urgent measures for prisons).

81 Informal conversation (8 May 2020) with a coordinator and social worker employed in services dedicated to vulnerable asylum seekers.

grammes already in progress, thus prolonging the duration of protection. Moreover, many migrants in work placement programmes or intermittent employment sectors have witnessed an increase in job offerings.[82] If we consider only this level, the pandemic has certainly had positive effects, and we could almost thank it. Unfortunately, however, the accounts of other informants[83] have highlighted a host of critical issues, showing that the ambiguity I have repeatedly mentioned in this chapter remains even during the pandemic. The logic of detention, surveillance and emergency-response has gained renewed strength. The people housed in reception facilities could no longer come and go from them.[84] Of course, the same was true of everyone in the country. And yet there is an enormous 'but': not only are reception facilities not equipped to allow social distancing and other measures of individual protection, they could easily become centres of contagion.[85] Further, what about the total lack of multi-lingual communication from the central government, as if Italy were a monolingual country, leaving it up to managing organisations to provide translated materials after a prolonged delay?[86] How to explain the "differential treatment of unaccompanied minors, who could look out from the windows of their rooms and see their (citizen) peers take their dogs for walks or at least free to stretch their legs by walking around the house"?[87] What about the fact that self-certification forms allowed citizens to move around for certain necessary and urgent reasons, but the authorities did not extend this logic to cover other

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82   Space limitations prevent me from delving deeper into this aspect, and indeed it deserves its own separate discussion. However, it is important to note that it was the most precarious and exploited individuals whose labour kept the system afloat in the very first weeks of the pandemic. In other words: staying at home is a privilege enacted at the expense of others who cannot stay at home. Specifically, in a 19 April 2020 press release, social service employees spoke out about the serious lack of protection for workers' health (Adl Cobas press release *Reception, social workers without protection asked to police users*: `http://www.adlcobas.it/Bologna-Comunicato-Accoglienza-operatori-trici-senza-protezioni-a-cui-si-chiede.html`).

83   Informal conversation (8 May 2020) with two lawyers from the city's social services.

84   The 1 April 2020 circular that the Head of Department for Civil Liberties and Immigration sent to the prefectures specified that migrants housed in reception facilities had to remain inside.

85   On 11 March 2020, the group Coordinamento Migranti di Bologna (Bologna Migrant Coordination) launched an appeal to the institutions in charge regarding the highly inadequate anti-contagion measures in some facilities, especially the Mattei Centre. For further information see `https://www.asgi.it/asilo-e-protezione-internazionale/coronavirus-asilo-bologna/`.

86   To pose a provocative question, it could be asked whether state institutions' neglect to translate their guidelines for curbing the pandemic into the main foreign languages betrays an unconscious prejudice, i.e. that migrants in Italy only exist 'locked inside centres'.

87   As stated by a lawyer working in an international protection service run by the city of Bologna (Informal conversation, 8 May 2020).

needs? Some migrants were actually fined by police while going to help desks to collect documents or to fulfil the requirements of reception procedures because such activities were not considered necessary and urgent. And finally, the suspension of court activities has further prolonged already unreasonably long waiting times, increasing applicants' uncertainty and existential precariousness.

This chapter opened with the question 'will the system survive?', and it closes with another puzzle: 'will this pandemic situation be useful?' Will it serve to instil in us the necessary awareness of the gaps in protection services and the divergent trajectories of different groups of migrants, over-determined by categories and forms of belonging imposed from outside? Will it help those in the boat to begin to feel the respect and recognition that would make it intolerable for them to know (even before seeing) that someone else is out there alone, at the mercy of the waves? Will it make the struggle for the universal recognition of fundamental human rights less difficult? Any real opportunity for change in the midst of this crisis must be deferred to some future time. At the moment we are too busy dealing with the repercussions of a system whose constituent logic is paralysed, a system more focused on self-proclaiming itself as a model[88] – deaf to internal contradictions – than looking in depth at its own fragilities.

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[88] Rhetoric immediately ridden at national level on how the country was able to cope with the pandemic.

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

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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.

Summary   1 Introduction. – 2 Framing Childhood in Migration. – 3 Migrant Minors and the Regulatory Horizon. – 4 Reception Spaces and Practices. – 5 Vesta: Migrant Reception in Private Domestic Spaces. – 6 Concluding Remarks.

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

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[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 UN-HCR-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-

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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,

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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

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[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).

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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

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[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-

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[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,

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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

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[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

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[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.

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[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]

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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.

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Seekers and Holders of International Protection in Bozen

Arrival, Transit and Reception Within an Internal Border Area

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Abstract   In the context of increasing controls at the Brenner Border, many migrants have been pushed to the margins of society. Asylum seekers arriving in the city of Bozen through the Brenner route have been defined through categories such as 'out of quota', 'autonomous arrivals', 'irregular'. These labels differentiate reception practices according to a criterion of (in)admissibility. In this study we will focus on the production of what have *de facto* become 'internal borders' and on the violations of the rights of asylum seekers that have resulted in this border area of Italy.

Keywords   Brenner. Borders. Asylum seeker reception system. Bozen.

Summary   1 Introduction. – 2 The Italian System of Reception. –3 Reception in Transit Places: The Academic Literature. – 4 Bozen and the Brenner Border. – 5 Final Remarks.

1   Introduction

In 2013, a growing number of Syrians and Eritreans started arriving on Southern Italian shores and heading to Northern Europe, through the Brenner route, as a result of the escalation of the Syrian civil war.

In coincidence with these new migration flows, controls were re-introduced at the Brenner border, pursuant to Article 25 *et seq.* of the Schengen Borders Code, that permits the introduction of temporary controls at internal European borders, in the event of serious threats to internal security.

Border enforcement has been strengthened since (Fontanari, Borri 2017) and regular random police inspections have been operated, in compliance with several agreements among Italian, German and Austrian police forces,[1] all aiming to control and reduce migrants' mobility. Inspections have taken place on trains and in train stations, all along the Brenner route, from Verona – the second largest railway station of the route, after Bologna – to Brenner, and further North, towards Munich (Antenne Migranti, ASGI 2017). Before then national institutions had been tolerating the so-called 'secondary movements' of migrants (Scalettaris 2007), that is internal European movements following their arrival in the continent. A 'laissez-passer' approach (Ciabarri 2015) had been evident, similarly to Greece.[2] But in 2013 it changed, as it became more and more evident in the following years, particularly in the period 2015-17.

We have witnessed some of these changes: one of us as an activist monitoring the transit of migrants through Verona, in collaboration with other activists of the Antenne Migranti Project;[3] the other throughout her PhD and voluntary collaboration with Antenne Migranti through which we met.[4]

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[1] For further details see Antenne Migranti, ASGI 2017. In 2014, an agreement regulated controls on passenger trains, and in 2017 on freight trains. The former agreement was ratified by both the Italian government (Law 209 of 3 November 2016, G.U. 21/11/2016) and Austrian government (Bundesgesetzblatt Nr. BGBl. III Nr. 47/2017). For further details see Antenne Migranti, ASGI 2017 and Monika Weissensteiner, "Da Lampedusa al Brennero". *Una città*. Available at http://www.unacitta.it/flip/lampedusa-brennero/files/assets/basic-html/page39.html. As regards the latter agreement see Ansa, "Austria, Controlli treni merci al Brennero". Available at http://www.ansa.it/trentino/notizie/2017/11/15/austria-controlli-trilaterali-brennero_5266a464-914d-4930-a7cf-8bc5e7004224.html.

[2] An infringement procedure was opened against Italy relating to the implementation of the Eurodac Regulation (no. 20152203). Press release, 10 Dec. 2015, available at http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-15-6276_EN.htm.

[3] Antenne Migranti was a project coordinated by the Alexander Langer Stiftung Foundation, in Bozen, with partial funding from the Open Society Foundation. The project was largely run by volunteers and had these objectives: to detect and prevent the violation of migrants' rights along the Brenner route; to support migrants by directing them to local services and helping them with asylum procedures; to assess migrants' needs and stimulate institutions to respond to them; to promote an informed debate on reception and free movement. The project ended in 2019.

[4] This chapter is a result of our collaboration since, which has grown more intense with the EU INSigHT Action and bears witness of our engagement to continue monitoring the conditions of migrants, along the Brenner route. In particular, the chapter builds on the article by Semprebon, Pelacani 2019, with the intention to present an up-

In the context of the increasing controls that we described above, many people with migrant origins were pushed to the margins of society. Yet, the current scenario bears also witness of the introduction of Law 113/2018, as will be explained, that brought, among other measures, a stiffening of regulations to access reception and de facto the dismantlement of the actual reception system (Della Puppa et al. 2020).

Some are holders of humanitarian protection[5] who tried to travel to Northern Europe in search for better settlement opportunities, thus making the inadequacy of the Dublin system increasingly evident (Morano, Foadi 2017). Others undertook autonomous journeys (Kasparek 2016) away from the Balkan route, after its closure in summer 2015, or from Southern Italy, in the period that preceded the full operation of the hotspot system (Sciurba 2017) – aimed at boosting compliance with the EURODAC (no. 603/2013) and the Dublin III Regulations (Casolari 2016). Many eventually found themselves stuck at Brenner and were pushed back to Bozen. Similarly, other asylum seekers were blocked in Ventimiglia, at the border with France, or in Como-Chiasso, at the border with Switzerland, and were transferred back to the hotspot areas (Tazzioli 2017).

This is how all and each of these locations transformed into *internal hotspots* (see also Denaro 2016 on Milan), characterised by more and more systematic border enforcement practices, but also "spaces of transit" (Tazzioli 2017). Forced to acknowledge the presence of migrants and their visibility in the streets, several actors have made efforts to activate solutions to deal with their needs, whether arriving by land through the Balkan route, or leaving Italy after being granted humanitarian protection, or re-admitted to the country in application of the Dublin Regulation or entering it to re-apply for international protection, or voluntarily abandoning an Italian asylum seeker reception centre where they had been living in extremely poor conditions.

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date on the specific case of Bozen. It draws from 15 qualitative interviews, carried out in February 2020, with local stakeholders involved in the reception of seekers and holders of international protection and victims of trafficking, as part of the EU INSigHT Action; from on-going discussions with volunteers of the Project Antenne Migranti, with whom one both authors have collaborated and also from ethnographic work undertaken by the second author, between 2017 and 2019, for the scope of her PhD thesis (Serena Caroselli, PhD in Scienze Sociali, curriculum Migrazioni e Relazioni interculturali, Università degli Studi di Genova, DISFOR. Title: *Percorsi attraverso i confini: un'etnografia delle esperienze delle donne richiedenti protezione internazionale e asilo tra Bozen e il Brennero*).

5 The humanitarian protection is a national status granted by the Italian government to asylum seekers in situations not typified by Legislative Decree 286/1998, whenever there are serious reasons, of humanitarian nature, or resulting from constitutional or international obligations.

All these groups of people have met several problems in accessing reception services in Bozen, highlighting several critical issues of the system, as will be explained, particularly in addressing the needs of people that are not comprised in the ordinary system of reception.

The chapter is structured as follows: first, we will briefly describe the Italian system of reception and elucidate the recent changes that have affected it. Second, we will revise the relevant literature on reception and secondary movements. Third, we will focus on the city of Bozen and look at the specific features of its reception system, to then conclude with some final remarks.

2   The Italian System of Reception

Italy has been characterised by a double-track reception system: an ordinary and an extraordinary one. The ordinary system was institutionalised into a network by Law 89/2002. It was called SPRAR (*Sistema di Protezione per Richiedenti Asilo e Rifugiati*, 'Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees') and it consisted of a network of reception projects, funded through the EU Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, that has grown from 1,365 available places, in 2003, to more than 26,000 in 2016.

Local entities joined the network on a voluntary basis, by applying for funding (up to 95% of the total cost), upon approval of Servizio Centrale (Central Service), the SPRAR's coordinating body. The actual implementation of activities was delegated to private actors.[6] Each project involved 'integrated' reception services, with the main goal of supporting beneficiaries on their path towards autonomy: apart from room and board, services included health assistance, language and cultural mediation, social assistance, multicultural activities, support for job orientation and job seeking, and legal assistance.

The extraordinary system was set up in 2011, in order to cope with the increasing number of arrivals on Italian shores, following the outbreak of the Arab Spring. Extraordinary reception centres were opened to provide a temporary solution, aimed to complement the limited capacity of the ordinary system. However, due to the persistent scarcity of ordinary reception places, the extraordinary system was strengthened and eventually institutionalised in 2014.[7] Standards of extraordinary reception centres are not defined in the rel-

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6 See the SPRAR dedicated website. Available at `https://www.retesai.it`.

7 Conferenza Unificata Stato-Regioni, Intesa tra il Governo, le Regioni e gli Enti locali sul piano nazionale per fronteggiare il flusso straordinario di cittadini extracomunitari, adulti, famiglie e minori stranieri non accompagnati, 10.07.2014, available at `http://www.statoregioni.it/Documenti/DOC_044430_77%20CU%20PUNTO%202%20ODG.pdf`.

evant normative framework (Legislative Decree 142/2015) to date. They are defined in the conventions signed between each centre and the relevant Prefecture.[8]

In recent years, following some legislative changes, both the ordinary and extraordinary reception systems have been considerably affected.

Law 113/2018 (in force since October 2018) established that the SPRAR should be renamed 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') and that it should be accessible only to holders of refugee status or subsidiary protection, unaccompanied minors, holders of permits granted for medical reasons, victims of natural disasters, victims of human trafficking, people with civil merits.[9] As a result of this, requests to access extraordinary reception facilities have risen, as will be detailed.

Following the introduction of the same law, a severe cut in reception expenditures was also implemented: the funding was brought down from 35 to 20 euro per day/beneficiary (Ziniti 2018), with reception operators stressing this does not grant an adequate standard of reception, but only the provision of basic services, far from an effective social protection for beneficiaries, let alone the aim of favouring their inclusion. This is particularly evident for extraordinary facilities which are no longer required to provide Italian courses, nor psychological, nor legal support, which are both left to the discretion of the operators.

This change in the law is coherent with a progressing trend of delegation of the responsibility for reception from the national to the local government, with scarce monitoring (see also Pelacani, Semprebon 2019). Repeated evidence by LasciateCIEntrare[10] suggests that the Italian Ministry of Interior does not regularly undertake monitoring visits to the extraordinary facilities, thus leaving them to the discretion of Prefectures. It derives that minimum standards of services cannot always be guaranteed (Pelacani, Semprebon 2019), nor any homogeneity of provision (Marchetti 2016). On the contrary, the

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8 The Prefecture is the headquarters of the Prefetto (Prefect) who represents the Ministry of Interior in each province. Examples of conventions are as follows: Prefecture of Rome http://www.prefettura.it/roma/allegati/Download:Cas_capitolato_tecnico_cig_695518503c-5854145.htm. Prefecture of Milan http://www.prefettura.it/milano/allegati/Download:Allegato_b_schema_di_convenzione-5732499.htm.

9 As indicated in the 2017 SPRAR Report, it should be stressed that, in 2017, the SPRAR had decided to give priority of access to holders of international protection, in line with the idea that the SPRAR should become the primary infrastructure to facilitate the integration of migrants.

10 See http://www.lasciatecientrare.it/.

SPRAR, now SIPROIMI, does identifies precise standards and financial reporting and monitoring requirements, although, following the consistent growth of the network and the fact that some operators are not yet sufficiently trained, it is more and more doubtful whether these requirements are met by each facility.

A further change resulting from Law 113/2018 concerns residency permits. The Law states that new extra requirements are necessary to obtain the residency status. As suggested by ASGI (Consoli, Zorzella 2019), such extra requirements are unconstitutional. Yet they have been legitimising practices by local authorities that were already under way before the passing of the Law: some local authorities refuse to (or delay) access to residency although it is a right for asylum seekers, as spelt by Legislative Decree 142/2015. While this does not prevent asylum seekers from accessing the reception system, it does create difficulties in obtaining the national health card and in accessing a number of other services, including access to socio-sanitary services and social housing – following the completion of the reception project.

The most recent data on the reception system, referring to the year 2018 (*Dossier Statistico Immigrazione* 2019), report the following: 26,200 places occupied in SIPROIMI and more than the triple the number, 82,600, in extraordinary facilities, confirming the trend in the past years. As for SIPROIMI, an update is available as of February 2020,[11] stating the total of available occupied places is 31,264-26,598 for ordinary beneficiaries, 4,003 for unaccompanied minors and 663 for people with mental or physical disability.

3 Reception in Transit Places: The Academic Literature

As spelt out in Legislative Decree 142/2015, the right to reception in Italy is granted only to asylum seekers with no means of subsistence and to asylum seekers for whom Italy is responsible according to the Dublin III Regulation.

Some categories of migrants are excluded or run a high risk of being excluded from reception. These include migrants who are in transit and who arrive by land and are not 're-distributed' through the quotas defined by the Ministry of Interior (for migrants arriving by sea). The most recent amendment to the national legislation of international protection and reception in Law 113/2018 confirms this exclusionary trend.

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[11] Data available at https://www.sprar.it/i-numeri-dello-sprar. Following recent normative changes, with Law Decree 130/2020, the ordinary system of reception was renamed SAI (*Sistema di Accoglienza e Integrazione*, 'Reception and Integration System') and some changes applied too, on which we will not dwell here.

In other words, access to reception and related rights can be hindered even whereby the pre-requisites of reception are met. This concerns particularly migrants who arrive by land, typically through the Balkan route or who travel southward through the Brenner Pass, for example after having been rejected their application for asylum in another EU member state. While migrants arriving on Southern Italian shores enter the reception system through the system of dispersal (unless they refuse to do so or flee), migrants arriving by land can face considerable obstacles in accessing any form of protection. Even if they manifest their willingness to apply for asylum, the formalisation of the application can take one month or more and the entry into the reception system can take much longer (e.g. NAGA 2018) or be eventually denied.

Migrants who are re-admitted to Italy following a take-back procedure, connected to the Dublin III Regulation, face similar difficulties. In this context, we should remember that Italy has been recording an increasing trend of incoming Dublin procedures in the last years: in 2018 it recorded 42,911 of decisions on incoming requests, (Eurostat 2019),[12] compared to 26,627 in 2017 and 24,990 in 2015. A peak was recorded in 2016 amounting to 64,844 (Eurostat 2019).[13] The time limits for the evaluation have often expired, with the result that migrants cannot be subject to a Dublin Procedure any longer. This changed after the Dublin Unit in Italy employed an additional group of professionals to improve the efficiency of the system (as volunteers reported in Bozen – fieldwork note, 20 February 2020). Attempts to overcome the deficiencies and limits of the Dublin Regulation have been made with the introduction of specific tools, such as the mechanism of relocation, which nevertheless has proved rather ineffective so far (Stege 2018).

It should be noted that there are also migrants who are granted reception but refuse it or leave the facility soon after having entered it. Where a voluntary and formally unjustified abandonment of a facility applies, migrants are excluded from reception measures (Legislative Decree 142/2015) and this is likely to constrain their mobility.

A recent report by Médecins Sans Frontières (2018) addressed the conditions of migrants experiencing one (or more) of the situations described above. It underlined their 'invisibility', the lack of protection by institutions and the high risk for them to be pushed to informal settlements in parks, squares, railway station platforms or squats

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12 Available at https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Dublin_statistics_on_countries_responsible_for_asylum_application#cite_note-2.

13 Data available at http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=migr_dubri&lang=en.

in abandoned buildings. Many of the informal settlements are found in border cities close to the Balkan route, including North-Western Italian cities such as Trieste, Gorizia, Udine, but also in Foggia and Crotone, in Southern Italy, where centres of first reception are located, as well as in Bozen, further up North. In Europe, evidence of similar conditions have been reported concerning border locations such as Calais (Rigby, Schlembach 2013; King 2016).

Various scholars have provided informed accounts of civil society actors assisting destitute migrants (on Italy: Marzorati et al. 2017; on the US: De Graauw 2015) and undocumented migrants (Ambrosini 2018) who face precarious and vulnerable conditions, and likewise migrants in transit. The role of civil society actors has been repeatedly underlined as crucial. On their side, government agencies have often 'turned a blind eye' to the presence of migrants while delegating responsibility to the third sector (Ambrosini, Van der Leun 2015; Marzorati et al. 2017; Ambrosini 2018; Mayblin, James 2019) and de facto disengaging (Castañeda 2007).

Generally speaking, the growing assumption that (some) migrants are 'in transit' has often overshadowed the relevance of evolving migration patterns, even in urban contexts located at the crossroads of internal and international borders. What can be defined as a transit migration framework has not only contributed to the neglect of some migrants, but has somehow legitimised non-intervention by local governments with respect to wider integration issues (Marconi 2018). This is in line with a more general tendency to consider forced migrants as a temporary population with the resulting adoption of temporary policy solutions (Fabos, Kibreab 2007). Davies et al. 2017 interpret this form of institutional abandonment as a means of control perpetrated through inaction. However, with the rapid diffusion of the (often blurred) 'transit terminology' (e.g. transit migration, transit countries, transit migrants) in the public and political discourse, transit countries and areas have been increasingly accused of being responsible themselves for transit migration. At the same time, they have been asked and induced to cooperate in filtering unwanted 'inflows' of people (Düvell et al. 2014).

While this can be described as an evident manifestation of a wider migration regime, it cannot be understood as a set of fixed dynamics, but needs to be looked at in relation to contextual specificities, including growing concerns and emotions associated with xenophobia and racism (Sunderland 2016). Additionally, policies can be more or less coherent and inclusive with respect to national legislations: some local authorities have refused to adhere to national (exclusionary) approaches, by choosing to support irregular migrants (Varsanyi 2006; Davies et al. 2017; Ambrosini 2018); others have shown varying degrees of willingness to grant, and difficulty in dealing with, reception to (otherwise stranded) asylum seekers (e.g. Davis et al. 2016);

others have designed interventions that reinforce the exclusionary nature of national policies (Chand, Schreckhise 2015; Gargiulo 2017).

National governments bear the primary responsibility for immigration policy (concerning the entry of migrants and citizenship regulation), while local governments are responsible for the provision of services. Research has shown that local authorities have been prone to adopt pragmatic approaches to migrants' incorporation (Caponio, Borkert 2010; Jørgensen 2012; Marzorati et al. 2017), as they are faced with their needs most directly (Vermeulen, Stotijn 2010) and are 'forced' to address them in some ways. In Italy, this has been happening in a context characterised by weak regulations at the national level and strong fragmentation of institutional responsibilities (Caponio, Pavolini 2007; Balbo 2015), adding to a welfare system that determines the eligibility of social rights depending on legal status (Sainsbury 2012), with resulting restrictions for undocumented and forced migrants.

In this direction, we will explore how the city of Bozen has been managing reception at local level, by elaborating on the specific governance features we have identified, partly in connection to the fact it has become an internal border area.

4   Bozen and the Brenner Border

The autonomous province of Bozen (from now onwards APB) is situated in the autonomous region of Trentino-Alto Adige. Although, the main responsibility for migration policy in Italy (i.e. control of entries, stays and returns) is in the hands of the national government, the APB enjoys considerable discretionary powers in the field of migration, compared to ordinary provinces and regions. This is why a specific provincial law on migration could be been introduced, resulting in disparities in the actual reception system, in comparison to localities, such a Trento, in the same region, and to localities in other Italian regions.

According to declarations by the President of the Provincial Authority of Bozen,[14] in 2018, in the provincial area of Bozen the total number of residents of immigrant origins amounted to 48,018 (9.1% of the total population), while asylum seekers amounted to 1,400 people (0.26% of the total population), thus a residual presence.

Discussions on joining the SPRAR have been ongoing since 2017. Municipalities activated the first projects at the end of 2018. Narratives by Antenne Migranti volunteers (fieldwork note, 30 November

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14   As reported during the Seminar *Snapshots from the borders* in Bozen, in March 2019 and confirmed in the IDOS Dossier Statistico sull'Immigrazione 2018.

2017) reported of declarations by the mayor of Bozen, stating his refusal to join the network unless the number of asylum seekers diminished. At the time of writing, in February 2020, beneficiaries were accommodated in six ordinary SIPROIMI projects, with a total of 223 places, all located outside Bozen.[15] Additionally, a total of 803 people were hosted in extraordinary facilities, 22% of women and about 30% of Nigerian origins (interview, 18 February 2020, Provincial Authority, Office for elderly people and Social Policy).[16] What is most significant is that only about 3% of asylum seekers in Bozen received a positive response to their application for asylum, in line with the national trends (interview, 20 February 2020, Caritas), meaning that the rest of people were left stranded without any access to reception, unless they appealed to the decision, as the vast majority did (about 80%).

Data by Caritas (interview, 20 February 2020) show that autonomous arrivals have been decreasing. In February 2020, they include especially women who returned from Germany (10% of arrivals in Bozen) through informal readmissions – a relatively recent phenomenon. Critical issues are linked to the *Questura*'s[17] acceptance of the related applications for asylum, that have been often transferred to *Questure* of other Italian cities, under the rationale that the applicants had previously applied for asylum there.

As anticipated, due to its geographical and strategic position – along the Brenner railway route and de facto the last large city before the Brenner Pass – Bozen can be considered a transit area for migrants. It has become a transit zone, a sort of internal hotspot, following the increasing controls carried out at Brenner and at Bozen railway station, as a result of the agreements cited in the introduction that force migrants stopped at Brenner to return to Bozen. As of Febrary 2020, approximately 150 people were crossing the border every month in either directions (interview, 19 February 2020, Red Cross), confirming the average number of border crossings in the previous years – a total of 146 people at the end of June 2017 (Antenne Migranti, ASGI 2017). The nationalities have not changed considerably Most migrants were. Most migrants were Nigerians, Afghans and Pakistani, with a decreasing number of Nigerian women (interview, 20 February 2020, Caritas; 19 February 2020, Red Cross).

All these movements are not always visible, on the contrary. Women of migrant origins, particularly from Nigeria, associated with hu-

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[15] Data (Feb. 2020) available at https://www.sprar.it/progetti-territoriali-3-2.

[16] It has been recently decided to close many facilities within the city, due to the decreasing number of beneficiaries, resulting from reduced arrivals on Italian shores in the last two years.

[17] The *Questura* is the Head Provincial Office of the Italian Ministry of Interior.

man trafficking movements,[18] are particularly invisible. Invisibility regards also other movements of migrants from Southern Italy, who are stopped even before reaching the Brenner border. None of these movements is counted in any statistics, thus they remain largely unaccounted. The same is true for movements by car from Trieste, through the Balkan route. No punctual monitoring has been undertaken along this route, if not occasionally by volunteers and activists collaborating with projects such as Antenne Migranti.

At the same time, The police agreements cited above had the main objective to deal with intra-European migration movements and fight irregular migration. They have produced inspections that have strongly reduced the movement of people while also making it far longer and riskier for people to cross the border.

However, since 2015, some 'fluidity' has become evident in border crossing: migrants are not always subject to police controls on the Austrian side of the border and are often left free to cross southward to reach Italy, while controls in the opposite direction have been much more systematic and have mostly resulted in migrants being stopped and asked to take the train back southward. A similar attitude was reported by police forces in Bozen with the hypothetical result that migrants eventually arrive in Trento, the first large town South of Bozen, but according to volunteers of Antenne Migranti this has not been happening since November 2017 (fieldwork note, 20 August 2018).

In particular, many migrants who tried to reach Northern Europe got stuck with informal passive re-admissions to Italy, operated by the Italian border police, under request of the Austrian border police. In 2015, these included at least 100 people who were stopped and blocked each day in Bozen, following inspection on trains.

In order to meet migrants' basic needs during their stay in Bozen, or at the actual Brenner border, two support centres have been opened in 2015, at the respective train stations, and have been operated by local humanitarian volunteers. The local association Volontarius Onlus opened a centre at the train station in Bozen (in April 2015) and another one at Brenner (in December 2014) to provide basic information, food and clothing, with coordinating volunteers from a range of local third sector organisations (including local cooperatives, Caritas, the Italian Red Cross and the Alexander Langer Foundation).[19] At Brenner they also coordinated an accommodation

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18 Some operators of Volontarius at Brenner reported of male and female passeurs who facilitated the crossing of the border with their car. As far as women and children are concerned, the operators also suggested that passeurs were involved in the trafficks of human beings (interview, 13 July 2018).

19 See https://www.volontarius.it/assistenza-umanitaria-alla-stazione-di-bozen/.

facility. Furthermore, some local parishes have provided temporary shelter – although with limited capacity – and Antenne Migranti volunteers have provided basic information on local services and on the asylum procedure.

The migrants who try and cross the Brenner border should eventually arrive in Bozen, following the agreement with the Provincial Authority, and access the reception system there. As Bozen is the largest city close to Brenner, even for those who may not have access to reception, Bozen is still likely to be the place they find themselves pushed to. According to the Director of Caritas (interview, 20 February 2020), 10% of migrants is represented by women, largely of Nigerian nationality, who return to Italy due to the Dublin procedure, or else who arrive from Latin America – a more recent trend of arrivals. Importantly, Caritas estimates that only 3% of the migrants arriving in Bozen are recognised international protection – in line with the considerable decrease of recognition all throughout the Italian territory (Eurostat 2019).[20]

In this context, over the most recent years, the city of Bozen has transformed into a 'grey area' characterised by increasing forms of institutional violence, associated, on the one side, with the control of mobility and a more and more organised and systematic management of the border, as a point of intersection and re-distribution of people in transit, overlapping with stratified historical and linguistic borders; on the other with the limitation of access to asylum procedures and reception. Bozen has thus become a sort of internal porous border, within which support has been often largely provided by few humanitarian actors, including Volontarius and the Red Cross and activists of Antenne Migranti, who mobilised to activate some minimal forms of support to migrants arriving at the railway station of Brenner and/or Bozen.

In the period 2017-19, technologies of control have been strengthened, including particularly inspections at train stations along the Brenner route from Verona to Brenner, an area that testifies a European approach to migration based on a neoliberal hierarchisation of rights and people who have access to them. Arguably, the Brenner border and the many internal borders disseminated along the route, including also other railways stations from Verona to Bozen, have had the main scope of implementing a border regime that aims at re-instating a hierarchy of class (Koshravi 2019; Mezzadra, Neilson 2016). This regime has contributed to redefining the trajectories of people who, beyond the 'label attached to them' upon arrival in Italy, have been generally identified as 'poor' and unwanted, although

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[20] Available at `https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/submitViewTable-Action.do`.

they compose a group involving individuals with multiple subjective experiences in regard to access to resources and rights (Pinelli, Marchetti 2017).

In September 2019, a total of 186 migrants benefited from the 'Emergenza Freddo' (accommodation provided for homeless people during the winter time), comprising 34% of 'Fuori Quota' – as will be explained –, 18% refugees, 46% migrants with a regular residence permit, 2% without any document). Furthermore, 45% of the total comprised migrants who had settled in the territory since minimum a year; the remaining 55% comprised people transiting through the city or who had settled since less than 12 months (Antenne Migranti 2020).

During 2018, a total of 845 people were registered for the 'Emergenza Freddo' and a total of 548 eventually accessed one of the available shelters, highlighting that many were actually left stranded in the city. The majority of migrants were of Pakistani origins, followed by Moroccans, Afghans, Iraqis and Nigerians. Italians corresponded to a total of 35 individuals – a figure that doubled compared to 2017. If we compare data on the legal status of beneficiaries, in 2018 and 2019, it emerges that the total number of 'Fuori Quota', holders of refugee status decreased (from 48% to 24% and from 24% to 18% respectively), while the total number of migrants with a regular residence permit increased from 26% to 46%.

What must be explained is that the way in which migration and transit have been dealt with in Bozen presents some peculiarities. First, responsibility for reception has been entrusted to two associations, Volontarius and Caritas, through direct selection by the Provincial Authority which does not grant full accountability of the Authority itself (Antenne Migranti, ASGI 2017), contrary to the standard procedure adopted by the public sector in Italy that involves the publication of and participation in a public tender. Second, in Bozen a system of 'Fuori Quota' has been implemented: the Provincial Authority has been providing accommodation to migrants who were re-distributed throughout Italy upon arrival, through the dispersal system operated by the Italian Ministry of Interior. There is however a number of migrants who have been classified as 'Fuori Quota', as anticipated above, that is to say migrants who have arrived autonomously, via land, to Bozen. They have been dealt with differently, in a system that is clearly characterised by the stratification of forms of access to reception, with considerable discretion on the side of reception operators that have been producing and re-producing various forms of marginalisation (Degli Uberti 2019, 3).

In particular, two parallel modes of reception have been envisaged: on the one side migrants who had been re-distributed through ministerial quota were accommodated in large centres, in poor hygienic and living conditions, with hardly any health assistance – particularly in 2016 where a lack of available accommodation was experienced

in town; on the other migrants 'Fuori Quota' were accommodated in temporary facilities dedicated to people with specific vulnerability only, including females, particularly lone mothers, while generally excluding men. Yet, even vulnerable people are not always provided adequate assistance, due to the structural absence of sufficient places (as it repeatedly emerged during the fieldwork between November 2017 and March 2019).

Concerning accommodation for vulnerable migrants, a relevant, although non-consequential aspect of the above parallel system of quotas, is that to date the SIPROIMI is not operating, which would have granted specific support for vulnerable individuals, including also specific individual projects to facilitate their way towards autonomy upon completion of reception projects. This in turn has arguably contributed to marginalisation (see for example Medici Senza Frontiere 2016) and institutional abandonment (Agier 2005), which ultimately are crucial elements contributing to Nigerian women refalling into trafficking circuits.

Another point needs to be made with reference to vulnerable migrants. In September 2016, the so-called Circular Critelli was approved by the Provincial Authority and introduced a system of access to reception based on the deservedness of potential beneficiaries.

It spelt out the categories of migrants who can and cannot access reception: many asylum seekers who travelled from the Balkans, transited along the Brenner route to then get blocked within it. These included migrants who had obtained the status of refugee or humanitarian protection and tried to reach Northern Europe; migrants informally re-admitted to Italy or that travel back to Italy to apply again for asylum – after having put forward one of more applications in other Member States that eventually rejected them; migrants with a pending asylum application in Italy who left reception centres to try and find better reception solutions in Northern Europe.

The Circular was eventually judged unconstitutional.[21] It became immediately evident that the Circular was based on the assumption of preventing asylum seekers from applying for asylum in Bozen, to have considering Bozen as a privileged destination (Antenne Migranti 2017, 41) encouraging a form of 'asylum and reception shopping'.

The consequence of this approach to the management of migration is that the system of reception has become more and more opaque. It still looks like a system in its initial experimentation phase. This has meant that many migrants have not received adequate support and that their rights have not be granted as the Italian and European legislative framework require. Besides, many migrants have found themselves in a sort of limbo, while waiting to access the asylum pro-

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21   See Sentence no. 4934/18, 448/18 del 4/10/2019 of the Tribunal of Bozen.

cedure or to try and continue their travel. As a result, the number of people in the city of Bozen have multiplied who could be defined either as asylum seekers or homeless, within a slow system of reception who wears off migrants forced to wait for an endless period to continue with their migration project while finding themselves in a situation of extreme fragility.

Not to be underestimated is also the fact that the Municipality of Bozen, similarly to other municipalities in Italy, has recently implemented the so-called urban DASPO, that is to say a policy measure through which the mayor – in collaboration with the Prefect – can find a person for specific reasons (such as prostitution and begging) and prohibit the same person from circulating within the area in which he/she was stopped for a given time.[22]

Going back to the reception system and its related measures, homeless people do not have access to it. The only available services for them are provided by Caritas: a short interview to orient the person on the services on the territory, support for the compilation of the asylum application and provision of a card that allows to have access to meals and showers. However, as it emerged during the fieldwork (November 2017-March 2019), these services are not always granted and discretion is evident. This situation hit the headlines in 2017, when the news reported about Adan, a 13 year old who in spite of having muscular dystrophy was still left out in the streets with his family and eventually died a few days later.[23] To date the situation has not improved considerably. A few people have been found dead along the river. The media did not report about it, but as some volunteers explained their death was the consequence of missing health support (fieldwork note 27 October 2019). Adding to this, many women disappeared from the city without leaving any trace since the last months of 2017 and this is also a sign of institutional abandonment.

When a person arrives to Bozen the first contact it should be with Volontarius Infopoint, with the help-desk. No specific evaluation is undertaken to verify the legal status of individuals, nor their condition of vulnerability, including for example indicators suggesting the person has been victim of trafficking.

As a result of this, in May 2018, around 260 people ended up being homeless in the streets, including 160 family members, of Nigerian, Kurdish-Iraqis, Moroccan nationality, and 100 male individuals of Gambian, Tunisian, Moroccan, Malian, Pakistani and Afghan nationality (estimates by Antenne Migranti volunteers, fieldwork note

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22 https://www.gemeinde.bozen.it/UploadDocs/26393_3667734.pdf.

23 *Alto Adige*, 12 October 2017 "Circolare Critelli, raccolta firme per abolirla", available at http://www.altoadige.it/cronaca/bozen/circolare-critelli-raccolta-firme-per-abolirla-1.1343670.

27 June 2018). The 160 family members were transferred to centres in central Bozen first, to extraordinary facilities outside the city second and finally to SIPROIMI outside of the region. Of the male individuals, 70 males are now homeless (estimates by street-volunteers, fieldwork notes, 20 February 2020).

Reception often seems to be geared towards the control of beneficiaries rather than their empowerment and integration, particularly in extraordinary facilities. In Italy this has translated also into rigid internal regulations limiting individuals' personal autonomy, although they should be allowed to go out during the day, as established for ordinary centres (Legislative Decree 142/2015; Accardo, Guido 2016).

Such a fragmented and de-structured management of migration flows, including also continuous transfers of people from one centre to another, has cleared informed and characterised the local practices of reception, while modifying the attitude of institutional social service staff towards an increasing closure: from discourses to practices that are based on pre-existing structural social divisions that have long characterised the wider geographical area of South Tyrol and that exemplifies a stratified society (Zinn 2018, 14).

5   Final Remarks

The geographical positioning is partly predictive of the categories of migrants that can arrive on the territory. As we have explained in this chapter, the number of migrants arriving by land and/or in transit to other countries has been quite high over the last years and has remained stable. Bozen have had to respond somehow to the presence of migrants arriving by land and/or transiting through the city, although municipal and provincial authorities have been under pressure not to welcome migrants arriving outside of the ordinary dispersal system.

The few services available to this group of migrants are relatively recent and (tend to) overlap, if available at all, with services for homeless people. Furthermore, services are provided mostly by third sector organisations, thus confirming their substitution function with respect to the public sector, that has rather focused on restricting movements through administrative acts, such as the Circolare Critelli, in line with what has been happening throughout Italy. This points to the fact that the traditional distinction between migration policy (focused on entry and citizenship) and immigrant (integration) policy (focused on local inclusion) has become inadequate (see Barberis, Violante 2013; but also Lebuhn 2013; Gargiulo 2017). Not only.

Restrictions for access to reception have been even more problematic for vulnerable migrants, although the national and European normative frameworks stress their specific needs should be addressed.

The implicit aim of policies in Bozen has been generally that of 're-pelling any burden' while also preventing the potential 'pull effect' of inclusive policies. On the side of the Provincial Authority, concerns about an extra 'burden' has been stated explicitly, in a recent press release,[24] taking a strong stance with the Ministry of Interior, calling for indications on how to include migrants that arrive autonomous-ly in the national system of dispersal, and on whether resources for homeless people should also be used for them (and for migrants that terminate their reception project or for whom reception measures are withdrawn, thus making them homeless).

Interestingly, many forced migrants are not calling for the right to enter and stay but rather for the 'right to come and go' (Fernandez, Olson 2011, 415), calling more attention to the need of mobility (see Mezzadra, Neilson 2016), to overcome the tendency of migration pol-icy to implement 'sedentary' solutions (Könönen 2018).

Seekers and holders of international protection arriving in Bozen have been treated as 'second-class citizens', compared to migrants arriving by sea on Southern Italian shores and dispersed through the quota system. This group of migrants can be considered as a further new category of excluded individuals (Degli Uberti 2019), construct-ed through policies associated with the blurred terminology of 'tran-sit migration', 'autonomous migrants', 'Fuori Quota'. This process of labelling that has been informing local practices, should be overcome through the recognition and re-instatement of the rights of seekers and holders of international protection. It can be done by radically transforming the approach to services, that is to say to overturn the criteria of 'deservingness' (Zetter 2007; Manocchi 2014) that lays at the basis of access to services themselves. It can be done by recognis-ing that the category 'migrants in transit' includes migrants with dif-ferent legal statuses, migration journeys and projects. And different genders. In this system of institutional abandonment and exclusion, women are particularly at risk, as their vulnerability is multiple and often associated with trafficking for the scope of forced labour and/or prostitution and their needs are addressed by a multitude of ac-tors, including anti-trafficking stakeholders that are responsible for identification and access to protection program and yet are scarcely connected to the overall reception system and the helpdesks open to migrants arriving in town (Caroselli 2020). A focus on women was be-yond the scope of this chapter, but it clearly deserves more attention.

Of course, focusing on the actual experience of each category of migrants is essential to recognise their specific needs. At the same time we would like to stress that it carries the risk of re-instating it,

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24   Press Release 1546, Autonomous Province of Trento, 21 June 2018 "Richiedenti asi-lo, dalla Conferenza Regioni ok alla proposta del Trentino e dell'Alto Adige".

while also moving attention away from the fact that such categorisation has been produced with the aim of 'fixing' positions and entitlements (Zetter 2007), and exclude systematically persons from receiving assistance (Degli Uberti 2019), showing how this politics decides to include or exclude trough deserving or (un)deserving refugees (Marchetti 2020).

The recent health emergency connected to the COVID-19 has highlighted some of the contradictions of the reception system in Bozen: in face of the evident critical issues relating to the system, institutions have so far failed to provide adequate solutions to provide migrants, particularly, migrants 'Fuori Quota' and migrants transiting through the city of Bozen, thus also exposing them to the risk of contracting the virus and to an increased marginality that makes access to services, including health services, all the more difficult.

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Finding New Ways for Refugees and Asylum Seekers' Inclusion
A Reflexive Analysis of Practices Developed by the Third Sector and Civil Society in Trentino

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Abstract   This essay aims at analysing the role played by civil society organisations in refugees' social and labour inclusion, highlighting the assumptions that drive their action and the challenges they are facing in the light of the recent political changes in the Italian scenario. The social realities investigated spare no effort for migrants' integration, sometimes finding solutions beyond the reception system. In this paper, we discuss their practices, analysing the borders (juridical, political, territorial, corporative, social, institutional, symbolic) they act and react, reflecting also on the assumptions that drive their actions, and crossing them with migrants' assumptions and biographical trajectories, to explore how they intersect, impacting on their migration and integration paths.

Keywords   Reception system. Civil society. Third sector organizations. Refugees. Inclusion. Trentino.

Summary   1 Introduction. – 2 The Act of Labelling People Through the Legal Dimension. – 3 Methodological Note. – 4 A Brief Summary of the Legal and Employment Framework. – 5 The Research Context. – 6 "Nobody Has an Umbrella": Past and Present of the Reception System in Trento. – 7 "People with their Suitcase in their Hands": Subjectivity, Creativity, Cooperation and Resilience Among Civil Society and Third Sector Outside the Bubble of the Reception. – 8 "At Least I Don't Have to Say Thanks": Some (Forced) Limits in and Beyond the Reception System. – 9 Conclusions.

1 Introduction

The reception system and its organisation, management and evolution influence the biographical trajectories of refugees and asylum seekers who are inside and outside it, as well as the policies and actions of the local social services. In line with the laws and regulations that discipline international migration in Italy in the last 30 years (Basso, Perocco 2003; Della Puppa et al. 2020), the national reception system was developed following emergency and security logics, too often aimed to assimilate or exclude immigrants settled in the territory and make them vulnerable.[1] These logics led to different, fragmented and discretionary levels of protection guaranteed to refugees and asylum seekers,[2] also triggering social tensions (Cuono, Gargiulo 2017).

In particular, research underlined the role played by local policies and local organisations in facilitating or instead hampering the reception projects for asylum seekers (Ponzo 2008; Fratesi et al. 2019) as well as how the whole reception system is imbued of protection and humanitarian logics that represent the asylum seeker as a voiceless body that needs to be restored and disciplined, leading to forms of institutional violence, thus prompting 'infantilisation' and victimisation processes, that cannot allow the recognition of their subjectivity and agency.[3]

Manocchi (2017), for example, developed interesting reflections on the role played by third sector organisations and their social workers in creating and reproducing, often because of economic reasons linked to the possibility of gaining funds, new processes of 'labelling' among the hosted asylum seekers, distinguishing among who is worthy of help from who is not, who is vulnerable and who is not, thus pushing those who are not fitting with these representations at the margins of the whole system (Sanò 2017). This structural and antagonistic perspective of the relationship between hosted people and social workers can be combined with another one that we can define more subjective and cooperative. According to Ambrosini (2018) all organisations and volunteers that work and act with immigrants

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This chapter is the common result of a shared work of research, investigation, and analysis. However, Giulia Storato wrote §§ 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8; Giuliana Sanò wrote §§ 4 and 9; Francesco Della Puppa wrote § 5.

1 Ambrosini 2014; 2015; Bertozzi, Consoli 2017; Campesi 2011; Bona, Marchetti 2017; Della Puppa et al. 2020; Gozzo 2017.

2 Bertozzi, Consoli 2017; Colloca 2017; InMigrazione 2018; Marchetti 2014; Naga 2017; Sorgoni 2011.

3 Avallone 2018; Mallki 1996; Michelon, Storato 2019; Pinelli 2017; Vacchiano 2005; Zetter 1991.

have also the possibility to act in their favour, facilitating process-
es of 'debordering' of the forms of labelling and control that imbue
the reception system and, in a broader sense, what he defined as the
immigration "battleground" (Campomori, Ambrosini 2020; Fontan-
ari, Ambrosini 2018), thus promoting the recognition of their agency.

2 The Act of Labelling People Through the Legal Dimension

By addressing these two different perspectives, in this contribution
we will focus on everyday practices – and their underlying meanings-
developed by third sector organisations, associations and informal
groups that deal with refugees and asylum seekers inside and out-
side the institutional reception system. The changes that have taken
place in recent years will also be considered and, in particular, those
after the entry into force of Law Decrees 113/2018 and 53/2019 (the
so-called 'Security Decrees'), converted respectively in Law 132/2018
and Law 77/2019, through which the law on international protection
was reformed and the structure and rules of the reception system
changed. In concrete terms, the new law changed the criteria for in-
clusion in the reception system, excluding asylum seekers from the
so-called second level (SPRAR), which was reserved only for unaccom-
panied minors and holders of protection. Together with the structural
changes, humanitarian protection has been abolished to make way for
new forms of residence permits, namely the ones for special reasons.
Above all, it is significant how due to the cancellation of the 'humani-
tarian protection' and the 'registration of residence', the new law im-
posed a gradual process of 'irregularity' of migrants, both newcomers
and those who had already achieved their legal and social stabilisa-
tion in recent years. Thanks to its particular nature, before the en-
try into force of the new law, humanitarian protection was the most
widespread among the forms granted by law. Designed to include all
cases where despite the impossibility of proving the persecution the
applicants' vulnerability was still evident, in reality, humanitarian
protection was able to fill the gaps in international law.

To all this is added the fact that the extraordinary reception sys-
tem has undergone significant financial cuts (as established by Min-
isterial Decree 20 November 2018), making it impossible for the man-
aging organisations to provide certain services, such as teaching the
Italian language or orientation activities to the labour market. The
negative effects of these new legal provisions have already been high-
lighted by other sources and research conducted in the field.[4] Follow-

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[4] Boccagni et al. 2020; OpenPolis, ActionAid 2020; Della Puppa et al. 2020; Campo-
mori 2020; Pasian et al. 2020.

ing the cancellation of the 'registration of residence', many obstacles have occurred in the daily life of migrants, exposing them to exclusion from settlement and work inclusion (Della Puppa et al. 2020).[5]

During our fieldwork, we referred to these subjects with the term 'the Unacknowledged' (Storato, Sanò, Della Puppa 2021), given that all of these people, regardless of their legal status, were experiencing different forms of denial in terms of access to a permanent job and home. In terms of the legal dimension, a further form of denial was experienced by some of our participants, the so-called 'out of quota', who entered the Italian border via the Balkan route and requested asylum and hospitality in Italy, without being immediately hosted in projects as happened to those who came by sea.[6] Likewise, recognised and unacknowledged asylum seekers expelled from the reception system have developed precarious housing paths, also due to a general closure of the access to the private real estate market. This uncertainty influenced, and at the same time, was influenced by the precariousness of the labour market, which seemed greedy for an unskilled workforce to be employed mainly in seasonal jobs in the agricultural and hotel tourism sectors. In these structural and material conditions, the participants developed their path that crossed the actions undertaken by local social services, third sector organisations, associations and informal groups which, from their different perspectives on the situation, tried to develop and strengthen their own services and support activities. In other words, the actions and activities developed by those organisations involved in the institutional reception system influenced the actions and strategies of refugees and asylum seekers as well as those developed by the other social services of the local context.

Starting from these premises, in this paper, we refer to the results of the research entitled 'Unacknowledged' conducted in the Autonomous Province of Trento, between 2018 and 2020, which aimed to explore housing, work and mobility strategies put in motion by refugees and asylum seekers who were on the margins of the reception system. In particular, we will focus on the role played by civil society and third sector organisations in promoting the work and housing integration of refugees and asylum seekers, by referring to the first part of the research that involved key-informants, working or participating in these organisations. In doing so, we will explore the principles and representations that guide their actions and highlight their

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[5] In recent days, news has come that the government has amended the security law approved by the previous government run also by the Northern League party. We pick up on these changes on § 4 of the present chapter.

[6] Sanò, Della Puppa 2020; Semprebon, Pelacani 2020; Benedikt 2019; Medici Senza Frontiere 2018; Antenne Migranti et al. 2017.

(potential) strengths, expressed in terms of creativity, cooperation and resilience, as well as their (forced) limits, uttered in terms of re-producing inequalities, maintaining boundaries and differentiation.

3 Methodological Note

In this research we adopted a qualitative methodology, combining ethnography with in-depth interviews. The fieldwork lasted 18 months and it entailed two different phases in data collection: the first one based on interviews with key-informants who entered in contact with the research population, while the second one based on ethnography and in-depth interviews with refugees and asylum seekers who were living at the margins of the reception system. The first phase was concluded with the collection of 28 interviews with: case-workers with asylum seekers hosted in the reception system, social workers and volunteers who work with homeless people; volunteers of associations and informal groups which develop activities and services addressed to research population. The second one, driven in the places of ethnography, allowed us to meet around 40 men who applied for asylum in Italy and were out of the reception system. About half of them have been also interviewed.

Though initially conceived to refer to asylum seekers who obtained a definitive denial of their request for international protection, the research, thanks to the experiences and know-how shared by key-informants and to the preliminary observations of the researchers, changed its target, including also regular asylum seekers and refugees who obtained the formal international or humanitarian protection. What emerged was that these people, although they were formally recognised, were experiencing almost the same forms of social denial than those who were undocumented. In this sense, the notion of 'Unacknowledged' from the heuristic title of the research became the lens through which analysing and re-reading the juridical and the social conditions experienced by the majority of the immigrants with whom we came in contact during our fieldwork. From the analysis of the empirical material we collected, it seemed quite evident to us that the use of this 'label' had much more to do with the social dimension and everyday life conditions of the migrants who were at the margins of the reception system.

In particular, the term 'Unacknowledged' resulted to be appropriate and analytically useful to describe the social invisibility and forms of everyday denial lived by the individuals outside the institutional circuits in terms of housing and working arrangements, which was strongly hindered by local policies and sometimes by the actions of third sector organisations and associations that entered in contact with them. Refugees and asylum seekers' biographical trajecto-

ries were indeed influenced by the action of these "intermediaries" (Ambrosini 2018), whose initiatives and services were represented as ambivalent, acting as both push and pull factors that might lead to stratified and diversified forms of 'unacknowledgement' (Storato, Sanò, Della Puppa 2021).

Within this perspective, the interviews conducted with key-informants have been extremely useful not only to acquire a deep knowledge of all actors around the reception system and how they work, but also to observe the practices and representations that drive their actions, allowing the researchers to reflect on the different ways they react or reproduce the different forms of 'unacknowledgment', thus to unveil their strengths and weaknesses.

The empirical part of this chapter will focus on both these issues. Before presenting it, a detailed explanation of the normative frame within which these social agents act and of the peculiarities of the research context is needed.

4 A Brief Summary of the Legal and Employment Framework

Due to the high number of arrivals of forced migrants across the Mediterranean Sea in 2015, a binary reception system has been implemented in Italy. As the number of reception's places within the SPRAR system (the acronym stands for Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees) was insufficient in satisfying the number of requests, another parallel reception system was created (the so-called CAS – the acronym stands for Extraordinary Reception Centres).

This second one was inspired by logics of emergency and, lead by Prefectures, was managed by third sector organisations. CAS could be placed in large hotels or military barracks, hosting a large number of asylum seekers or could be engaged in the so-called 'wide-spread reception', with small flats converted in reception centres placed in cities and small towns all around Italy. Although governed by different resources and principles, the two different reception systems followed similar rules, offering to the hosted asylum seekers some basic services and an orientation to the institutions of the territory. In this organisation, the big centres became the places of first reception in each region, while the small ones, both CAS and SPRAR, assumed the duty to manage a second reception, in which a stronger orientation to working and social integration of asylum seekers was intended to be promoted.

In this scenario, Law Decree 113/2018 marks a further obstacle in the path of social inclusion of immigrants. As we have already explained, it entails the cancellation of the residence permit for humanitarian reasons; the restrictions on the right of residence regis-

tration; the denied access to SPRAR programs for asylum seekers; the extension of detention periods in hotspots and repatriation detention centres; and the shift of funds from assistance to expulsions.

The introduction of these innovations has produced new forms of 'irregularities' within the immigrant population. In practice, it has made people invisible, even those currently present in the territory, by hindering their access to social health services, and putting them in a position of vulnerability to exploitation by unscrupulous employers and criminal networks. It also foments fears and racism, and as we will see below it undermines the virtuous paths activated over the years in many Italian municipalities (Boccagni et al. 2020). We can affirm that, the 'Security Decree *bis*' (Law Decree 53/2019) is part of this political and social framework of 'institutional racism'. Indeed, the law has amended the criminal code, to the text of public security laws and the provisions for the protection of public order aimed at the repression of social and civil struggles and dissent, moving the repression of almost any form of protest to the criminal field. The consequences are particularly serious for immigrants, given that they often live in precarious socio-legal conditions compared to natives. This repressive tightening must be read in the light of a particular economic phase, which desperately requires a reduction in the protection and cost of the workforce. In this regard, the current reconfiguration of the mechanisms of repression, precariousness and marginalisation of refugees and asylum seekers tends to make these people increasingly 'vulnerable' within the social dimension and, above all, in the labour market system (Dines, Rigo 2015).

As Di Cecco claims:

> While (Italian) migration policies seek to strengthen the command of migrant mobility, producing complex logistics based on control and discipline within the reception system, the labour market is crossed from increasingly massive phenomena of non-payment, thanks to diversified forms of competition between workers and the growing weight of the 'political economy of promise' [Bascetta 2015]. (2019, 211)

This particular nature and vocation of the labour market for asylum seekers and refugees will be present in the following empirical section of this contribution, in which the rhetoric and practices related to job inclusion will be extensively explored, by addressing particular attention to the representations put in place to make a distinction between 'deserving' and 'undeserving' migrants.

Furthermore, the very recent Law Decree 130/2020 must also be recalled, accepted by the main Italian mass media as a 'cancellation of the security decrees'. Actually, the new provisions on immigration, approved by the so-called 'Conte 2 government', hegemonised above

all by the 5 Star Movement and the Democratic Party, do not cancel anything essential of the previous Law Decrees 113/2018 and 53/2019, limiting themselves to making a few minor adjustments and fully confirming the repressive and criminalising system towards immigrants – and social struggles (Della Puppa et al. 2020) – they contain.

First of all, the multiple detention facilities for refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants without residence permits have not been abolished and no abolition is planned. In these detention centres, frequently, human, social and civil rights have systematically been violated. At the same time, the SPRAR system was not restored, the only one that guaranteed minimum results of social inclusion, providing for the insertion of applicants for international protection in small structures, integrated within the local socio-territorial fabric, with training courses and integration paths. Although the SPRAR system does not represent a 'glorious past' to be claimed, it was certainly a more shareable and effective system – despite the coexistence of very different methods of intervention among them (Sanò 2018) – than the current one, based on a concept of emergency and 'extraordinary' reception, which provides for the concentration of large numbers of applicants, amassed in large centres and separated from local communities. To replace the SPRAR, a new 'reception and integration system' has been created with features that are still largely unknown and opaque.

The institution of humanitarian protection – up to the decrees of the previous government led by the Northern League and the 5 Star Movement – was the form of protection through which asylum seekers could most frequently hope to obtain a permit of residence – has not been reinstated, but new cases of 'special' protection have simply been 'added'.

Therefore, the entire security, repressive, discriminatory and racist approach of Italian migration policies, past and recent, is substantially reaffirmed.[7]

5 The Research Context

As previously written, the research has been conducted in the Autonomous Province of Trento. Because of its position, among the Alps and close to the Austrian border, and of its greater political autonomy from the central national government, the so-called 'forced migrations' and the management of the reception system present in this territory some peculiarities.

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[7] Basso 2010; Basso, Perocco 2003; Della Puppa et al. 2020; Ferrero, Perocco 2011; Perocco 2012.

Firstly, as the other Italian regions, also the Province is involved in the territorial redistribution of immigrants that arrive in Italy through the Mediterranean Sea. Once arrived on the territory, asylum seekers found the same double standard of reception previously described (CAS and SPRAR, now called SIPROIMI – Protection System for Persons with International Protection and Unaccompanied Foreign Minors). The total population of asylum seekers received in Extraordinary reception centres during 2015-20 has been always maintained below 2000,[8] thus a limited quota compared to other regions. The same can be said about the receiving capacity of the local SIPROIMI system. It offers only 149 places (17 of them reserved for non-accompanied foreign minors), and together with the Autonomous Province of Bolzano, it covers only 1% of the total places available (SIPROIMI, CITTALIA 2019). Probably also because of these limited numbers, the management of the local reception system differs from the rest of Italy, as we are going to see later.

The discussion on the arrivals by sea and the local reception system needs to be integrated and enriched with the features of another important phenomenon that differentiates the research context from the other parts of Italy. We refer to the arrival of immigrants from a different route, that of Brenner, which crosses the border between Austria and Italy. These people, coming above all from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh (Giovannetti 2018), often ask for asylum in Trento. They are usually called 'Dubliners' or 'out of quota'. 'Dubliners' because they have often crossed, and have been fingerprinted, in other European countries of the 'Schengen area' and for this reason for them Italy does not represent, as for the arrivals by sea, the first country in which they formally asked for international protection. Given the regency of the Dublin Treaty, once they arrive in Italy their request for asylum is 'frozen' and the Dublin procedure is activated to establish which is the competent country that has to examine their request. 'Out of quota' because these people are not included in the quota of territorial redistribution previously cited as those arriving through the Mediterranean route. For this reason, they do not immediately enter the formal reception system, being forced to access the low-threshold services as if they were undocumented and, in the worst case, to sleep in the informal settlement of the city (Storato, Sanò, Della Puppa 2021). Also because of these 'unacknowledgement', these particular categories of asylum seekers suffer from invisibilisation processes within official statistics. It is almost impossible to establish the quantitative dimensions of this

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8 Reference to data available at the following link: https://www.cinformi.it/Progetti/Accoglienza-straordinaria/Cruscotto-statistico-accoglienza/I-grafici/Presenze-in-Trentino.

phenomenon, although other researchers and our fieldwork suggest that it is constant and continuative.[9]

In this scenario, our research aimed at exploring the working and housing strategies, and in a broader sense the biographical trajectories, of refugees and asylum seekers who were at the margins –of pre-reception and post-reception – of the institutional reception system. As it has been said earlier, it is almost impossible to establish how many people are at such margins: data available show how, only in 2019, more than 400 people exited the extraordinary reception system, finding themselves at the opposite side (CINFORMI 2020). Among them, there are refugees and asylum seekers who decided to remain in Trento, some of them living different forms of 'unacknowledgment' and describing precarious housing and working trajectories. Also for this reason, the features and everyday work of the reception system is linked with the features and everyday work of other territorial social services, which the research population may access. We refer in particular to the low threshold services addressed to homeless people that in Trentino seem to be highly developed compared to those arranged in other Italian regions. Although the presence of dormitories – whose capacity is increased during the winter – and daily services open all year, their access criteria, in particular of the dormitories differently accessible according to the residence permit, subtend the conviction, guided by the ideological rhetoric of the 'welfare shopping', that a good and always accessible welfare system may attract many new immigrants and asylum seekers from other territories. For these reasons, in recent years the receiving capacity and measures have been drastically reduced, limiting the assistance provided to 'out-of-quota' asylum seekers and dismantling the reception system itself. Data provided by the Provincial body CINFORMI, clearly show how, after the entry into force of Law Decrees 113/2018 and 53/2019 and the victory of Lega at the provincial election, the widespread reception system has been drastically dismantled. If at the end of 2018, there were 179 reception centres in 69 municipalities of the Province, the provision for the end of 2021 is to maintain 40 reception centres distributed only in 12 municipalities (CINFORMI 2020).

Also for these reasons, in recent years, an increased number of people who are forced to live in informal settlements has been registered. These people usually live in Trento, not only because it is the city which receives most asylum seekers, but also because this is the only city, together with Rovereto, that offers low threshold services. This group of people is therefore composed also by asylum seek-

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[9] Benedikt 2019; Semprebon, Pelacani 2020; Medici Senza Frontiere 2018; Antenne Migranti et al. 2017.

ers that are not able to access the reception system and by refugees and asylum seekers that, although having completed their reception project, have not been able to find a permanent house and work position within the territory. In their everyday life, these people can cross the initiatives developed by third sector organisations and social services, whose action has been challenged by the previously discussed provisions on asylum and reception systems.

6 "Nobody Has an Umbrella": Past and Present of the Reception System in Trento

As we said earlier, the organisation, the provided services and, in a broader sense, the politics of reception inevitably influence refugees and asylum seekers' biographies as well as the actions that local social services, third sector organisations and informal groups can take. The deep changes of the reception system, presented in the previous paragraphs, were implemented also at the local level, and therefore in Trentino, where in the same period the result of the local elections confirmed how the electorate was in line with the orientation taken by the national government in the field of immigration. In this context, most of the key-informants involved in the research experienced, as defined by one of the interviewees, a 'shock' in adapting to this changed working and social context, realising that they probably had been working and operating in a 'bubble', without having a full understanding of the increasingly hostile attitude towards immigrants in their city.

> It has been like going out, I don't know, from, feeling a big shake and saying: but what did we do? Nobody understood us, in these years we have been talking among us, because evidently outside there, something else was happening, thus, the idea of a bubble that is a exploding, a bubble, I mean, I am afraid that all of us remained actually in a bubble, that is the reception world, I don't know how much we succeed to bring it outside; we were so busy to make things work that maybe, then, I don't know how much we transmitted. (key informant)

> What I realise is that the world of social work in Trentino somehow is in shock now and it struggles to overcome this shock because, it's like saying, there has always been the sun and suddenly it starts to always rain and nobody has an umbrella, boots and you only have two pairs of sandals, while you need socks and hot clothes, thus we are retooling. (key informant)

This widespread feeling of being misunderstood and the consequent shock has been reinforced by the fact that the reception system in

the City of Trento has been depicted as an example of 'good reception', given also to the porous borders between the two different subsystems (CAS and SPRAR).

> The changes for me, this question obviously makes me think only and exclusively of the ongoing political change that in Trentino we perceived in a particular way, because I believe that here a reception system had been established, although with thousands of critical issues, but after all good, compared to the rest of Italy, I mean, the idea of a 'widespread reception', the activation of many services, in my opinion, over the years allowed the effective integration of people, also in the most distant territories, in the valleys, because the small centre and few people allow integration more easily and so on. (key informant)

Differently from the rest of Italy, the whole reception system was in fact governed by the Autonomous Province of Trento, to which all third sector organisations managing small and big centres referred. This centralisation, spatially expressed in the institutional building of CINFORMI, allowed the elaboration of a quite homogeneous reception system, with similar standards between SPRAR and CAS and with some transversal services that were addressed to all asylum seekers and refugees hosted. Just to give some examples, the legal service, the orientation to the integration in the labour market and the psychological support were provided by single organisations and were aimed at all asylum seekers hosted in the Province. With the changes described above, some of the services were forced to close (i.e. the Italian language courses or the job orientation for CAS) and others have been reformulated. Furthermore, the 'widespread reception' in small apartments in the valleys is still closing and the hosted asylum seekers are gradually being transferred into the only big reception centre that is placed in the city of Trento. Also, the borders of all social work in and beyond reception are porous, with strong cooperation between third sector organisations and civil society, that has its roots in the past years and now is still evolving, given the changes previously described. Some of the organisations which are managing reception centres for asylum seekers are for example responsible of other forms of reception addressed to holders of international and humanitarian protection as well as to immigrants or people who suffer from working and housing precarious conditions. They manage some flats, sometimes with the cooperation of the municipality of Trento, to contrast potential situations of marginality in the city. Once a recognised asylum seeker has to abandon the reception project, they can ask for a place in these other services and find a temporary housing solution, that may be free or rented with a facilitated fee. At the same time, once an immigrant

is forced to leave the reception project without having found a house, an articulated network can be activated. For example, some associations are managing flats that are available for refugees and asylum seekers, promoting also experiences of co-habitation, and volunteers are offering a place to sleep for the night. Finally, there are services which are addressed to homeless people which are providing daily and night reception also to the population involved in the research and in particular to those arrived from the Balkan route and other Italian cities. With particular reference to the so-called 'Out of quota', other services have been implemented during the past and the present, establishing dormitories or 'pre-reception centres' in which they have been hosted.

Therefore, in this sense the biographical trajectories of the research population influence, and at the same time, are influenced by the services and solutions that the civil society and third sector in Trentino are able and willing to provide. The offer addressed to these people is always evolving in this new scenario. In the following two paragraphs we are going to describe some of the meanings, practices and representations that guide the promotion of the social and labour integration of refugees and asylum seekers in Trento.

7 "People with their Suitcase in their Hands": Subjectivity, Creativity, Cooperation and Resilience Among Civil Society and Third Sector Outside the Bubble of the Reception

A first dimension that emerges from key informants' interviews is the fact that, given the changes occurred, they feel a need to develop new creative answers, without relying so much on public institutions, thus showing also their resilience. The centralisation in the management of the reception system that represented in the past a point of strength is indeed nowadays revealing its weaknesses:

> To me it has been quite a shock, therefore now we are operating in a very different context, you need to invent new strategies that are going out from the, I mean, institutional logics of the project and you need to start to think on European funds, other funds and therefore going out from the dynamic very much, here everything depended from the Province, Cinformi was at the centre and then every organisation worked; I believe that this experience will teach us, as an organisation, to orient on other realities. (key informant)

> Perhaps, as a system we did not protect ourselves. I mean, the communication that we gave, probably was not the right communication. We didn't communicate efficiently. Our internal organi-

sation has always depended from [CINFORMI][...] the system was not ready to sustain itself beyond the Province, it was too linked, so perhaps we should have reflected on this. (key informant)

Therefore, within this new context, both third sector and civil society organisations developed new forms to cooperate and new services to respond to the emergent needs in particular of those people who are at the margins of the reception system (Boccagni et al. 2020). For example, front offices have been created to help refugees and asylum seekers without the legal assistance provided by the reception projects, to be properly informed on the advancement of their request for international protection as well as to help immigrants with humanitarian protection to renew their documents. Some important efforts have been done also concerning the teaching of the Italian language. Besides the existing associations, new ones have been created and they all coordinate their action – through the new-born 'Rete Italiano Trento' – to avoid overlapping, and at the same time to differentiate, the offer. Lots of volunteers are nowadays engaged in the teaching of the Italian language, showing also how the changes have generated a counter-action by people who previously maybe were not so much in 'the field'. The Italian schools seem often to represent the first contact point between the research population and all other services. Through lessons, they can establish the first relationship of trust and then present the different problems they are facing in their everyday life outside the system.

Another important contact point is daily services for homeless people, often attended also by the research population, in which great cooperation between social workers and volunteers has been established, also through the creation of particular projects. Thus, in both examples, from a situation of crisis, forms of cooperation and resilience have arisen, that questioned the already exploded borders of the reception bubble. The cut of financial resources for reception was converted in social and relational resources for the whole community. In fact, on one hand, refugees and asylum seekers increased their possibilities to meet new local people, on the other hand, there has been collective care of their situation by social services and local communities, which had never been in contact with these people before. A brief note is needed about the only people who, in these cases, seem to have been most affected by these changes, i.e., the social workers and Italian teachers employed in the reception centres, who lost their jobs and who are another kind of 'unacknowledged' that we are not considering in this contribution, but to which public and academic attention should be given.

All third sector and civil society organisations are 'retooling' themselves on the promotion of housing and labour inclusion, which is also the main focus of the research. Concerning the facilitation of the integration in the labour market, the only service that is still

working is addressed to those who are hosted in the SIPROIMI system. The transversal service of orientation for CAS closed during winter 2019 and, although it presented some limits that we are going to describe later, it was extremely useful because it made many efforts to work also with the territory, to increase immigrants' qualifications and to inform them about their rights as workers:

> We meet everyone. We give them information concerning the labour market, what is a CV, which are workers' rights, what is a contract and which are the training possibilities; how you can carry out an active job search, I mean, a general understanding and then we start meeting them in individual interviews, and according to the path length and their knowledge of the Italian language, during the individual interviews we try to understand which are the objectives to work together on. (key informant)

> Well, in general we work a lot with the territory, because the key of job orientation has been that of working a lot with the companies and a lot with the territory. (key informant)

With regards to the new strategies to promote refugees' job orientation, the only facilitations provided by social services and civil society are related to help to find job opportunities through formal and informal channels (job agencies and acquaintances) and to write or update their CV. For the refugees and asylum seekers involved in the research, finding a job is one of the main worries, although they are losing their trust in the formal channels provided by the city (public and private job agencies), recognising the importance of knowing people who might help them.

> He tells me that he needs a job, that he wants to pay taxes and he doesn't understand why the labour market is so closed. He brought his curriculum to different job agencies and nobody answered him. Also among the other guys involved in the research, there is a widespread idea that job agencies are useless. Several times they told me that they have brought their CV everywhere without receiving any answer. (Field note, 4 July 2019)

Once again, the collective care previously described and the increase of the occasions of contact between local people and refugees, maybe through the Italian schools or through social services for homeless people, can represent a new strategy for civil society and third sector organisations to 'react' with creativity to the changes related to the orientation in the labour market, relying more on immigrants' words and volunteers or migrants' social networks than on the market of credentials and qualifications.

Developing creative and cooperative projects outside the boundaries of the reception system seems to help people who are working in these services to change their representations on their users, allowing asylum seekers to escape from their label of 'non-autonomous people' to become 'citizens' and 'normal people' who need just further help to start their new life on the territory:

> You create a different relationship with the hosted people in these projects, it is much a relationship of trust, not a peer one, but almost, I mean, they are free; it is a little bit their home, and a little bit our home; so that is the agreement; we can talk, we can stay together and communicate with each other, so far things have always been fine, then there is always the exception [...] at first I asked myself, but are they the same people? [...] because they were different, I mean, the reception system is necessary but it is a mandatory frame for people, there is little to say, a mandatory frame saying where one has to live, how they have to live, who they can meet, how many social workers, the legal and juridical procedure for the request, it is an obligation and they live it as an obligation, than it works because they have no alternatives and by the way it is an obligation that is useful also for them, but then they arrive to us, after two weeks, you feel that the person is 'decompressed', I use this term [...] because they are on the territory as citizens, it is really a thing in which you can see the difference, it is a different approach [...] so, this is the difference, they are not the beneficiaries, they are not all, the asylum seekers, they are not the ones who have just received, they are people who right now have their suitcase in their hands and who have to try and who want to stay here with things that they have not discovered yet. (key informant)

Once outside the bubble of reception, the representations of refugees and asylum seekers may change, opening to the possibility to find other solutions and to shift the focus from the formal aspects (the juridical label) to the substantial one (on people and citizens' rights), developing also creative solutions or showing the necessity to adapt the action to a new kind of people that may benefit of it. This path is not always easy and representations and the consequent practices developed by civil society and third sector associations may follow different guiding principles. This is particularly evident in the field of the initiatives developed to facilitate the housing inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers out of the reception system. Although the presence of immigrants who are sleeping in informal settlements around the city is still a significant phenomenon (Storato, Sanò, Della Puppa 2021), many associations, informal groups and third sectors organisations are trying to do their best to overcome it. As written before, some of the third sector organisations which manage reception cen-

tres, have also their own projects, in which they host for a while families or young men who are facing, not only economic, difficulties in accessing the private housing market. Only regular asylum seekers and refugees may access these services and places are limited, not enough to satisfy the requests. Besides these services, some associations or volunteers work in strict collaboration with third sector organisations involved in the reception, and offer refugees and asylum seekers who are going out from the projects, a place to live until they can find a house. Furthermore, there are associations or social services finding housing solutions for migrant and native people in difficulty, that are adapting their action in the light of the new requests, questioning their ways to offer housing solutions. They develop new experiences of cohabitation not depending on, but in collaboration with third sector organisations engaged in reception. Finally, informal groups have been created with the peculiar aim to offer temporary housing solutions to these people while exercising forms of advocacy to guarantee their fundamental rights.

All the solutions and new projects offered and here briefly presented are still evolving and present both strengths and weaknesses. The former may be shortly listed as a strong general commitment of the local community, which increased after the latest changes to the reception system, the strong collaboration at every level (public, third sector, associations, informal groups and single volunteers), the creativity and the resilience, both expressed in terms of the capability to convert the resources available, relying also on other forms of social and financial support. The latter, and in particular the difficulties all these realities are facing to overcome an internalised model of reception, will be presented in the following paragraph.

8 "At Least I Don't Have to Say Thanks": Some (Forced) Limits in and Beyond the Reception System

The bubble in which the whole reception system has been included and that nowadays is challenged, revealed some limits in promoting the substantial working and housing inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers who entered in it.

Built on strict rules and through a language focused on some keywords like 'autonomy', 'competence', 'vulnerability', the reception system not only has been divided and separated from all other public services (providing, for example, its own psychological support system or job orientation), but produced divisions also within it, distinguishing between 'good migrants' or 'bad migrants', according to their capabilities and, above all, to their adherence to the rules of the reception (respect of the times, respect of the rules of co-habitation, being reliable on the working place) (Manocchi 2017).

This second differentiation probably depended on the expectations of the managing organisations to represent themselves outside, in the territory, as examples of 'good reception', also legitimised by a rhetoric of the public institutions linked for example to the development of 'best practices'.

Furthermore, this distinction could be reinforced also by the fact that from a legal point of view, in the past, asylum seekers could be recognised if they could prove a 'good integration path'. These stratified separations had also important practical consequences once people went out of the projects, leading to paradoxical situations that could question this rhetoric:

> The point is if the integration has been interpreted, for example, for young age, as a lack of relationships in the country of origin, a good studying path, maybe a civil service that in the meantime is finished; therefore a person who is potentially hyper-integrated and who obtained the document on this basis, is forced to go to a dormitory and therefore to move from a moment in which in the project you are the best, or one of the best, to a moment in which you share a dormitory with people who are at the margins of the society, and this fact creates very strong imbalances, because people are not ready, and also social workers are not ready. (key informant)

A discourse based on the merit, although legitimised firstly by the legal frame, and not on rights, can be counter-productive for the social inclusion of these people and the reproduction of these logics outside can create new boundaries among asylum seekers and refugees who deserve further help and those who do not.

These representations tend to be reproduced outside the reception system in other services or initiatives.

> Well, for the moment I met two opposite macro-categories. I mean, there are the super-autonomous and therefore the people who arrive [to the service] who are present, here, on the territory, but completely autonomous; from the other side there is a big bracket of people who are hyper-vulnerable, that is they often come accompanied also by social workers, there are many services who are already activated or that are activating, I would say that the intermediate bracket is missing, perhaps that we are more used to see within the project [of reception], that is the person who is autonomous on certain aspects, while on others who needs an accompaniment that is a little structured; well, these two categories, the super-autonomous and the vulnerables no autonomous are much more present [within the service]. (key informant)

> We agreed that people are chosen by the social worker, therefore it is difficult that we help someone who has not been introduced to us, for a reason, they are too many [people who need help]; [...] so, it seems to us a right criterion that of saying well he/she is a person who did a lot and has some numbers to move forward, he/she deserves also help, it doesn't mean that an unlucky person doesn't deserve help, but they are so many that, I mean. (key informant)

Within this context, some refugees and asylum seekers, who are considered to behave properly, can pass from a project to another, others can find other solutions, above all in terms of housing and working strategies, that don't cross the ones provided by the services listed above, becoming even more invisible for the native community, but maybe more rooted in the territory. The situation of precariousness that refugees and asylum seekers are facing, reveals how the structure of the labour and housing market in Trentino (with some differences and similarities in Italy as well) can be considered one of the main reason why these people, in most cases, cannot project their life in the territory in a more stable manner. Given the seasonal or short-term jobs that they are doing while they are going out from the projects (notice how having a job can be also a cause of exclusion from the right of reception), they can enter in some other projects of the territory or find some temporary housing solutions, falling then into a situation of extreme vulnerability once their contract, as well as the period in which they are hosted, are concluded. Among case workers and volunteers, there is awareness about the possibility that their support may end with an accompaniment to the so-called 'low threshold services'.

> Well, the job loss or we know that we received an intern, hoping that this period can help him as a launch pad, but we foresee that maybe this cannot be its conclusion; therefore an intern, a person who lost his job because his contract has not been renewed or truly because he lost the job because the company closed and... people who are doing civil service, right now there is this phenomenon of guys who are doing the civil service, it may be that where they are doing the civil service doesn't end with a hiring and it finishes, in those cases we do an accompaniment on the territory, it is sad, but it happens, we know that it may happen. (key informant)

The structure of the labour market, as well as the distrustful attitude towards migrants of the local community – widespread also in the housing market – limit the operating margins of the social workers who are engaged, or were engaged, in the promotion of refugees and asylum seekers' working inclusion.
One of the most used tools to match job demand and supply has been internships, which, although having been often successful for

inclusion, accepted and institutionalised unpaid work, socialising immigrants to their label of unqualified workers within the society and allowing companies and factories to always benefit from a free labour force, that hardly could have been absorbed in the paid labour market (Di Cecco 2019). Although the creativity of certain solutions found by third sector organisations can be, as previously written, appreciated and a strong work also to inform immigrants of their rights has been carried out, internships may have contributed to enforce the precariousness of life conditions of refugees and asylum seekers and all migrants and people in general, improving their qualifications, but imposing on them an institutionalised subordination, that someone did not accept. The episode narrated by one of the key informants is extremely useful to highlight this controversial issue, on which organisations have already reflected:

> I believe an interesting case, on which we have reflected also in team, is the case of this man, therefore a man of a certain age, we tried many ways, but he was having a very hard time with the language, he was a little slow, and it was at the end of the project and he was one of the cases in which we found a somewhat extraordinary resource, we understand what we can do, he went to a hotel in Trentino, on the mountains and therefore he did, the idea was that he would have a couple of months of internship and then he would be hired, it seems to me; now I don't remember exactly, but after the internship they did hire him, but with very few hours and in a situation of extreme irregularity and he chose to move, and he moved to work in Foggia, he went to Foggia, Rosarno, he worked in agriculture according to the different seasons and then he came back to renew his documents, we saw each other and he told me the situation in the South, that he was living etcetera and I said to him 'well, but don't you think that maybe you could have had a little bit more here?' and he answered 'in the South, I am exploited but at least I don't have to say thanks to anybody; here it seems that they do me a favour if they give to me 400 euro per month to work in a hotel' and I said: 'OK let's reflect a little bit on it', and sometimes it comes back to us, eh? In our mind. (key informant)

Furthermore, this system tended, above all in the past, to centralise the knowledge and expertise in assisting refugees and asylum seekers, operating within some forced limits (above all legal) that inevitably shaped also those of the wider community. An example can be provided through the meaningful words of a key informant, who is trying to develop new strategies to face the requests for accommodation by immigrants out of the projects. In the ethnographic diary written during one of our meetings it is said:

> An important issue emerged concerning the 'new requests': the paths developed by immigrants who came to access the service are very similar, people have similar experiences and this leads to talk about a 'massification of assistance', that is, it is like if during the reception project, anybody was offered the same possibilities and experiences (training or internships), making it difficult for the other services/projects to understand peculiarities and in which qualities a person differs from the other to propose its own intervention. (field note, 14 March 2019)

Finally, the reception bubble created also confusion and debates on which should have been the social service responsible for the care and assistance of refugees and asylum seekers:

> With particular reference to the research population, the key informant tells me about a problem concerning 'to whom belongs an asylum seeker?', a short circuit was created concerning the assistance of international protection seekers, with social services affirming that they were the responsibility of CINFORMI, making these people fall in a condition of strong marginality that forced them to access the low threshold services. (field note, 18 March 2019)

These are limits that we observed within and beyond the reception system and they can all be linked with the creation and maintenance of borders that lead to a mechanism of reproduction of inequalities, also in the wider community. After the changes previously described, all these limits have the potential to be overcome. Stronger collaboration and reflexive analysis among all people who are engaged in the welfare system is needed and it seems to us that these processes are ongoing and reinforcing. At the same time, it should also be emphasised that the creation of a sort of 'parallel welfare' or a welfare specifically aimed at refugees and asylum seekers, if, on the one hand, it could provide specific and more targeted support, on the other hand, it can create the conditions for an easy and generalised dismantling of the services, with the consequent loss of both migrant 'guests' and social operators.

9 Conclusions

The panorama described is extremely varied and undoubtedly shows a social world deeply committed to promoting work, housing and the social inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers at the margins of the reception system. In doing so, civil society and organisations are facing different challenges, referred not just on financial resources, that in Trento do not seem to be a problem as confirmed by the success of

many fund raising occasions, but in terms of taking reflective actions on the projects developed, avoiding the reproduction of inequalities, while one is engaged in overcoming them.

Further reflections on the entire social system are needed and they have to be inserted in a broader theoretical frame. In particular, it seems important to keep together the reflections on the living conditions of migrants with the analysis of the uncertain and opaque nature of the institutions.

Given its peculiarity and fruitful social texture, the territory we have chosen as a case study allowed us to reflect both on the incorporated meanings and representations associated to reception and on the practices developed inside and outside its borders, problematising their lights and shadows.

In light of the changes that have taken place in recent years, the efforts made by this contribution in exploring the triangulation made up of social actors, migrants and institutions can help broaden our vision on the reception system. Although the reception of refugees and asylum seekers has long been at the centre of numerous Italian debates that are mainly focused on rules, workings, and dynamics of control circulating inside the system, still not much has been written about how the reception paradigm affects the everyday-life conditions of migrants who are outside of this system.

Just as not many words have been said about the working conditions of social operators who are now forced to manage the erosion caused by the national and local policies. To the creativity and gestures of resistance that for years we have observed coming from migrants, especially in those studies focused on this topic, we must now add those coming from the employees involved in the reception system. Despite the concrete differentiation of status, with particular regard to the condition of non-citizen status shared by migrants, observing the role played by third sector organisations in facing the numerous obstacles posed by institutions can become a topic of interest. The ethnographic data and materials displayed on the pages of this article reveal two important elements not yet fully explored. Firstly, they show the forms of racism and discrimination that affect the workers employed in the reception system. This type of treatment is the result of an intense campaign of hatred and intolerance carried out by political actors who have spread the idea that working with migrants is not a real job. The consequences of this political communication are extremely visible in the empirical section reported in this article, especially where the testimonies of social workers describe the difficulty of building relationships of trust with the community and with the territory to provide social assistance, work and housing inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers.

Secondly, they capture the reflexivity adopted by workers who observe the functioning of this system from the outside and which

now appears to them full of critical problems. By adopting an external look, workers can certainly become more critical and, above all, put in place new strategies to cope with communication and cuts imposed by the political actors.

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For Dignity, Against Racism: The Struggles of Asylum Seekers in Italy

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Abstract   In Italy, over the last years in the world of social struggles asylum seekers have been in the spotlight several times, having led several episodes of mobilisations and protests. They emerged as political subjects, with their own claims and situations; parallel to the issue of reception, they expressed themselves in the public space as asylum seekers, with campaigns, pickets, and marches, with which the respect for their rights and dignity is advocated. This study analyses the causes, forms and repercussions of the struggles of asylum seekers in the last decade. After the analysis of the experience of immigrants' struggles over the last three decades, the article examines the social roots and the features of the struggles of asylum seekers between 2011 to 2019, and considers their meaning in the political context.

Keywords   Asylum seekers. Struggles. Reception. Italy. Racism.

Summary   1 Introduction. – 2 Struggles and Self-Organisation of Immigrants in Italy: A Snapshot. – 3 Asylum Seekers Between Precarity, Exploitation and Racism: The Social Roots of Protests. – 4 Struggles of Asylum Seekers Between Occasional Protests and Organised Mobilisations (2011-17). – 4.1 Organised Mobilisations. – 5 The Decline of Struggles Between War on Migrants and Repression (2018-19). – 6 Concluding Remarks: Fragmentation, Dignity, New Horizons.

1   Introduction

In Italy, over the last few years in the world of social struggles asylum seekers have been in the spotlight several times, having led several episodes of protests and mobilisations. Asylum seekers have often been present in immigrant struggles in the 1990s and 2000s, yet it was in the last ten years, since 2011, that asylum seekers emerged as individuals, *as political subjects*, with their own claims and situations. Parallel to the issue of reception, they have started to express themselves in the public space *as asylum seekers*, with protests, campaigns, pickets, and marches, with which the respect for their rights and dignity is advocated.

The majority of claims have immediate concrete goals, aimed at improving daily living conditions; many of them are, necessarily, temporary and occasional, while only a lower number has a longer duration, becoming structured, widening the topics, getting in connection with other organisations. This entails early claim processes with growing incisiveness which exposes the reception system, migration policies, public policies; wider protests and mobilisations in time, space and contents criticise the state policies up to the global situation, the state of affairs, meanwhile some realities enlarge the dimension of criticism and look beyond the local context.

If there is no unified movement in the struggles of asylum seekers, no connection with a wider immigrants' movement (which has weakened), no significant connection with the set of social struggles; this is due in part to the conditions of extreme precarity and weakness of asylum seekers, but mainly to the lack of a unified movement of social struggles and extreme limitation of social conflict. In any case, asylum seekers are a reality which creates struggles, and this is an important element for all social struggles; such struggles contribute to voice and support immigrant workers and all workers. For this reason, struggles of asylum seekers rekindle the political issue of the relationship between capitalism and migration (Basso 2020), regarding the relations between national workers and foreign workers, between social struggles and immigrants' struggles. Within this relationship, the features of the struggles of asylum seekers shall be understood, to observe what their role is and how they interact with social struggles. In theory, new solidarities may be generated by the fact that the disadvantaged class is a global one (Sassen 2007), but in practice, nothing can be taken for granted as there are several elements against it – starting from institutional racism, working relentlessly to disparage and divide.

The first chapter analyses, without aiming to be exhaustive, the causes, forms and repercussions of the struggles of asylum seekers in Italy in the last decade. The second chapter reports the experience of immigrants' struggles over the last three decades; chapter 3

examines the social conditions of asylum seekers, in terms of social roots for their struggles; chapters 4 and 5 analyse the struggles between 2011 to 2019.[1]

2 Struggles and Self-Organisation of Immigrants in Italy: A Snapshot

In the 1990s and 2000s, in Italy there have been several experiences of struggle and organisation of immigrants, which led to the creation of an embryonic immigrant movement. More or less structured, more or less long-lasting, and more or less wide and impacting experiences which saw the activation and self-organisation of immigrants, shedding light on important social issues in addition to the daily problems (*Trade Unions* 2004; Basso 2006; Basso, Perocco 2003). The immigrants' drive for self-organisation has taken two distinct, and in part separate, forms: immigrants' associations, the participation in trade unions. As for the first aspect, a great number of associations (cultural, religious, social and advocacy associations), have been constituted since the late 1980s, but they have manifested a certain fragility. This has been due to the permanent precariousness that characterised the working and the juridical conditions of immigrants, as well as to the migration policies that have hindered their process of self-organisation. Despite this fragility, there has been a trend over the years to constitute associations of a multi-national character, which have gradually taken their place alongside the several mono-national associations. As for the second aspect, the unionisation of immigrants has grown considerably in the last two decades; after a first phase which saw a movement of immigrants *towards the unions*, a phase of trade unions *towards immigrants* followed (Basso 2004; 2007; Della Puppa 2018).

The activism of immigrants was not irrelevant at all, despite the systematic effort to make it look as such. In the 1980s, when immigrants were a few hundred thousands, the very first organisations were created, mainly revolving around support networks and associations, which converged in Rome on 7 October 1989 in the first mass demonstration on immigration "For the rights of immigrants and equality". Since then, for over 15 years, there has been a surge in activities by immigrant workers, through the occupation of places where they could live and get organised, a remarkably wide unionisation, the struggles for residence permits in 2000 and 2010 in Brescia

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[1] The study is based on a census of the struggles and protests in the period 2011-19 featuring asylum seekers, whose data were gathered from the press and internet. A ten of interviews and talks were carried out with activists and leaders of the struggles.

(Montagna 2002, 2012) and in Rome, the creation of the Comitato Immigrati in Italia, the mobilisation and general strike in the provinces of Vicenza and Reggio Emilia against immigration law 189/2002 in the period 2002-03, the active participation side to side with Italian workers in the protests to defend Art. 18 of the Workers' Charter (Prohibition of dismissal without just cause). In between, a number of little, yet significant, responses, to the periodic intensification of state racist campaigns, started in 1991 against Albanians (locked up by the thousands in Bari stadium), in 1997 with the sinking of Albanian ship Kater i Rades by a corvette of the Italian navy, or the physical attacks against individual immigrants with the outbreak of wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, or against Palestine. This process of politicisation has reached its peak in December 2004 to then decrease, together with the gradual reduction of strikes and struggles of the national working class. This set of struggles, strikes, and mobilisations involved over the years, with changing intensity, several dozens of thousands of immigrant workers. Important concrete results arrived, such as the large regularisation launched with the entry into force of law 189/2002. Besides that, such resistance has raised a number of fundamental questions for the Italian public: the root causes of international migrations, the reasons of 'illegality' of a certain number of immigrants, the sources of racism and of the system of institutional discrimination, and their use by the upper class (Basso, Perocco 2020).

Between 1999 and 2004 immigrant workers were at the forefront of several actions to claim rights that the labour market and immigration laws were denying 'foreigners', more or less openly; whereas since 2008 onwards – due to the economic crisis, unemployment and precarity, state and employers' repression, Law 94/2009 "Provisions in the field of public security" together with other punitive measures, the exacerbation of racism and anti-migrant propaganda – there has been a comeback of struggles within a larger process of withdrawal in the labour movement and decrease in social conflict. In any case, mention shall be made of the several protests by farm labourers in Southern Italy countryside, in the province of Latina, by the female workers employed in fake cooperatives in the agrifood sector, by migrants in Rome for a right to housing (see also Lotto 2015; Mometti, Ricciardi 2011). A special highlight goes to the most important social struggle of the past ten years, i.e., the mobilisation of porters employed in the logistics sector, related to the independent trade union S.I. Cobas (Cillo, Pradella 2016). The logistics sector sees a remarkable presence of cooperatives or small firms working in subcontracting for large transport (Sda, Ups, Gls), trade (Amazon) or production (Ikea) companies; cooperatives' workers (warehouse keepers, porters, drivers) are mainly immigrants and are employed under very harsh conditions (extreme precarity, very low wages, ex-

hausting rhythms and working hours). Over time, workers have organised and mobilised to protect their rights and improve their working conditions, thus contributing to the development of S.I. Cobas; they have won several labour disputes and obtained good results in the hubs of logistics. The leading role of immigrant workers has affected the vision in S.I. Cobas, who has widened its scope also to immigration and migration policies; this political path has condensed in a two-fold unified struggle program (unification of social struggles, unity of Italian and immigrant workers) to face globally the various social issues.[2] This political program materialised in several demonstrations and mobilistions, which culminated in the general strike of 26 October 2018, and in a large demonstration in Rome on the 27 October, which saw the participation of 15,000 people, many of whom were immigrant men and women. The attention towards asylum seekers stems from different reasons, among which the fact that a part of them has been entering the labor market, in the sectors of logistics, agri-food and industry; in this process *labor activism* and *migration activism* intertwine and are tied together.

Asylum seekers have often been present in these struggles. One example is Jerry Masslo's story, a South African asylum seeker, anti-racism activist from Mthatha, a farm labourer in Campania who in 1989 with other immigrant workers asked for better working conditions: for that he was killed by the organised crime – always present in agriculture, especially in the recruitment of labourers through *caporalato* – illicit intermediation of workforce (Fanizza, Omizzolo 2019). His murder caused a sensation in the country, and gave way to the era of the political participation of immigrants, started with their presence in the aforementioned first large demonstration against racism (Rome, 7 October 1989). Another example is the asylum seekers who took part in the early 2000s to the struggles for residence permits and regularisation, for the right to housing, against the wars in the Middle-East, or in the last few years against the exploitation of farm labourers (Borretti 2010; Scotto 2016). Yet, it was in 2011, with the so-called 'North-Africa Emergency', that asylum seekers emerged as social and political subjects with their own claims. After having experienced arbitrary norms and practices, discrimination and racism, they have started to express themselves in the public space *as asylum seekers*, with protests, pickets and marches. Thus, in the 1990s and early 2000s asylum seekers had taken part in several social struggles in the country, but in the last decade, they have become leaders in struggles that are fully their own, on their living conditions, their reception, and their rights.

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2 https://sicobas.org/news/3123-documento-contro-il-razzismo-di-stato-per-l-unita-di-classe-tra-proletari-immigrati-e-autoctoni.

3 Asylum Seekers Between Precarity, Exploitation and Racism: The Social Roots of Protests

The increase in arrivals from Africa and Middle-East and the tripling of asylum demands from 2010 (12,000) to 2011 (37,000),[3] has highlighted the structural limitations in the system of asylum seekers reception, based on reception centres and refugee camps – which look more like total institutions. The higher number of asylum seekers applications[4] in 2014 (63,456), 2015 (83,970), 2016 (123,600) 2017 (130,110), 2018 (53,596),[5] 2019 (43,873)[6] have further underlined such limitations.

The reception and legal status of asylum seekers, reformed under legislative decree 142/2015, introduced important changes. It provided a legal framework and set standards, introducing important changes: the establishment of *Centri di Primo Soccorso e Assistenza* (CPSA, 'First-aid and Assistance Centers'), located in the landing regions or in the neighbouring ones; the establishment of regional Hubs and *Centri di Accoglienza Straordinaria* (CAS, 'Extraordinary Reception Centres') aimed at initial reception and classification; the enhancement of SPRAR (Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees), centers for reception and social integration. Instead Law 46/2017 limited the guarantees offered to asylum seekers: created to "streamline bureaucracy and protect those who deserve it", promulgated together with Law 48/2017 on the security and decorum of cities,[7] it generalised the hotspot approach of the European Agenda on Migration 2015[8] and introduced several procedural and changes of a restrictive nature.[9]

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[3] Source: Ministry of Interior.

[4] http://www.libertaciviliimmigrazione.dlci.interno.gov.it/it/documentazione/statistica/i-numeri-dellasilo.

[5] 67% denied. http://www.libertaciviliimmigrazione.dlci.interno.gov.it/sites/default/files/allegati/riepilogo_anno_2018.pdf.

[6] 81% denied. https://viedifuga.org/richiedenti-asilo-ed-esiti-in-italia-2019-dati-aggiornati-dopo-quattro-mesi-di-interruzione-gennaio-giugno-ipertrofia-dinieghi-umanitaria-all16/.

[7] A law against "urban decay" and in favour of "urban decency", affecting the poor and marginal layers.

[8] It is based on the large-scale implementation of asylum-seekers and refugees centres.

[9] For example: the amendment to the first instance judgment of international protection, i.e., the replacement of 'summary orders' with chamber proceedings without hearing, thus eliminating the open public aspect of the proceedings, the oral cross-examination and the possibility for the judge to ask questions to the asylum seeker who lodged an appeal; the abolition of the second degree of judgement: migrants won't be able to appeal against a judicial decision when their asylum claim is rejected; the establishment of Centres for repatriations, in view of increasing rejections and expulsions; the introduction of voluntary community service work, which turns asylum from an unconditional right into a status that shall be 'deserved'.

Such provisions have radicalised the restrictive and repressive approach of Italian migration policies, and at the same time they have not solved the issues affecting asylum seekers. The model of "widespread reception", proposed by the national reception system, failed because, notwithstanding the enhancement of SPRAR reception centers and the National plan for the distribution of asylum seekers,[10] only a part of the Municipalities offered accommodation.[11] Many Municipalities refused to host reception centers and thus the majority of asylum seekers (77% as of 15 July 2017; ANCI 2017, 23) were hosted in CAS, which are marked by inadequacy: lack of decent living conditions (overcrowding, structural deficiencies of the buildings), lack of services (food, legal and medical assistance, Italian language courses), and isolation of structures.

Whether it is a matter of first or second reception, of this or that type of reception structure, the social conditions of asylum seekers and refugees are quite poor. The housing, health, work, administrative, daily life conditions present many marked critical aspects.[12] But this is not only due to the emergency approach of migration policies, to a limitation of rationality and knowledge of public policies: it is a policy of inferiorisation and subjugation knowingly and systematically implemented in Italy for the last forty years concerning immigration. Therefore, in the case of asylum seekers, it is not only a problem of poor reception, of lack of attention from the state towards reception centres: the problem is the reception model itself, based on centres, based on camps, on the camp model, which has turned *Italy into a country of camps* (Roma camps, refugee camps, etc.). A model that clearly and necessarily must be overcome.

The concentration of public funds and structures in the hands of a few 'giants' of the non-profit sector turned often the reception of asylum seekers into a fully-fledged business activity. Social workers in reception centres are not properly trained and are underpaid; minors and the victims of human trafficking are barely protected; the long stay in reception centres, due to the delays in assessing asylum applications, leads many asylum seekers to depression, irregular work, prostitution or petty crime (Campagna lasciatecientrare et al. 2016). Besides the serious violations of rights in the process of identification of newcomers (Amnesty 2016), the asylum seeker's right to be heard within 30 days from the application day is still a very long way off.[13] The long

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[10] Memorandum of the Ministry of Interior of 11-10-2016.

[11] In 2016 only 40% (ANCI 2017, 25).

[12] Avallone 2018; Busetta et al. 2019; Campagna lasciatecientrare 2016; MEDU 2015; NAGA 2019; Swiss Refugee Council Osar 2020.

[13] In 2016 the mean time between the application and the response was 307 days (ANCI 2017, 25).

wait is exacerbated by the frustration caused by the rejections, which are quite abundant (around 50% of applications in 2016, 60% in 2017).[14]

Labour insertion of asylum seekers is quite critical. The majority of them ends up in irregular work and underground economy, especially once they are outside the reception system (either after obtaining international protection or after their asylum application was rejected). Voluntary community service work turned out to be irrelevant for the purposes of employment; on the contrary, the programs of voluntary work follows the logic of getting used to a permanent work precarity (Pasqualetto, Perocco 2020), which asylum seekers experience once they leave the reception centres.

This is topped by the violent stigmatisation campaign against asylum seekers, carefully fed by the mass-media, state institutions, political parties. Asylum seekers – portrayed as a global threat, as locusts draining the welfare system, as idlers – are pointed at as responsible for the financial scandals affecting the reception system and this increases the opposition of the Italian people against reception. They are subjected to the role of double 'victim': of poor management of public resources, of people's rage promoted by institutions. The latter is daily fueled by the spreading of fake news on public funds aimed at asylum seekers (e.g. the daily pocket money), on their lifestyle, on their culture, and on the reasons of their protests. Such news embeds the notion that the majority of asylum seekers are not 'real refugees' but rather 'economic migrants' in disguise as refugees who exploit the welfare and asylum system entering Europe 'illegally'. This narrative, based on the wrong yet smart distinction 'asylum seekers'/'economic migrants', is enhanced by the high number of rejections to asylum applications, even though such result has been proved to be the consequence of the assessment criteria (ANCI 2017, 25).

As it often happens, institutional racism has translated into popular racism. People's rage has burst against asylum seekers: from North to South in Italy, in small villages and large cities, there has been a plethora of protests (roadblocks, citizens' associations, pickets, torch marches, damaged reception structures) in anticipation of the arrival of asylum seekers in reception centres or against their presence.

Emergency policies, poor management, inadequacy of the structures, lengthy bureaucracy, extreme precariousness, institutional racism, and hatred campaigns are the main features of the framework of reception of asylum seekers. These are also the main elements generating their protests.

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4 Struggles of Asylum Seekers Between Occasional Protests and Organised Mobilisations (2011-17)

In the last decade, asylum seekers were at the forefront of hundreds of protests and mobilisations. The majority of their struggles is focused on reception conditions, as in their daily lives they basically live the reality of reception centres. Most of the times, these protests were inevitably occasional.

From 2011 to 2017 around 390 occasional protests were counted, mainly temporary actions lasting for a couple of hours, or a couple of days, which had no follow up. Such protests started from the daily experience of asylum seekers, who questioned specific aspects of the reception system and often focused against the cooperative managing the reception centre hosting them (186). Usual reasons are: food (90) – its quantity, quality or distribution pattern; the failure to distribute the 2.5 euro pocket money each asylum seeker is entitled to (72), the lack in the centre of equipment for the winter (warm clothes, hot water, heating, 19), clothes (27), wi-fi or means to communicate with the outside world (17); health and sanitation issues (29); the entry/exit time in the structure (6);[15] gaps in healthcare (26), in legal advice (7), in Italian language courses (15), in social inclusion or vocational training projects (6); the cooperative abandoning asylum seekers (5); insults, threats or ill-treatment by the operators in the reception centres (12).

Other reasons concern direct responsibilities of the State or anyway ascribable to decisions of the public authorities: the slowness in the assessment of their asylum application (111), the rejections of their applications (19), the request to issue an ID (12), the depletion of reception funds (7), the isolation or overcrowding of the reception structure (41), the transfer of asylum seekers to other structures against their will (13), the lack of communication of their transfer to other structures (2), the request by asylum seekers to be transferred to other structures (28), the exclusion from protection though they would be entitled to it (8), their removal from the reception centre on disciplinary grounds (4), forced identification procedure (4), a forced idleness ongoing for months or years (5), and their safety (2).[16]

The majority of such protests took place outside the reception structures. The most frequent method has been the roadblock in the street in front of the reception centre or in one of the main streets

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[15] In Brindisi (Apulia) there were protests by the asylum seekers working in the agricultural fields nearby since very early in the morning ("Protesta migranti a Brindisi", *Ansa*, 01-04-2016, www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/cronaca/2016/04/01/protesta-migranti-a-brindisi_ed1eb799-6c3c-4f03-be6d-daa7b5ba3327.html).

[16] Some protests were connected to the death of asylum seekers, for instance in Sesto Fiorentino (Tuscany) in 2017 and in Crotone (Calabria Region) in 2013.

(132);[17] more rarely in ports (2) or in airports (2).[18] There were several pickets and protests – sometimes with overnight camps – in front of the Civil Government (53), Municipalities (11),[19] Police (10), Carabinieri (7), legal head office of the cooperative managing the reception centre (34), Province Councils (1). These add up to parades and marches (18),[20] the occupation of squares (6), of important streets (2), of railway stations (3), of railway tracks (4). The protests inside the reception structure were carried out through spoken complaints (26), hunger strikes (30), occupations with the block of entrances (38), damaging furnishings (27), fires (5), occupation of transport means for transfers (4), block of the catering vehicle (1), voluntary work strike (1).

Though the protests were short-lived, focused on immediate requests, on limited issues, they affected the whole country and have taken place in all sorts of reception structures, old and new, of initial and secondary reception (with all their names – Hotspot, Hub, CPSA, CDA, CARA, CIE, CPR, etc.); they have exposed the bad conditions in which asylum seekers are forced to live, bringing to light the arbitrary practices they undergo systematically; at times they have marked an important occasion to create contacts and solidarities with the associations and anti-racist groups or have constituted the core of larger, more organised protests.

4.1 Organised Mobilisations

Asylum seekers were at the forefront of organised mobilisations and have also taken part in organised actions. These are more structured protests, again originating from bad conditions of living, but

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17 The most relevant episodes affected the reception centre/CARA in Mineo (Sicily) with 9 roadblocks on the Gela-Catania Highway and the reception centre/CAS in Pian del Lago (Sicily) with 8 roadblocks, between 2013 and 2017.

18 Of which one with occupation of the runway by forty Eritreans escaping the reception center/CPA in Elmas, Sardinia ("Cagliari, migranti in fuga dal Centro di accoglienza bloccano l'aeroporto per quattro ore", *La Repubblica*, 18-12-2013, www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2013/12/18/news/aeroporto_di_elmas_invaso_da_migranti_eritrei-73970647).

19 Of which one with the occupation of the Municipality of Messina (Sicily) by some fifty asylum seekers after the flood of the baseball field where they were hosted in tents ("Messina. I richiedenti asilo nel fango del campo di baseball", *Terre Libere*, 28-12-2013, http://www.terrelibere.org/4727-messina-i-richiedenti-asilo-nel-fango-del-campo-da-baseball).

20 Sometimes for dozens of miles, such as the refugees in Valderice (Sicily), who in December 2014 walked to the Civil Government in Trapani ("Trapani: trasferiti da Palermo, i migranti dormono in strada per protesta", *La Repubblica*, 19-12-2015, http://palermo.repubblica.it/cronaca/2015/12/19/foto/trapani_trasferiti_da_palermo_i_migranti_dormono_in_strada_per_protesta-129809763/1/#1).

with which they criticised migration policies as a whole and the whole reception system, accused of the infantilisation and degradation of the 'guests'.

In Lampedusa (Sicily), where after the reception centre was turned into a hotspot, from October 2015 on regular protests have taken place against forced identifications, violence and inhuman living conditions, and have seen the constant support of local associations. During the May 2016 protest, when seventy asylum seekers camped for days in the square in front of the San Gelasio parish to ask to leave the structure, they refused the intervention of Save the Children and Unchr, and went back to the structure after having received the legal support of local associations. In the first few months of 2018 there were several protests by the approximately 200 (mainly Tunisian) 'guests' – which culminated with a suicide on 5 January, an attempted suicide on 18 March, arson on 9 March, and serious accusations by associations (ASGI, CILD, Indiewatch) and local authorities.

Between February 2013 and March 2014, the refugees hosted at Ferrhotel in Piacenza (Lombardy) mobilised after they were abandoned by the State institutions when the funds for North Africa Emergency ran out; finally they obtained, with the support of local associations, the extension of their stay.[21] The request to issue an ID and the replacement of the cooperative managing the reception centre lie at the basis of the protest of asylum seekers in Busto Arsizio (Lombardy):[22] despite the hostility by the local administration and the majority of the local population, asylum seekers have repeatedly occupied the reception centre and the railway station, winning, after months, the struggle for documents and decent reception. The poor conditions of the former military barracks Serena in Treviso (Veneto) have led to the protests which took place between September 2016 and March 2017,[23] while the exclusion from the SPRAR reception project of Afghan and Pakistani asylum seekers in Cosenza (Calabria) – in spite of their international protection – triggered the protests of early 2016.[24] In spring 2017, in Pordenone (Friuli) asylum seekers who arrived through the Balkan

21 "La verità sui profughi arrestati", *Melting Pot*, 01-04-2014, https://www.melting-pot.org/Piacenza-La-verita-sui-profughi-arrestati.html#.YP56py0QOJW.

22 "Busto Arsizio, occupato centro migranti", *Ansa*, 29-06-2017. http://www.ansa.it/lombardia/notizie/2017/06/29/busto-arsizio-occupato-centro-migranti_02438d95-1ef5-4c74-9e61-87664e356a76.html.

23 "Profughi, ancora una protesta in Piazza dei Signori a Treviso", *Tribuna di Treviso*, 27-09-2016, https://tribunatreviso.gelocal.it/treviso/cronaca/2016/09/27/news/profughi-ancora-una-protesta-in-piazza-dei-signori-a-treviso-1.14163232.

24 "Cosenza, la polizia contro il presidio dei migranti", *Osservatorio Repressione*, 02-07-2016, http://www.osservatoriorepressione.info/cosenza-la-polizia-presidio-dei-migranti/.

route protest at the Civil Government's premises for not being placed in the reception system, which is only aimed at asylum seekers from the Mediterranean route; forced to live in the parking lot of an abandoned office district, removed by the local administration in the name of urban decency, they asked for a decent place to live.[25]

These claims were expressed in different ways, but all share the physical occupation of public space. A few examples: the protest marches in Turin (Piedmont) in 2011;[26] the occupation of the sea rocks with hunger strikes, pickets and the creation of a 'tent city' by asylum seekers stuck on the French/Italian border in Ventimiglia (summer 2015 and 2016);[27] the camp in the garden of a former primary school in Padua (Veneto) organised by Tunisian refugees in May 2011[28] and by refugees who passed through Libya in April 2013.[29]

One main feature of these protests is the connection and collaboration with associations, NGOs, independent unions. The support of associations has often produced a change in the nature and methods of the struggle; on one hand the claims were more organised and visible thanks to the presence of associations rooted in the local context, on the other hand the associations represented the interests of asylum seekers presenting themselves to the institutions as their champions, thus limiting their voice and independence. Among the several experiences of collaboration, the following shall be mentioned: the claims by the refugees in Terzigno (Campania), expelled from the reception centre after the publication of a video denouncing the terrible living conditions and readmitted after a permanent picket promoted by Associazione 3 Febbraio (July-August 2016);[30] the claims by asylum seekers in Bet Sit hotel and Papa Paolo VI and Santa Sofia structures in Taranto (Apulia), expelled from the project after their protests at the Civil Government (September 2016-June 2017) and readmitted thanks

25   "Protesta dei profughi a Pordenone", *Il Friuli Web*, 04-04-02017, available on You-Tube (`https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A3pVJ56M-7M`).

26   "Diritto d'asilo, libertà di movimento per tutti/e!", *CSOA Gabrio*, 22-01-2012, https://gabrio.noblogs.org/post/2012/01/22/diritto-di-asilo-liberta-di-movi-mento-per-tuttie/.

27   "Ventimiglia. Un 20 giugno per la libertà di movimento, contro la Fortezza Europa", Global Project, 20-0-2015, `https://www.globalproject.info/it/in_movimen-to/ventimiglia-un-20-giugno-per-la-liberta-di-movimento-contro-la-fortez-za-europa/19210`.

28   "[Bsa Padova] La nostra lotta parla a tutta la città", *Brigate Solidarietà Attiva*, 18-11-2018, `https://brigatesolidarietaattiva.net/2011/05/18/bsa-padova-la-nos-tra-lotta-parla-a-tutta-la-citta/`.

29   "Padova, le voci dei profughi dalla Gabelli occupata", *Melting Pot*, 13-04-2013, available on YouTube (`https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OCwwEKNInXs`).

30   "Tra feci e spazzatura, dentro il centro di prima accoglienza di Terzigno", *La Stampa*, 16-07-2015.

to the support of the independent union Slai Cobas and ASGI;[31] the struggle of asylum seekers in the former military base of Cona (Veneto), which received quite extensive media coverage: after almost two years (2015-16) of protests inside and outside the structure against overcrowding, cold, filthy sanitation, lack of medical assistance, on 3 January 2017 an uprising broke out after the death of Sandrine Bakayoko. On 13 January, asylum seekers, independent union USB and CISPM organised a protest march to demand closing off the structure. On 14 November, 300 asylum seekers left the camp and went to the Civil Government in Venice (50 km away) in what was called the 'March for dignity';[32] the march, which lasted several days, supported by the hospitality of families and parishes in the villages crossed, led to the distribution of 200 asylum seekers in other reception centres. One week later, other refugees followed the lead and left the camp, but without success: they had to go back after being blackmailed by the state authorities who said the asylum seekers would lose their right to apply for asylum. The demonstrations continued and on 13 January 2018 the permanent closure of the camp was requested.

All these protests contributed to a wider and deeper acknowledgment of migration and of the conditions of asylum seekers, at the same time they saw a widening of the scope and degree of criticism, reaching the whole reception system, migration and public policies, and sometimes the relationship between national workers and immigrant workers. Often their discourse and actions go beyond single actual situations and tackle wider matters (the political asylum system, national and European policies), sometimes they endeavour to establish a link with labour issues (precarity, exploitation, reduction of wages and social rights) and with workers' struggles.

For example, CISPM (International coalition sans-papiers, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers), part of an international federation created in 2012 in several European and African countries which federates several Italian organisations, was involved in organising protests by asylum seekers in Ventimiglia (2015), Turin (2015),[33] Florence (2016),[34] and Cona (2017). These experiences have

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31 "Taranto: proseguono le espulsioni dei richiedenti asilo", *Radio Onda d'urto*, 18-01-2017, https://www.radiondadurto.org/2017/01/18/taranto-proseguono-le-espulsioni-dei-richiedenti-asilo/.

32 "La marcia dei migranti contro il sistema di accoglienza in Veneto", *Internazionale*, 21-11-2017, https://www.internazionale.it/reportage/annalisa-camilli/2017/11/21/cona-conetta-migranti-marcia.

33 Movimento Migranti Rifugiati, "Manifestazione a Torino per la Settimana Internazionale di azioni", available on Facebook (https://www.facebook.com/pg/movimento.migrantirifugiati/events/?ref=page_internal).

34 USB Toscana, "Firenze: migranti in piazza diritti e libertà di movimento per tutti!", 17-12-2016, https://tinyurl.com/7uth2h3w.

converged in the "Fight/Right – Diritti senza Confini" demonstration, held in Rome on the 16 December 2017, among its organisers was CISPM.[35] CISPM has come to national attention during the protests for the murder, on the 4 June 2018, of Soumaila Sacko, farmhand and trade unionist working in the vegetable harvest in the Calabria region. His murder has once again brought back to the attention of the public the exploitation of immigrants in the agriculture sector, an issue which CISPM faces with independent union Usb; but it tackles wider topics: it opposes EU migration and austerity policies; it criticises the agreements among European and African countries on migration movements; it opposes Italian laws on migration; it demands permits of stay and decent reception for all asylum seekers; it advocates a general struggle for social justice, linking immigrant struggles to those against social expenditure cuts; it considers the denial of immigrants' rights as a matter involving the whole population and as such it advocates for a more explicit international class struggle across-the-board for all nationalities.

Modena's Refugees criticised specific aspects of their real experience as asylum seekers and the reception system as a whole, including work exploitation embedded in voluntary work[36] or the Centers for Repatriation. The Movimento Migranti Rifugiati in Turin fights for migrants' and workers' rights, considers the EU and the European states guilty with promoting policies which are against international law and causing the ordeal asylum seekers have to bear.[37] Asahi supported the struggles of asylum seekers in Bologna and works in traveling routes with meetings in the main Italian cities to inform asylum seekers of their rights. The Coordinamento Migranti Bologna supported the struggles of asylum seekers in Bologna expelled from shelters at the end of 2017[38] and took part to the Transnational Social Strike Meeting in Paris in October 2016; created more than ten years ago with the establishment of a national platform against Im-

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35 The claims were humanitarian permits of stay, the abolition of migration Laws 180/2002 and 46/2017, the right to housing and residence, a decent reception, the increase in social spending, the minimum wage, rearrangement of agreements with African countries on migration movements, the overcoming of the Dublin Regulation (https://www.facebook.com/Roma16Dicembre).

36 Modena's Refugees, "Basta sfruttamento, documenti e dignità per i/le migranti", 15-05-2017, available on Facebook (https://m.facebook.com/Modenas-Refugees-148933708978763/events?locale2=sw_KE).

37 Movimento Migranti Rifugiati. *Programma*, 13-06-2013, http://www.migranti-torino.it/?p=29512.

38 "Noi non ce ne andiamo! Non potete buttarci in strada! Manifestazione delle e dei migranti dei dormitori di Bologna", *Coordinamento Migranti*, 12-12-2017, https://www.coordinamentomigranti.org/2017/03/29/noi-non-ce-ne-andiamo-non-potete-buttarci-in-strada-manifestazione-delle-e-dei-migranti-dei-dormitori-di-bologna-30-marzo-ore-14-piazza-maggiore/.

migration Law 189/2002 and on the relevance of immigrants' struggles against precarity, it denounces the Italian reception system for asylum seekers as a functional element to their subordination, the European norms on asylum and the migrations policies of European states.[39]

5 The Decline of Struggles Between War on Migrants and Repression (2018-19)

In the period 2018-19 there has been a tightening of migration policies, matched by a surge in propaganda and anti-immigrant racism, aiming at countering their rooting, demeaning their social value, reducing the social and political costs of immigration. This campaign mainly targeted asylum seekers, with the slogan "they are all illegal"; and it turned out to be a fully-fledged *war on asylum* (Burnett 2015).

It refers to law 132/2018 (the so-called 'Security Decree') which has taken to extreme decades of exclusion and criminalisation of immigrants, in a process now focused on asylum seekers. This law worsens dramatically the conditions of incoming immigrants, it reduces the rights and guarantees for asylum seekers, it strongly limits the application of the right of asylum up to almost erasing it. It introduces a remarkable worsening of custody and administrative detention[40] and it abolishes humanitarian protection.

Such law introduces several obstacles to the issuing of international protection. It broadens possible crimes that, in the case of criminal conviction, determine the denial of international protection or the cancellation of the refugee status and subsidiary protection: among new possible crimes, with final judgment, we find threats or violence against public officials; it introduces as new grounds for exclusion of entering Italy any sentence for refusing to dissolve a demonstration or meeting. Though there is a clear willingness to demean and neutralise subjectivity, organisation and resistance in immigrants, the general scope of that law shall also be underlined, as it pursues a general repression of social movements, struggles, and workers' mo-

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39 Coordinamento Migranti Bologna, available on Facebook (https://it-it.facebook.com/coordinamentomigranti.bologna.7/).

40 It introduces a new system of administrative detention for those asking for international protection, to determine or verify their identity or citizenship, up to 30 days in hotspots or first reception governmental centres; when their identity or citizenship may not be determined, their detention may continue within a Centre for Repatriation up to 180 days. It prolongs the maximum detention time within Repatriation centres for the foreigner to be deported, increasing it from 90 to 180 days. It entails a review of suitable places for detention while waiting for deportation, including "undetermined facilities", different from Repatriation centres, available for public security authorities or suitable locations at the border offices.

bilisations: with a view to suppress social unease and disagreement, to criminalise poverty and to exclude, it prohibits pickets and meetings, it introduces again roadblock as a crime,[41] it exacerbates punishment in case of occupation of buildings and terrains, it entails expulsion of poor people and beggars from the cities to preserve the urban decorum.

Such law worsens the conditions of refugees and asylum seekers through the disarticulation of the reception system: it is partly erased, as it will only host the beneficiaries of international protection and unaccompanied foreign minors, thus excluding asylum seekers and the beneficiaries of humanitarian protection. It favours a reception model of asylum seekers based on emergencies, isolating and marginalising them, built on large-sized centres (dormitory-centres) only providing some essential services. Asylum seekers may only be hosted in CAS and CPA (Centri di Prima Accoglienza), which were often already lacking social, language, training, employment and legal protection services. Asylum seekers, distinguished by refugees and beneficiaries of international protection, are placed in a suspended context, in a limbo which does not entail nor start any process of social integration. This condition of exclusion and suspension is symbolised by the provisions on the registration at the registry office,[42] which is compulsory for the issuing of the residence certificate and the ID, on the required documents to access public services (social services, public housing, aid and incentives) or to obtain services by private entities (employers for the work contract, landlords for a lease contract, driving schools to get a driving license, banks to open a bank account).

For the period 2018-19 a decrease in protests is observable. In CAS, CARA and CPR (Repatriation centers) there were 78 occasional protests in 2018 and 36 in 2019 (against 79 in 2015, 112 in 2016, and 122 in 2017); no organised mobilisations in which asylum seekers acted collectively, autonomously or partially so, to raise structured claims. This decrease has also affected the activities of associations led by immigrants themselves, after the lively previous season; among the few cases, highlight should be made of the 6 December 2018 demonstration in Naples against the 'Security Decree', which saw the participation of asylum seekers.

The first three months of 2018 presented a number of protests, though in decline, in the wake of late 2017 mobilisations; afterwards there was a sharp decline. In 2018-19, there were two peaks in pro-

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41   It targets workers' mobilisations, the struggles of trade unions and social movements, etc.

42   Foreigners, to obtain registration, shall prove their stable permanence in one place and have a residence permit.

tests, one in December 2018 (9 episodes) and one in September 2019 (12 episodes), both at the time of the conversion into law of the Security Decree and Security Decree II. Yet, these peaks in protests are not only linked to the elimination of humanitarian permits, the slash of funds for reception and expulsions from the centres, because the protests mainly concerned Repatriation centres – where immigrants are detained before being deported. The overcrowding of such structures (due to the increase in illegality rates as a consequence of migration policy), the harshening of detention conditions, the increase in actual deportations, are the main causes of protests in CPR, the main actors of the protests.[43] The Repatriation centres with the highest rate of conflicts were Turin (corso Brunelleschi) with two cycles of protests (late 2018, July-September 2019); Rome (CPR Ponte Galeria) with harsh protests in summer 2019; CARA in Bari Palese (late 2018); CPR in San Gervasio in the area of Potenza with a permanent state of agitation (spring 2018, late 2018, July – September 2019); CPR in Lampedusa (protests from early 2018 until its closure in March, again starting from September 2019); CPR in Caltanissetta (winter 2018-19), CARA in Mineo and Trapani Milo. In CPRs we saw the most radical forms of protest: individual (2) and collective (8) hunger strikes; attempts to escape (13) more or less successful, damage (6); CPRs were the locations of all fires (8) and clashes with the police (6 out of 7).

In Csa conflicts decreased, both in frequency and in forms, despite the measures cutting places in structures and funds. As in the previous period, protests took place both inside and outside the reception structures, for the very same reasons; collective protests against mass expulsions from centres after the entry into force of the Security Decree, culminated in the Caserta incident in 2019.

Among the most frequent reasons for the protests in CAS we find again food (23), the delays in the procedures of asylum application (17), the delay or lack of pocket money (18), unsuitable clothing (4), heating (2), hot water (3), internal rules (2), healthcare (4), threats and violence by operators (3), general conditions of reception and services (12), facility conditions (5), overcrowding (3), residence documents (5), transfer request (3), transfer resistance (6), isolation (3), deportations from CPR (2), death of an asylum seeker (2), expulsions for unavailability after random presence controls (1), voluntary work (1).

Around half the protests took place inside the facilities, with one case of damage (27 in the previous period); in three cases one or more operators were held captive; in one case asylum seekers refused to get off the transportation means used to transfer them from one facility to another. As for protests outside the structures, the most frequent ones were roadblocks (13), patrols (7), demonstrations (5),

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43 On the situation of CPR, see Migreurop 2020; Majcher et al. 2020.

street protests (4); only one march of considerable length. Part of the protests took place at the cooperatives (2), law enforcement premises (3), Red cross (1), municipality (3), or railway stations (2).

The decrease of protests in the reception system have different causes, among which, first and foremost, the entry into force of the Security Decree and following cancellations by Prefects. The elimination of residence permits for humanitarian reasons cancelled the right to residence permit for thousands of asylum seekers and prevented many others to access the reception system; the number of 'guests' in CAS and CARA went from 183,000 in January 2018 to 92,000 in November 2019, with a reduction by 30% between October 2018 and October 2019. Furthermore, the repression introduced by the Security Decree inhibited the action of immigrants and compromised solidarity by associations supporting immigrants' struggles. Finally, thousands of asylum seekers saw or could see their reception revoked based on the arbitrary power of Prefects to do so; among the main reasons for the revocation of the residence permit we see possible 'unruly' behaviours by immigrants.

6 Concluding Remarks: Fragmentation, Dignity, New Horizons

Though still at an early stage, with several difficulties and in different ways, the last decade in Italy saw the rise of asylum seekers as political and social subjects. In a nutshell, though fragmented and linked to the situation, within social struggles there has been an increasing centrality of asylum seekers, who have had a role, striving, self-organising, creating moments and processes of claim with growing intensity.

Many protests are impromptu and remain local. The majority of claims have immediate concrete goals, aimed at improving daily living conditions. Many of the mobilisations are, *necessarily*, temporary and occasional, only a lower number has had a longer duration, becoming structured, widening the topics, getting in connection with local organisations. Yet they paired early claim processes with growing incisiveness which denounced the reception system, migration policies, social problems. There were wider protests and claims in time, space, contents and goals, which have criticised the state policies up to the present situation; some realities have enlarged their dimension of criticism and look beyond the local context. There were several collaborations with local activism, sharing experiences or participating in associations, in anti-racist and (mainly independent) unionist organisations.

There is no unified movement in the struggles of asylum seekers, there is no connection with a wider immigrants' movement, there is no significant connection with the set of social struggles. This lack of

connection is due to the conditions of extreme precarity and weakness of asylum seekers, but even more to the lack of a unified movement of social struggles and extreme limitation of social conflict in the country. Against policies, practices and discourses which inferiorise them concretely, socially, psychologically, and spiritually, the struggles of asylum seekers aim at dignity and respect; asylum seekers are a reality which creates struggles, and this is an important element for all social struggles, as such struggles contribute to voice and support immigrant workers, all workers, all social struggles.

The march of emigrants from Africa and the Middle East to Europe is the march of insertion within the world labor market. Such insertion happens in the name of wage slavery as people belonging to the working class and in the name of racism as people belonging to races and nations which have been historically dominated and colonised. In concrete, such insertion happens with their (subordinate) integration in the European working class, where they meet the fate and expectations of local workers, and where they meet the social and political struggles of European countries. This class meeting may give rise to new solidarities, new social ties, new opportunities for exchange and mutual learning; new possibilities of social transformation may arise, to overcome suffocating barriers such as nationalism, but for that to happen racism and discrimination must be erased, as they were placed on purpose on the road to the collective enhancement of workers. Asylum seekers' struggles aim to the affirmation of their dignity as human beings and workers, to the achievement of decent life and working conditions, i.e., they aim at the fulfilment of the social needs of working humanity, and, along such universality and shared destiny, they contribute in voicing and supporting immigrant workers and all workers. For these reasons they shall be saluted and supported.

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Part 2   Refugees and Asylum Seekers in the COVID-19 Pandemic

The Coronavirus Crisis and the Consequences of COVID-19 Pan-Syndemic on Racial Health Inequalities and on Migrants

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Abstract   After examining the ecological-social origins of the novel Coronavirus and the features of Coronavirus crisis, the text analyses at the global level the COVID-19 related racial health inequalities and the impact of the pandemic on the health and working conditions of immigrant workers, asylum seekers, migrants. The text highlights a syndemic situation affecting them, which exacerbated and transformed inequalities that already existed, generating new ones, intertwining the old and the new.

Keywords   Novel Coronavirus. Ecological rift. Inequalities. Health disparities. Syndemics. Racial inequalities. Migration. Asylum seekers. Immigrant workers.

Summary   1 The Ecological-Social Origins of SARS-CoV-2. – 2 The Coronavirus Factor. – 3 The Great Equalizer Joke: COVID-19 and Inequalities. – 3.1 Syndemics and Global Health Inequalities. – 3.2 COVID-19 and Racial Disparities in Health. – 4 The Impact of Coronavirus Crisis on Migrants. – 4.1 Immigrant Workers: More Exposed, More Precarious, More Exploited. – 4.2 Asylum Seekers between Confinement and Abandonment, and the Odyssey of Emigrants. – 5 Conclusion.

1   The Ecological-Social Origins of SARS-CoV-2

It is now accepted that the 2019 novel Coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) has ecological-social origins. This fact is nothing new since most epidemics have been the result of major environmental and climate changes, partly and sometimes linked to human activity. The H_1N_1/1918 influenza virus, which gave rise to the largest and deadliest modern

pandemic, the Spanish flu, found in particular ecological-social conditions the favourable conditions for spillover, from migratory birds to humans, remaining endemic there ever since (Burgio 2020, 22-3). These conditions consisted mainly in marked environmental, biological, ecological-social imbalances, and in particular in the (early) large intensive livestock farms,[1] in the conditions produced by the First World War. In addition to H_2N_2 in 1957 (Asian flu) and H_3N_2 in 1968 (Hong Kong flu), between 1997 and 2005 there were other influenza viruses (e.g. H_5N_1 avian flu) with spillover from avian species (migratory and sedentary) to human species; however, these pathogens, although very virulent, were not very contagious because they had not completed the necessary mutations to engage the human respiratory tract and consequently zoonosis[2] was rather limited.

Things change in 2002, when a new Coronavirus (SARS-CoV) appeares in China, attacking the lungs and causing Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) (Burgio 2020, 24). Due to significant instability, this Coronavirus fails to spread on a large scale, however, its origin from a different reservoir-species, the bat, raises much concern, as the bat is a mammal, on the phylogenetic level it is closer to humans and therefore bat viruses may have an easier evolutionary adaptation towards human airway receptors, spillover into humans and cause zoonosis (Andersen et al. 2020). Concerning this reservoir-species, the great environmental changes occurred in the last decades in South-East Asia have expelled from their natural habitat a great number of frugivorous bats (Pteropodidae) pushing them towards the outskirts of cities, where they come into contact with other animal species with which they exchange viral strains, thus facilitating their adaptive evolution.

This last observation raises several relevant questions, which refer to the ecological-social origins of the current SARS-CoV-2 Coronavirus pandemic, which is the result of the spillover of a bat virus causing a very serious, often lethal, disease in humans: COVID-19 (COronaVIrus Disease 2019, acute respiratory disease from SARS-CoV-2). Such origins are manifold and have a name: climate changes, environmental disruption, deforestation, agribusiness, mass urbanisation and capitalist-led urbanisation. Better yet: capitalism's attack on man and nature. Therefore, Burgio's assertion that this is not a sudden and random biological accident, but rather the symptom of a chronic and rapidly progressive disease affecting the entire biosphere[3] should be carefully considered. This disease is the result

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[1]   Particularly in the USA.

[2]   The transmission of infectious diseases from animals (other than humans) to humans (or vice versa), either directly or indirectly.

[3]   E. Burgio, "The First Pandemic of the Anthropocene", *WSIM*, 18-03-2021, https://ws-imag.com/science-and-technology/65247-the-first-pandemic-of-the-anthropocene.

of the *metabolic rift* produced by the capitalist economy (Clark et al. 2019; Foster et al. 2011), a fracture that the turbo-capitalism of the neo-liberal era has radically exacerbated. The statement "to heal humanity and contemporary society we must heal the planet" is right, but it is not complete: to heal the planet we must heal humanity and contemporary society.

Wallace's studies (2016) have been instrumental in shedding light on these links. He points out that the emergence of "new" dangerous viruses is linked first and foremost to the processes of deforestation and human penetration into the last primary forest. Land-grabbing, the disappearance of small-scale agricultural land working for the local market, and extractivism in the primary forest release new pathogens that for millennia have been held in check by the forest ecosystem. The irruption of agri-business into virgin ecological systems brings pathogens out of the deepest hinterland. Through some reservoir-species (birds, bats, etc.) they are transported out of the forest into neighbouring, peri-urban areas where human settlements and livestock are present, with the consequence that "the functional diversity and complexity these huge tracts of land represent are being streamlined in such a way that previously boxed-in pathogens are spilling over into local livestock and human communities" (Wallace 2020, 33). Besides, the impoverishment of local communities brought about by advancing land grabbing and agribusiness is forcing local people to go even deeper into the remote forest to collect food (wildlife), thereby increasing their encounters with new pathogens. After that, the passage to urban peripheries, to big cities, through the internal and international movements of things, animals and men, is a relatively easy thing to do; the globalisation of world trade and international migration do the rest, in the sense that they facilitate, feed, and widen the circulation and spread of the virus. Still, in these exchanges and passages of environments and hosts, pathogens mutate and develop more virulent and infectious phenotypes: "the basic logic of capital helps to take previously isolated or harmless viral strains and place them in hyper-competitive environments that favour the specific traits which cause epidemics, such as rapid viral lifecycles, the capacity for zoonotic jumping between carrier species, and the capacity to quickly evolve new transmission vectors. These strains tend to stand out precisely because of their virulence" (Chuăng 2020).

Deforestation and forest penetration are closely linked to the industrialisation of agriculture, in which hyper-intensive, concentration-based animal production constitutes, Wallace points out, a nursery for more or less dangerous viruses, a veritable breeding ground for zoonotic diseases: "growing genetic monocultures of domestic animals removes whatever immune firebreaks may be available to slow down transmission. Larger population sizes and densities facilitate greater rates of transmission. Such crowded conditions depress the

immune response. High throughput, a part of any industrial production, provides a continually renewed supply of susceptibles, the fuel for the evolution of virulence" (Wallace 2020, 34). In destroying ecosystems, agri-industry pools together living beings expelled from their natural habitat with intensive livestock farming; these contacts are the source of spillover of viruses – which are not coincidentally given animal names (swine, cattle, avian). At the margin of agribusiness, the incubation of Coronaviruses (MERS-Cov, SARS-CoV, SARS-CoV-2) takes place: "agribusiness is so focused on profits that selecting for a virus that might kill a billion people is treated as a worthy risk [...] Agribusiness as a mode of social reproduction must be ended for good if only as a matter of public health" (34). Referring to H_5N_1, Wallace noted that "rural landscapes of many of the poorest countries are now characterised by unregulated agribusiness pressed against periurban slums. Unchecked transmission in vulnerable areas increases the genetic variation with which H_5N_1 can evolve human-specific characteristics. In spreading over three continents, fast-evolving H_5N_1 also contacts an increasing variety of socio-ecological environments, including local-specific combinations of prevalent host types, modes of poultry farming, and animal health measures" (2016, 52). Referring, for example, to the recurrent Ebola epidemics in Africa, Wallace highlights the continuity of the link between the expansion of primary industries, the penetration of agribusiness, the destruction of local eco-systems, the displacement of populations, the attraction of reservoir species and epidemics. Thus, while there was a cotton-related outbreak in Sudan in the mid-1970s (Wallace, Wallace 2016, 60), in recent years palm oil industrialisation appears to be responsible for recent Ebola outbreaks in Guinea (Wallace et al. 2016; Wallace, Wallace 2016), where deforestation and environmental devastation have facilitated the microbiological processes described above.

Moreover, ever greater masses of the human population live in highly degraded environmental and rural contexts or are crowded into the suburbs of large cities. This factor is certainly not a primary cause, but it facilitates the stabilisation and circulation of viruses. In China, SARS-Cov-2 was born at the intersection of capitalist economics and epidemiology (Chuǎng 2020); Wuhan (capital of the Hubei province, 11 million inhabitants), Chongqing (36 million inhabitants), Nanjing (capital of Jiangsu province, 8.5 million inhabitants), Changsa (capital of Hunan, 7 million inhabitants), are "four furnaces" below which there is an evolutionary pressure cooker made of hyper-urbanisation and agri-business. Therefore, the latest great epidemics (avian flu, SARS-Cov, SARS-Cov-2) originated in China not so much because of some mysterious Chinese specificity, but rather because, in this country, the historical and social conditions for the emergence of these phenomena have concentrated in recent dec-

ades, as was the case in past centuries for other geographical areas for other epidemics (plague, cholera, smallpox, etc.).

Therefore, the emergence of new pathogens and the resulting pandemics is not random, there are specific and structural causes. The SARS-CoV-2 Coronavirus pandemic, Pirrone observes, is

> the result of this continuous attack on nature by capitalism, which has led to the erosion of those barriers that nature has put in place, over billions of years of history, to protect biodiversity and relations between species [...]. Sars-Cov-2 thus turns out to be an epiphenomenon of the neoliberal capitalist domination of the planet [...]. Its appearance is as much a consequence of the keys possessed by biotechnology to open the gates that nature had placed in defence of living species as of the environmental disasters brought about by the application of these biotechnologies to agri-food systems. (2020, 118-19; transl. by the Author)

2 The Coronavirus Factor

If the novel Coronavirus is a symptom of the current state of the environment and a *sign* of the progressive disease affecting the biosphere, the Coronavirus crisis is a *litmus test* and a mirror exposing the structural problems of contemporary societies, highlighting the major crisis of our times. The pandemic is a metaphor for the structural crisis of capitalist society, pre-dating the virus.

Among the many examples, national health systems may be mentioned: in the last decades, in several countries of the world, they have undergone a progressive deterioration or have been the object of strong attacks in the wake of neoliberal policies that – through the new public management, the stigmatisation of the public service (an inefficient bandwagon that would poison the population with universalism) – have imposed a profound transformation under the banner of privatisation/semi-privatisation, individualisation and corporatisation.[4] In the so-called "first pandemic wave", several health systems were overwhelmed by the pandemic due to the surprise effect, but also as a result of decades of state disengagement in public health, budget cuts, staff reduction, abandonment of territorial medicine, the concentration of medicine in large hospitals, distancing from a genuine concept of public health and social medicine. The so-called 'second pandemic wave', which occurred in the fall of 2020, confirmed that the problems in national health systems were and, obviously, still are structural and could not be attributed to the surprise effect

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4 For Italy, which had a high mortality from COVID-19, see Prante et al. 2020.

alone. So much so that Joe Biden, for example, both during his campaign and after the election, had to include among his goals the (albeit minimal) expansion of American public healthcare because fully private healthcare has had devastating and highly unequal effects.

The Coronavirus crisis has also been a formidable *social accelerator*, a potent factor in accelerating social trends that existed before the pandemic. It has expanded, generalised, and structured several social processes that predate the pandemic, entrenching them in the social structures and daily life of many countries. In addition to the "year of the global pandemic" or the "year of fear", 2020 should also be titled the "year of the great acceleration". Among the many examples, suffice it to mention home food deliveries through apps and digital platforms, distance learning, the increased militarisation of society and control over daily lives. All these phenomena predate – by far – the Coronavirus crisis, yet it gave them new momentum, making a real leap in quantity that has sometimes turned into a leap in quality (think of online education, which has transformed the nature of teaching). In particular, the Coronavirus crisis has been an element of acceleration of social processes of a neo-liberal nature, for example, the individualisation of education, which through the massive use of information technology has given a strong impetus for distance learning; or the social atomisation magnified by the enormous growth of the web and digital labour (i.e. work from home). Above all, we should mention the sharpening of social inequalities and social polarisation, the structural casualisation of work, the increase in the number of working poor, all phenomena that preceded the pandemic but were extended and aggravated by it.

Moreover, the Coronavirus crisis provided the capital with an *opportunity* to expand further, to penetrate even more deeply into all spheres of social and natural life; to reorganise and at the same time subject society to the laws of capital even more stringently. It has been an occasion to expand its field of action and control even further, to expand its social and natural boundaries. As already happened in the past, in times of crisis the capital reorganises itself, and in doing so it transforms the whole of society, depending on capital – starting from the labour market, the workplaces, and the economic processes. In practice, this process consists in redefining and lowering the conditions of life of the class-that-lives-of-work (Antunes 2020), in redefining social rights, in redesigning the role of the state according to the commands of the world market and capitalist accumulation.

Last but not least, the Coronavirus crisis has also been a *social detonator*, a detonating factor. Both in its role as a litmus test and social accelerator, the Coronavirus crisis has converged and entangled pre-existing social contradictions, exacerbating social hardships and inequalities, increasing social risks. On the one hand, this can fuel social chaos, from which negative solutions can emerge; on the oth-

er hand, it can revive social struggles, in favour of equality and social justice, the environment and public health.

3 The Great Equalizer Joke: COVID-19 and Inequalities

The double – economic-social and ecological – crisis, predating the novel Coronavirus, is accompanied by the health crisis and by a racial crisis, combining in a triple crisis (the crisis of the crises?) that has affected all spheres of the social life of the populations and the countries of the world, and that has had multiple consequences on the economic, social, political and cultural levels. The pandemic and the health crisis have affected social classes, economic sectors, professions, genders, countries and territories differently. The assertion that the virus is a great equaliser (so defined, for example, by the Governor of the State of New York in March 2020) is not true: the possibility of contracting it, COVID-19 prevention and treatment, its severity and mortality, daily life at the time of the pandemic, are elements related to social class, to the position in the social structure and system of social relations.

As for virus *transmission*, wealthy classes had a lower risk of becoming infected by enjoying the possibility of protecting themselves more and better or keeping a physical distance (availability of big houses, private cars, devices, paid services). During the lockdowns of the first wave, people in many countries were told to "stay home", but housing conditions are quite unequal – some people live in crowded, small houses with little equipment, and some people have no house at all. The transmission of the virus has been conditioned by socially unequal housing conditions. In terms of *exposure* to the virus, a large proportion of the working class could not avoid going to work, could not work from home as they were employed in essential jobs (shop assistants, nurses, cashiers, public transport, cleaning or personal care workers), could not work in a protected manner; for these categories of workers exposure to virus was particularly strong and prolonged. Working-class and deprived groups were found to have more *susceptibility* to COVID-19 due to worse social, economic, and environmental conditions. In short, the resources available within the storm of pandemics have been differentiated and unequal; it is not true that "we are all in the same boat", if anything, we navigate rough sea with very different boats, some people do not even have a boat at all.

3.1 Syndemics and Global Health Inequalities

It is well known that COVID-19 has more severely affected the elderly and individuals suffering from other diseases (diabetes, cardiovascular disorders, tumours, diseases of the immune system). However, such diseases are the result of inequalities in the social determinants of health. They are linked to social factors (profession, income, education), the living conditions of the individual, their class condition. Thus, not only the possibility of contracting the virus but also the possibility of suffering serious complications or dying from COVID-19 is linked to the position occupied in the social structure, in the historically given system of social relations. This position is manifested in the social gradient of health and affects the vulnerability to COVID-19.

Gravlee (2020, 1-2), while recalling that "pandemics always follow the fault lines of society", underlined that COVID-19 presented the conditions of the syndemic (Singer 2009),[5] which is the result of the combination of disease concentration ("the co-occurrence or clustering of multiple epidemics as a result of large-scale, political-economic forces and adverse social conditions") and disease interaction ("the ways that overlapping epidemics exacerbate the health effects of adverse social conditions, either through biological interactions between disease states or through interactions between biological and social processes"). With COVID-19 there was a syndemic – "a set of closely interrelated endemic and epidemic conditions (e.g., HIV, TB, STDs, hepatitis, cirrhosis, infant mortality, drug abuse, suicide, homicide, etc.), all of which are strongly influenced and sustained by a broader set of political-economic and social factors" (Singer 1996, 99) – resulting from the interaction between infectious disease (contracted differently according to the social gradient) and non-communicable diseases (unequally distributed according to the social gradient). Thus, as it has happened in the past and recently during other influenza epidemics (Mamelund 2019), COVID-19 affected the population differentially; morbidity and mortality were unevenly distributed across the factors of class, race, gender, age, territory. For the sake of space, I will give just two examples, focusing on the British context and the Italian context.

In England, regarding admissions for COVID-19 "45% of patients were from the most deprived 20% of the population" while regarding mortality from COVID-19

> death rates were highest amongst men employed in elementary occupations […], caring, leisure and other service occupations […],

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[5] "The presence of two or more disease states that adversely interact with each other, negatively affecting the mutual course of each disease trajectory, enhancing vulnerability, and which are made more deleterious by experienced inequities" (*The Lancet* 2017, 881).

process, plant and machine operatives occupations […]; adminis-
trative and secretarial occupations […], sales and customer ser-
vice occupations […], skilled trades occupations […] death rates
were lowest among men employed as managers, directors, sen-
ior officials and in professional occupations. (SAGE 2020, 11-12)

As far as positive cases are concerned, the picture is the same: a
study covering the period 1 March 2020-9 May 2020 highlighted that

diagnosis rates were highest in the most deprived quintile (over 300
cases per 100,000) – for both men and women – almost double that of
the least deprived quintile (around 200 cases per 100,000). Indeed, the
rate in the most deprived quintile was 1.9 times the rate in the least
deprived quintile among men and 1.7 times among women. (2020, 14)

In Italy – historically characterised by strong health inequalities
(Costa 2015) manifested in the chronicity, life expectancy and mor-
tality levels – COVID-19 traced the national fault lines, which were
already manifested in March 2020 in a certain over-representation
(relative and absolute) of the working classes in the increases in mor-
tality rates (ISTAT 2020a, 88). This trend was confirmed in the fol-
lowing months: until the end of May 2020, a higher level of mortali-
ty was recorded among the population with a low level of education,
not only the elderly (ISTAT 2020a, 89). In the first three months of
2020, 37% of the deceased (14,324 cases) had at least one co-morbid-
ity with some pathology (ISTAT 2020b); medical records of a group
of 4,738 deceased showed that 13.3% had one pathology, 19.6% had
two, and 63.6% had at least three chronic diseases diagnosed before
they were infected with SARS-CoV-2 (ISS 2020).

3.2 COVID-19 and Racial Disparities in Health

Many studies have confirmed that the unequal impact of COVID-19
on population health is related to the 'race' factor, to racism as a so-
cial relationship of exploitation and as an ideology of legitimation of
exploitation.[6] Everywhere racial inequalities in health emerged for
COVID-19, which are the result of systemic racism and structural ra-

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[6] In some of these studies the term racism is associated with the adjective 'systemic' or
'structural', or the notion of 'racial capitalism' is used; but these adjectives seem some-
what 'superfluous' since racism, insofar as it is a material relationship of domination jus-
tified by a racial ideology that legitimates and perpetuates domination, is by definition
a structural element of capitalist society, it is congenital, organic and vital to capitalism
(Basso 2016). A child of colonialism, typical of the modern world, racism is structural and
functional to the system of inequalities of the capitalist society as a system of inequalities.

cial inequality. I will quickly dwell on three contexts: United States, England, Brazil.

Gravlee noted a peculiar syndemic situation in the United States. In terms of social factors, racism had very significant weight on the health impact of COVID-19, with somewhat worse consequences for the African-American population. The general social condition of black people, historically the object of systematic exclusion, discrimination, violence, and social inferiority, has been the humus in which the COVID-19 syndemic has developed, characterised by a more severe COVID-related health condition among blacks (but also among Latinos and Native Americans). The racism that structurally pervades the U.S. society (from work to income, from education to the judicial system, from housing to urban planning, even to the air we breathe [Novick 1995]) has constituted "a fundamental cause of racial inequities in disease concentration. This perspective sees the social patterning of hypertension, diabetes, and now COVID-19 as culminating from a system of racial oppression" (Gravlee 2020, 4). Laster Pirtle emphasised the importance of racial capitalism in COVID-19's production of differential effects, of heavier consequences for blacks: "racism and capitalism mutually construct harmful social conditions that fundamentally shape COVID-19 disease inequities because they [...] replicate historical patterns of inequities within pandemic" (Laster Pirtle 2020, 504).

Much like the uprisings that followed G. Floyd's murder, the disparities in levels of positivity, co-morbidity, severity, and mortality from COVID-19 are the result of broad and deep racial (and class) inequalities that historically and structurally plague the African American population in all areas of social life – from employment to economic status, from housing to education, from health to the justice system, from birth to death.[7] With the great crisis of 2008, in addition to a strong social class polarisation, there was a violent impoverishment of the black population, which has further increased with the Coronavirus crisis. It has widened and deepened racial inequalities in various spheres of social life beyond the realm of health. So Laster Pirtle is right when she states that "COVID-19 is showing us who we are... again" (p. 506).

In a country where access to health care is class-based and where even before the pandemic, there was exponential growth in the level of worker indebtedness due to healthcare costs, infections and COVID-19 mortality were characterised by strong racial disparities (Bassett et al. 2020; Chin-Hong al. 2020, Zelner et al. 2020). Already at the start of the pandemic we saw "une surmortalité importante de

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7 Conley 2010; Harris, Lieberman 2013; Massey, Denton 1993; Oliver, Shapiro 2006; Wright, Rogers 2015, 312-63.

la population noire (33% des décès contre 18% de la population générale des états pour lesquels l'information est disponible [...] Dans la ville de New York, de loin la zone la plus touchée par l'épidémie (avec 30% de l'ensemble des décès par Covid-19 enregistrés sur le territoire national au 1er mai 2020), le taux comparatif de mortalité pour cette cause de décès atteint 92 pour 100.000 dans la population noire et 74 dans la population hispanique, contre 45 dans la population blanche et 35 pour la population asiatique [...] plus de 50% des cas et presque 70% des décès par Covid-19 identifiés à Chicago, dans l'Illinois et en Louisiane concernent des individus appartenant à la population noire alors que celle-ci n'y représente qu'un tiers au plus de la population totale" (Barbieri 2020, 11). This trend continued even more sharply in the months that followed: through mid-August 2020, there were 2.6 more cases among African Americans than among the white population, 4.7 more hospitalisations, and 2.1 more deaths (CDCP 2020).[8] The second wave saw a worsening of mortality disparity, with "Black, Indigenous and Latino Americans all have a COVID-19 death rate of triple or more White Americans, who experience the lowest age-adjusted rates".[9] Over-represented in essential, low-skilled, dangerous and demeaning jobs (salespersons, transportation operators, cleaners, food delivery workers, babysitters, etc.), African Americans – most affected by COVID-19 – are also most affected by diabetes, cancer, and cardiovascular disease; they died more from COVID-19 and these diseases, i.e., from pre-existing comorbid conditions (syndemics).

A similar situation has been recorded in England. A study by the Office for National Statistics on deaths between 2 March 2020 and 28 July 2020 found that (based on a statistical model adjusting for age and excluding care home residents):

> the rate of death among Black African males was 3.8 times higher than those of White background, while for Black African females the rate was 2.9 times higher; all ethnic groups other than Chinese females were at higher risk of COVID-19 mortality than the White ethnic population [...] ethnic differences in mortality involving COVID-19 are most strongly associated with demographic and socio-economic factors, such as place of residence and occupational exposures.[10]

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[8] Data as of 18-08-2020. `https://www.cdc.gov/Coronavirus/2019-ncov/covid-data/investigations-discovery/hospitalization-death-by-race-ethnicity.html#footnote01`; `https://covidtracking.com/race`.

[9] `https://www.apmresearchlab.org/covid/deaths-by-race#counts` (last update 22-12-2020).

[10] ONS UK, `https://www.ons.gov.uk/releases/explainingethnicbackgroundcontrastsindeathsinvolvingcovid19england2ndmarchto3rdjuly2020`.

In Brazil – despite an image of a multicultural country in which harmony between whites, blacks and browns dominates – the colonial, slave and racist past of this country is more alive than ever and is still ingrained in its social structure and daily life (Fernandes 2008; Gorender 2010; Moura 1988). Over the past three decades, some changes and progress have produced a slight improvement in the living conditions of black populations and a relative decrease in black-white inequalities (Marcia, Prates 2019), however, deep racial inequalities are still present today and affect black and brown people (in particular the women), Indigenous populations at all levels: access to the labour market, jobs, unemployment rates, incomes, health status, housing.[11] Whites hold 70% of managerial positions. The relative poverty rate is 15.4% among whites and 32.9% among blacks and browns (IBGE 2019). In prisons, which are filled with a black population, 68% of incarcerated women are black, half of whom have not completed elementary school and are very young (Borges 2019). Blacks have great difficulties in accessing the health system and health protection.

This racial system has been reflected in COVID-19 infection and mortality: higher levels of COVID-19 infection and mortality have been reported among the black population, which is highly present in essential and informal services (Baqui et al. 2020; Goes et al. 2020; Oliverira et al. 2020; Santos et al. 2020).[12] A study of 29,933 cases registered up to 18 May 2020 found a mortality rate of 55% among blacks and browns and 38% among whites, across all age groups and education levels; a gradual decrease in mortality rate as education level increases; a mortality rate of 80% among unschooled blacks and browns versus a mortality rate of 19% among whites with higher education (Batista et al 2020). The largest epidemiological study conducted in the country found that the poorest populations (including Indigenous people, who have long been experiencing an increase in cardiovascular and metabolic diseases) are twice as likely to become infected compared to the richest population (Halal 2020). Poorer regions (Nordeste, Norte and Centro-Oeste) had higher mortality rates.[13]

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11 Gonçalves 2018; Heringer 2002; IBGE 2018; Paixão et al. 2010.

12 Results immediately highlighted by the press: https://www.abrasco.org.br/site/noticias/desigualdade-racial-por-que-negros-morrem-mais-que-brancos-na-pandemia/49455/; https://revistagalileu.globo.com/Sociedade/noticia/2020/05/na-pandemia-de-covid-19-negros-morrem-mais-do-que-brancos-por-que.html; https://www.cnnbrasil.com.br/saude/2020/06/05/negros-morrem-40-mais-que-brancos-por-Coronavirus-no-brasil.

13 *Coronavirus Brasil*, https://covid.saude.gov.br/.

4 The Impact of Coronavirus Crisis on Migrants

The Coronavirus crisis exposed the social problems and inequalities that already existed, while at the same time amplifying and reinforcing them. It is accepted that it has sharpened social polarisation within countries and global inequalities. It has increased inequalities in employment, economy, education, consumption, use of time, hitting harder the working classes, women, young people, minorities. At the same time, the Coronavirus crisis has transformed inequalities and the system of inequalities, changing old ones, generating new ones, intertwining the old and the new, following the class division of society.

A test of these processes, in particular of the differentiated impact of the crisis, can be observed in migration. Just as in the great economic crisis of 2008, during the pandemic, immigrants and migrants suffered very heavy consequences, due to the double penalty of migrants, to their dual status as wage earners and foreigners. During the pandemic, they experienced conditions and problems similar to those of the native population, yet often more severe. As will be seen, for many reasons, immigrants and migrants have been particularly vulnerable to the pandemic and its economic and social effects; specifically, because of the conditions, they have a high level of exposure, susceptibility and vulnerability to the virus and at the same time have suffered serious consequences at the labour and administrative levels, just to mention a few.

4.1 Immigrant Workers: More Exposed, More Precarious, More Exploited

Let's see in detail the impact of the Coronavirus crisis on some dimensions of migrants' social life,[14] distinguishing between immigrant workers residing in a foreign country, asylum seekers, emigrants in travel.

Concerning the former, two points must be made. Firstly, they reside mainly in the large urban and industrial centres of Europe, the Americas, South-East Asia and the Gulf, in other words, in the most populated and crowded areas of the planet. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in 2014, about 20% of international migrants lived in twenty major cities (from London to New York, Shanghai to Buenos Aires), where they accounted for a fifth of the population (but they were 83% in Dubai, 62% in Brussels, 46% in Toronto).[15] Secondly, they constitute an essential part of the workforce employed in key-sectors; in 2017, they constituted 20.6% of workers in North America, 17.8% of workers in Northern, Western and Southern Europe, 40.8% of workers in the Arab States (ILO 2018, XII), primarily employed in low-skilled, dangerous, demeaning but essential jobs for so many economic sectors: workers in logistics, transport, business and personal services (riders, retail, cleaning, domestic work, care work), healthcare (in hospitals, nursing homes, families), the tourist-hotel and restaurant sectors, construction, food processing, agricultural. Low-skilled immigrant workers are over-represented in several essential jobs; in Europe about 13% of key workers are migrants (extra-EU migrants or EU mobile citizens), but in some jobs such as cleaners or helpers, they account for more than a third (Fasani, Mazza 2020, 1, 10); in the United States, 69% "of all immigrants in the US labour force and 74% of undocumented workers are essential workers [...] the percentage of undocumented essential workers exceeds that of native-born essential workers by nine percentage points in the 15 states with the largest labour force. In the ten largest MSAs, the percentages of undocumented and naturalised essential workers exceed the percentage of native-born essential workers by 12 and 6%" (Kerwin, Warren 2020, 1).

Due to their specific position in the labour market and their professional status, but in particular, due to their concentration in essential sectors and manual jobs, most immigrant workers were not

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14 On risk factors and areas of vulnerability see OECD 2020a.

15 IOM (23-11-2020). https://migrationdataportal.org/themen/migration–data–relevant–covid–19–pandemic. According to the IOM, as of 3 November 2020 immigrants "accounted for at least 4.5% of the population in 12 of the 20 countries with the highest number of COVID-19 cases, and this share is more than 10% in 8 of these countries".

able to work remotely, they were not able to abstain from work, they had to accept any working conditions to safeguard their residence permit or their job, they worked in places where anti-COVID precautions were not always applied, they continued to perform jobs characterised by close contact with colleagues or the public. Due to their general condition, they often use public transport and live in poor and densely populated areas, in dwellings with limited overcrowded spaces in which children, parents, grandparents and uncles live together. For these reasons – in particular for the combination of labour segregation and housing hardship – they had high exposure to the virus, which more than a few times resulted in a high level of infection, concentrated in outbreaks that broke out in specific workplaces such as slaughterhouses, logistics hubs, food companies. This situation was compounded by a significant susceptibility resulting from general living and health conditions (syndemic).

At the moment,[16] data on the diffusion of COVID-19 among immigrants are limited, inhomogeneous, and difficult to compare, also because of the different survey systems and demographic compositions. Nevertheless, we do have some initial indicative studies. In Sweden (Valeriani et al. 2020; the study covers the period March 13–May 7, 2020) and in Norway,[17] twice the incidence of COVID-19 was reported among the immigrant population compared to the native population. In Spain (Guijarro et al. 2020), in France (Papon, Robert-Bobée 2020), in the Netherlands (Kunst et al. 2020, 14), in Sweden (Hansson et al. 2020), the significant susceptibility to the virus produced by general living conditions and difficulties in accessing health services[18] has resulted in medical complications and sometimes excess mortality among the immigrants. In Italy, a national study updated to April 2, 2020, has highlighted that the casuistry regarding foreign-born people presents a different demographic and clinical structure from the casuistry of those born in Italy. Among the former, the female component is higher (56.4% vs 50.8%), the average age is lower (46 years vs 64), there is a greater concentration in the Northwest (72.8% vs 57.5%) and urban areas (52.1% vs 31%). Above all, there is a higher risk of hospitalisation and admission to intensive care (1.4 times). There are more severe manifestations of the disease even in terms of age – due to delays in diagnosis and the use of health services (IDOS 2020, 251).

As was the case with the economic crisis ten years ago, the Coronavirus crisis has had a harsh impact on the work of immigrants, who have been among the hardest hit by precarity, unemployment

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[16]   November 2020.

[17]   University of Bergen, https://www.uib.no/en/globalchallenges/139119/being-healthy-and-working-new-country.

[18]   Due to language difficulties, lack of residence permit, etc.

and underemployment, worsening working conditions, and impoverishment. Although the impact on the employment of all workers has been heterogeneous (depending on national contexts or geographical areas; in terms of unemployment, underemployment, inactivity), in the OECD area, the worst consequences have fallen on immigrant workers (OECD 2020b, 11-12), for several reasons: the strong presence in sectors affected by the crisis (hotel, restaurant, domestic work) or in sectors with a high level of informality, irregularity and precarity; the concentration in low-skilled jobs, the first to be affected in times of recession and unemployment; an often unstable administrative condition, deriving from the link between work contract and residence permit; partial fruition of social rights, as they are linked to the migratory status. Workers who are structurally precarious by definition and de facto, precisely because of their concentration in precarious jobs, have been among the first to be affected by unemployment and more acute precariousness, falling into a kind of "precarity loop". Moreover, the pandemic has enlarged and amplified their over-education and under-classification. In the context of high unemployment and harshening of migration policies, to find or keep a job enabling them to obtain or renew their residence permit, immigrants have been forced to accept a lower classification. In some national contexts, they were penalised in enjoying social safety nets and there have been cases of discrimination in welfare.

As far as unemployment is concerned, Hispanic women in the United States (-21% compared to other women or men), immigrants (-19% compared to 12% US-born), young adults and the less educated were most affected by job loss (Kochhar 2020); immigrants – especially Latinos and women – were more acutely affected by unemployment than US-born citizens (16.5% vs 14%) (Capps et al. 2020). In Canada, in March-April 2020, recent immigrants – who are concentrated in short-term, low-paying jobs – were more affected by unemployment than Canadian-born workers and long-term immigrants (job-to-unemployment transition rates of 17.3%, 13.5% and 13.5%, respectively) (Hou et al. 2020). The impact on the employment of immigrant women (regardless of education level) was particularly harmful. Between March and May 2020, the unemployment rate for immigrant women increased by about 7% compared to 4.5% for Canadian-born workers and immigrant men.[19] In Germany, unemployment grew faster among immigrant workers in the period March-June 2020 (27% vs 20%).[20]

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[19] A. Ferrer, B. Momani, "The startling impact of COVID-19 on immigrant women in the workforce", *Policy Options*, 21-10-2020, https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/october-2020/the-startling-impact-of-covid-19-on-immigrant-women-in-the-workforce/.

[20] J. Nasr, "COVID-19 pandemic derails Germany's push for migrant integration", Reuters, 20-07-2020, https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSL5N2EZ0XS.

In some economic sectors or geographical contexts, there have been situations of worsening exploitation of workers, of exacerbation of discrimination at work. In Italian agriculture, for example, the area of severe labour exploitation has widened, working conditions have worsened with the increase in irregular work, the lengthening of working hours, the intensification of work rhythms, the reduction of wages and break times, the reduction of labour disputes (IDOS 2020, 289).[21] In Spain, in the agricultural sector of Huelva, female farmworkers from a bleak pre-COVID condition have plummeted into a hellish condition.[22]

4.2 Asylum Seekers between Confinement and Abandonment, and the Odyssey of Emigrants

During the pandemic, asylum seekers suffered severe consequences – at health and social level – due to their structural vulnerability and poor social status, which predated th pandemic. At the moment there are no systematic and updated data on infections among asylum seekers. However, various sources (specialised organisations, press, etc.) indicate that the reception centres and refugees camps were not able to ensure physical distance and public health; the crowding of the centres and refugees camps was, if anything, a significant factor of contagion. The dramatic case of the Moria camp in Lesbos, between COVID-19 and detention, was one of the darkest pages of the refugee tragedy but also an example of the inadequacy of the camp model. Not only because these facilities are severely overcrowded and it is not possible to maintain distancing, but also because very often, the infected were not evacuated from the facilities and were quarantined within them, spreading the virus to the entire facility.

This type of management has occurred more than a few times in Italy. With the dismantling of the widespread reception system and the concentration of asylum seekers in large reception centres, the ground has been prepared for the spread of the virus. A study carried out in June 2020 on 195 reception centres scattered throughout the country highlighted that the management of PCR-positive guests very often implied the adoption of uneven and improvised measures

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[21]   An international journalistic investigation has documented a worsening of the conditions of foreign labourers in several European countries https://www.eurone-ws.com/2020/07/17/invisible-workers-underpaid-exploited-and-put-at-risk-on-europe-s-farms.

[22]   A. Márquez Tejón, H. Wilson, "Protecting migrant women workers in food supply chains during COVID-19", *OpenGlobalRights*, 14-08-2020, https://www.openglobalrights.org/protecting-migrant-women-workers-in-food-supply-chains-during-covid.

with DIY solutions.[23] Using a special "saturation index" of reception centres, another national study conducted on 5,038 facilities between May-June 2020 confirmed the close correlation between overcrowding and risk of infection. The same study showed that the isolation of positive subjects ordered by the health authority took place in a quarter of the cases at the same facility. Only half of these cases were in a single room with exclusive services.[24]

Often, and in many parts of the world, to add insult to injury, the victim-blame effect applied: these structures and their "guests" have been singled out as spreading the epidemic, the carriers of the virus. Thus, to the traditional public image of the asylum seeker as a slacker, scrounger and underdeveloped, the element of "asylum seeker as a health hazard" was added. With the pandemic, we witnessed the appearance – not new – of the link between otherness-health emergency-security policies, which was followed by exclusion practices and racism in the name of health security (also through the distinction between "native virus" and "foreign virus").

At the moment, there are still no systematic studies on the impact of the pandemic on the work of asylum seekers. Yet, from various sources (reports, press articles, etc.) it has emerged that in many parts of the world, they have lost their jobs, have had great difficulty in finding new ones, and have seen an increase in irregular work. This situation led to an increase in inactivity and monotony in reception centres, especially during lockdown periods, during which these facilities became veritable prisons in which inactivity, discouragement, forced overcrowding and a sense of abandonment took over. On the other hand, those who did not lose their jobs faced the problem of a high risk of infection by being employed in low-skill jobs in essential sectors.

In addition to the loss of jobs, there was the uncertainty of their residence status due to: the suspension of asylum applications and residence permits, the weakening of legal status caused by the state of emergency, the closure of borders and humanitarian corridors, the interruption of the provision of reception and integration services (especially during lockdowns), the absence of specific interventions in favour of this category in times of pandemic, the difficult access to social and health services and poor health care at a time when

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23   E. Camilli, "Covid19. Prassi improvvisate e difformi: ecco cosa è successo nei centri d'accoglienza", *Redattore sociale*, 01-07-2020, https://www.redattoresociale.it/article/notiziario/covid19_prassi_fai_da_te_improvvisate_e_difformi_ecco_cosa_e_successo_nei_centri_d_accoglienza.

24   An emblematic example is a reception centre in the province of Treviso (Italy) in August 2020: after discovering two cases of positivity, instead of taking out or isolating the infected, the residents were let to be infected, resulting in 250 people testing positive in a few days.

the health systems of many countries have been in crisis, the worsening of housing conditions. All this further aggravated a situation that was already compromised and deteriorated by forced migration, poor mental and physical conditions due to the journey and life in the camps, repressive and punitive migration policies, and the anti-migrant propaganda that has long raged throughout a large part of the world. These elements have negatively affected their exposure to the novel Coronavirus. They have damaged the first steps of integration and rooting, throwing thousands of people into limbo and negatively impacting those who have not obtained humanitarian protection or asylum and on those who have left the reception and international protection systems, especially undocumented.

With the arrival of the pandemic, almost all the countries of the world (about 195) closed their borders, strengthened controls, imposed more restrictions. If most of the times these measures were due, sometimes the pandemic was a pretext to apply ultra-restrictive measures and migration policies not justified by the pandemic. Of course, these elements have reduced migratory movements and limited departures. However, since the structural causes of emigration have not changed – on the contrary, with the Coronavirus crisis they have become even more profound in poor countries – emigration has continued, albeit in a more difficult, more uncomfortable, more dangerous, and more costly manner.

The closure of borders, ports,[25] and legal channels, the worsening migration policies, and health restrictions have worsened migration conditions for both those who already on their way and those setting out during the pandemic. More than a few times, migrants have been stranded in transit countries, at border crossings, along the way; stranded with no means of livelihood, little access to services, with little public attention. The worsening conditions of migration have made them even more vulnerable; with the pandemic, they have seen an increased risk of inhuman treatment and have suffered escalated mistreatment, rape, violence. The reports and documentation regarding migration in different parts of the world – for example, the Colombian-Venezuelan area, Central America, the Mexico-US border, India, the Balkan route, the sub-Saharan route, the Mediterranean route – have painted a very gloomy picture; a large part of the migrations have slipped into a foggy limbo, passing even more into the hands of traffickers and criminal organisations that have often operated undisturbed. In the situation of closed borders, forced vacuum (absence of NGOs, journalists, rescues, public authorities) and state of emergency, migrations have become even more irregular,

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[25] In the Mediterranean, quarantine ships have also been added, fully-fledged floating hotspots on which hundreds of people have been kept at sea for days on end.

new services related to smuggling have arisen, smuggling activities have changed adapting to the new context, traffickers have changed routes and modes adapting to the new situations, finding new solutions (Sanchez, Achilli 2020).

5 Conclusion

The Coronavirus crisis has taken place in a context of structural growth of inequalities in the four corners of the planet in recent decades. A context in which all forms of inequality have become more acute. Globalisation of neo-liberal policies and ideologies has transformed social inequalities and the system of inequalities, modifying the old ones, generating new ones, intertwining the old and the new. Social, health, environmental inequalities have been modified and exacerbated because of the considerable ongoing environmental crisis and the deep metabolic rift – which, in combination with the very acute economic crisis and the SARS-Cov-2 health crisis, have unified into a colossal triple crisis of capitalist society.

The pandemic has aggravated racial inequalities. Racialised groups were strongly penalised by it in all spheres of social life: in health (a higher rate of contagiousness, linked to material factors such as the job carried out), in work (increased unemployment, underemployment, precariousness, deskilling), in housing (poor availability of spacious housing). Some social groups, such as emigrants and immigrants, who were already highly vulnerable and disadvantaged, have been hit very hard by their dual status as wage earners and foreigners. Many migrant women have seen their living and working conditions worsen dramatically as a result of the triple oppression that constantly weighs on them.

The pandemic have exposed the role and the condition of migrants within the world labour market, the nature of migration policies (organic to it), the utilitarian (or pathological) conception of immigration in many countries. For this reason, the Coronavirus crisis is, could be – and should be – an opportunity to rethink migration policies, to review the dominant conception of the immigrant as a man/woman bearer of needs for social emancipation.

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What the COVID-19 Outbreak Tells Us about Migration

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Abstract   This chapter looks at the impact that the recent outbreak of COVID-19 is having on asylum seekers, as well as foreign workers and residents on the European continent, with a special focus on Italy. It describes the critical situation in the refugee camps at the South-Eastern borders of the EU (i.e., the Greek-Turkish border and former Yugoslavia) and the outbreaks of xenophobia that have been reported by NGOs and international relief organizations working in and around the camps. The paper also briefly looks at the present situation of migrant workers in Italy on the basis of the currently available figures, describing the impact of the COVID-19 and the subsequent regularization introduced by the Government. The concluding remarks point out that the Coronavirus crisis puts at risk the living conditions of countless vulnerable households, and could unleash a new wave of migration of people in search for better living conditions. It is therefore necessary that both governmental policies and citizens' attitude *vis-à-vis* migration adapt themselves to the global changes imposed by the pandemic.

Keywords   Migration. Asylum. Coronavirus. Employment. Regularisation. Agriculture. Caregiving. Ethnicity.

Summary   1 Introduction. – 2 Refugees, Asylum Seekers and the Coronavirus: The Lessons Learned. – 3 The Impact of the Coronavirus on Labour Migration in Italy. – 4 Is Coronavirus Hitting Foreigners Harder Than Nationals? – 5 In Place of Conclusions.

1   Introduction

The recent outbreak of Coronavirus which, from mainland China expanded rapidly throughout the world, has definitely triggered a powerful social earthquake which is shaking all aspects of modern, globalised life from its very foundations.

The overall picture before our eyes is changing very rapidly, but, from what we can see now, the virus exacerbates a number of contradictions and weaknesses already existing in modern society. At a closer look, we can say that not only does the COVID-19 outbreak create new imbalances and discriminations, but definitely throws new light on previously existing ones, which had been somehow neglected in the public discourse. If it is true that major crises are but accelerators of on-going processes, then the COVID-19 outbreak should definitely prevent us from closing our eyes in front the living conditions of migrants.

Among these, different forms of inequality and discrimination, on which a large part of the current socio-economic organisation both at the global and local level is based, stand out for importance. Human mobility, which is part and parcel of today's world, will mostly be affected, but consequences will not be equal for all: having the wrong name, the wrong passport, the wrong zip code will inevitably bear consequences on the opportunities of 'foreigners' for integration in a new country. We are all facing the same storm but our boats are rather different.

The over 272 million migrants presently existing in the world will face harsh consequences on their opportunities to settle permanently in their host countries, and to earn a decent living for themselves and their families. Following the present health crisis, we will be facing a short-medium term economic and labour crisis, which will probably hit migrant workers harder: many of the jobs in post-COVID-19 labour crisis (tourism, hospitality, agriculture, cleaning services, assistance to elderly people, baby-sitting, petty trade) are actually filled by migrants. The inability to move out of their countries will impact global agriculture and put migrants' families at greater risk, as remittances will probably dry up. The 26 million refugees and the almost 46 million internally displaced people[1] are particularly at risk, considering the living conditions in the overcrowded camps, where social isolation and personal hygiene are simply impossible, and where the transmission of all sorts of diseases and viruses (including COVID-19) is extremely easy and swift.

All in all, we can maintain that the presence of migrants is more tolerated than welcome in the societies of destination, especially, as it is the case in Italy, on the basis of their economic relevance, coupled with the extreme flexibility of their working conditions, as well as the lack of social, political and sometimes even human rights. Hence, this attitude helps keeping away from the eyes of the public opinion the intolerable living conditions of tens of thousands of migrants working in the agricultural fields of many Italian regions, in the cleaning services as well as in the health care sector. The Coronavirus outbreak has in

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[1] See UNHCR (2020), *Figures at a Glance*, https://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html.

this respect a two-fold, paradoxical effect. The pandemic, on the one hand, puts migrants somehow on the back burner of the public discourse, because the media are 100% absorbed by the present health emergency. On the other hand, it is precisely the on-going pandemic that worsens migrants' living conditions and prompts the media (and hence the public opinion) to turn their eyes again on them. Migrants are once again brought to the forefront of the public discourse, and become again the bargaining chip of the political negotiations within Governments and Parliaments. The lengthy and heated discussions on the regularisation of migrants which took place in Italy last May (and on which we will come back later) are a clear example of that.

What are the consequences of the COVID-19 outbreak on migration and especially on migrants and their families? What are the consequences on the destination countries and their economies? How will it affect the already complicated relation between migrants and host territories and peoples? These are the main questions we will try and deal with in this chapter.

The chapter will start with a brief overview of the current situation in and around the refugee camps at the South-Eastern borders, followed by a glimpse at the recent changes in the Italian asylum legislation prior to the outbreak of Coronavirus. After a glimpse at the recent regularisation introduced by the Italian Government for agricultural workers and care-givers, the paper presents some figures illustrating a possible connection between nationality and Coronavirus impact in the UK and Italy.

2 Refugees, Asylum Seekers and the Coronavirus: The Lessons Learned

The lockdown and travel ban recently introduced by nearly all European countries, as well as the closure of international borders will ostensibly have a higher impact on foreign citizens, and especially on asylum seekers. As far as the latter group is concerned, while on the one hand it is precisely the request for asylum that could legitimise their entry, more than the search for work, on the other hand it is precisely the precariousness of their living conditions (and hence sanitation) that could induce the governments of the host countries to hinder their entry, preventing them from applying for asylum. However, we must also consider that *de facto* the different categories of migrants (once clearly distinct) now tend to mix and overlap, and seem to form a single "mixed flow", united by the same reasons for survival. Not by chance, in the current analysis of international migration, there is more and more talk of "substitution of categories" (De Haas 2011).

Let us therefore start with a brief overview of asylum (and asylum applications) at the European level.

As a result of the containment policies applied throughout Europe after 2015, first-time asylum applications dropped from 1,216,900 in 2015 to 549,000 in 2018. In 2019, they increased again to 612,700.[2] At the end of 2019, 842,500 applications for international protection in the EU Member States were still under consideration by the national authorities.

Coronavirus brought this growing trend to a sudden stop. According to figures issued by EASO (the European Asylum Support Office based in Malta), just before the COVID-19 outbreak, applications had increased by 16% over the same period (January-February 2019). Between February and March 2020, applications dropped by 43% (34,737 applications in March).

March figures – says EASO in a press release of 30 April – are not truly indicative of asylum-related migration trends, but are rather the result of COVID-19 containment measures.

This does not necessarily imply a sheer reduction of asylum-seekers, but simply points out that the on-going health crisis may prevent them from submitting their application, turning them into 'invisible' migrants.

The already dramatic situation in the detention camps at the South-Eastern border of Europe, especially in Greece, has even worsened after the outbreak of Coronavirus: EU member States, who where already trying their best to keep asylum seekers away from the heart of the continent are now given new ammunition by the pandemic, for they can maintain that it is being spread by migrants themselves. Which is, by the way, exactly what we hear from heads of Governments of member States such as Hungary, that can lead to an increase of xenophobia throughout the continent. On the other hand, it is clear that detention camps (be they in Greece or elsewhere in Europe, including Italy) are the ideal setting for an uncontrollable spread of the virus. This is why, by the way, the model of mass accommodation of migrants (recently re-introduced in Italy by the overturn of the legislation on asylum-seekers' hospitality) is totally counterproductive. The situation is all the more dangerous because the whole issue is almost totally ignored by the public opinion, which is influenced by mainstream mass-media. This entails two different dangers: on the one hand, the danger of gross underestimation of a potentially devastating crisis; on the other hand, the opportunity for Governments to act with a free hand, without a real control by citizens and grassroots movements.

Let's give now a closer look at the situation along the so-called Balkan Route, linking starting places in Asia and the middle-East (Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Syria) to the heart of Europe via Turkey, Greece and former Yugoslavia.

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2 Eurostat news release (2020). Asylum in the EU Member States, 48/20-20 March 2020.

Here, too, we have to record a media paradox. The media coverage of the appalling situation of migrants throughout the Balkan Route (from attempts to flee Syria, to their stay in Turkish camps, to their passage through Greek camps and, finally, through South-Eastern Europe) was overshadowed in early 2020 by the concentration of the media all over Europe on the Coronavirus epidemic. As mentioned earlier, immigration is only dealt with if the news to be given is tragic, and only if this tragedy also affects us, the 'natives'. Suddenly, for the migrants of the Balkan Route, both conditions have occurred: a situation that in itself is tragic (which obviously existed before) becomes noteworthy because the COVID-19, in the camps, could give rise to an uncontrollable emergency. In addition, the crisis of migrants along the Balkan Route becomes a pretext, for the governments of the countries traversed, to manipulate the discontent of their public opinion and to scapegoat migrants. The emergency situation along the Balkan Route has already existed for several years. In 2016, in order to defuse Turkey's threats to open its borders to migrants hosted in refugee camps (currently estimated at around 3.6 million people), the European Union signed an agreement with Ankara in order to contain the arrival of refugees which had seriously threatened the stability of several European governments in 2015. In a nutshell,[3] with the agreement, the EU promised Ankara a total of EUR 6 billion, as well as the possibility for Turkish citizens to enter Europe, and the intensification of EU enlargement negotiations with Turkey, in exchange for Ankara's commitment to keep the growing number of refugees fleeing the Syrian war, which had begun five years earlier, in the country. In particular, the joint communiqué foresaw that, while Turkey would readmit refugees who had attempted 'illegal' entry into Greece, the EU would in turn accept an equal number of asylum seekers from Turkish refugee camps. In the first weeks of 2020, following the actual opening of the Greek-Turkish border to migrants, tensions between the two countries began running high (Viale 2020; Hackenos 2020; *Left* 2020). In this situation, already on the verge of rupture, the COVID-19 pandemic exploded: after an initial period in which Europe has turned back on itself, the time bomb of migrants in Greek camps and marching on the Balkan Route soon became apparent. Several reports by international organisations, non-governmental organisations and journalists highlighted the living conditions in camps on the brink of collapse, with migrants exposed to mistrust, when not open violence, by local populations, often stirred up by ruling classes in search of cheap scapegoats (Mazzola, Martiniello 2020, McAuliffe,

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3 See EU-Turkey Joint Statement, 18 March 2016. `https://www.europarl.europa.eu/legislative-train/api/stages/report/current/theme/towards-a-new-policy-on-migration/file/eu-turkey-statement-action-plan`.

Bauloz 2020; Guadagno 2020). The conservative government led by Kyriakos Mitsotakis reacted extremely harshly, with the unilateral suspension of the Geneva Convention throughout March, thus preventing migrants from exercising their right to apply for asylum. The UNHCR itself intervened to stigmatise the Athens decision, stressing that it had no legal basis: a State that is a party to the Convention (such as Greece) cannot deny those who come to its borders the possibility of applying for asylum. The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (Article 78[3]), invoked by Athens at its advantage, "only allows for provisional to be adopted by the Council on a proposal from the Commission and in consultation with the European Parliament".[4] The European Union, as is well known, has had a rather ambiguous reaction in this regard: following an inspection carried out in early March 2020, the four major political authorities of the Union proclaimed that Greece represents "the shield of the European Union" on its South-Eastern borders. Furthermore, they "express solidarity with Greece" and at the same time strongly reject Turkey's use of migratory pressure for political purposes.[5]

By the same statement, the EU promised to earmark 700 million Euros for Athens "to support migration and integrated border management". Just to underline the short-sightedness characterising this whole story, the EU announced in the same period that EUR 2,000 each will be paid to migrants in Greece as an incentive to voluntary repatriation. By the way, it should also be noted that the initiative is also financially insufficient, because it is limited to a maximum number of 5,000 people, representing a total investment of 10 million Euros.[6] As a matter of fact, the European Commission seems much more interested in tuning up appropriate procedures to ensure repatriation. In a recent communication, after warning that Member States are facing practical difficulties in carrying out return activities and operations to third countries, the Commission suggests that return procedures should continue as far as possible, and that the Commission and Frontex will support National authorities in coordinating their efforts.[7]

4 See UNCHR (2020), *Statement on the Situation at the Turkish-Greek Border*, https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2020/3/5e5d08ad4/unhcr-statement-situation-turkey-eu-border.html.

5 Press Office - General Secretariat of the Council of the European Union, Statement on the situation at the EU's external borders, 4 March 2020.

6 BBC (2020), "EU to Give Migrants in Greece €2,000 to Go Home", 12 March, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-51859007; ANSAmed (2020), "Migrants: Greece to Offer 2,000-euro Repatriation Incentive", 13 March, https://tinyurl.com/f86a3h8w.

7 European Commission, "Communication from the Commission. COVID-19: Guidance on the implementation of relevant EU provisions in the area of asylum and return procedures and on resettlement", (2020/C 126/02), 17 April 2020.

Organising a solid reallocation programme to spread the migrants throughout the Member States would be, needless to say, much harder work, especially in terms of political negotiations. As mentioned above, the increase in the number of migrants on their way through the South-Eastern regions of Europe has provoked the reaction of the populations involved, often exploited for propaganda purposes by local governments. There has therefore developed a tendency to represent migrants as scapegoats for the problems afflicting different countries, causing them to close in on themselves with a 'nation-first' approach.[8] The Coronavirus pandemic has also often provided an opportunity to further restrict migrants' freedoms, blaming them as 'plague-spreaders'. The critical situation of the camps in Greece is described in detail by a short study published by Human Rights Watch (HRW), which interviewed several migrants hosted in the camps.[9] First, overcrowding: as of 20 April, 34,875 migrants were hosted in the camps of Chios, Kos, Lesbos, and Samos, despite a maximum capacity of 6,095 people. An interviewed operator stated that "it is very unlikely that COVID-19 will never come to Moria [the Lesbos camp]. The only solution, if we want to minimise casualties, is to decongest before it comes".

At the end of April 2020, no cases had yet been identified on the Island camps, also known as Reception and Identification Centres. The Greek Government's plan to decongest the camps by relocating migrants to the mainland actually only affected 2,380 people, which was absolutely insufficient to effectively combat overcrowding and prevent the outbreak of the pandemic. Even before the Coronavirus, Greece had already introduced new restrictive asylum legislation in the last quarter of 2019, which had raised a number of concerns: among other things, the new legislation extends the period of detention in the centres from 3 to 15 months and compiles a list of 12 'safe' countries, to which migrants can automatically be repatriated.[10] Unfortunately, the situation is no better in the other countries along the Balkan Route, according to numerous local and international sources. Bosnia, given its institutional and economic fragility, is perhaps the weakest link in the chain. The camps located in the Una-Sana Canton and around the city of Bihac are suffering from serious overcrowding problems, exacerbated by the 14-day ban imposed by the authorities with the total closure of the country on 17 March.

[8]   In Serbia, for instance, the immigration issue strongly influenced April's parliamentary election (see Stojanovic 2020; Fruscione 2020).

[9]   For a detailed description of the situation, see Human Rights Watch (2020), "Greece: Island Camps Not Prepared for COVID-19", `https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/22/greece-island-camps-not-prepared-covid-19`.

[10]   For a detailed analysis of the new Greek legislation, refer to Mouzourakis 2019.

The complete ban on moving in and out of camps imposed in the current pandemic has left those locked inside them feeling more isolated, frustrated and information-starved than ever, as an article appeared on the website Balkan Insight puts it (Jerevic, Stojanovic, Vladisavljevic 2020). Even worse, however, is the situation of those rejected from the Croatian border, who are setting up irregular camps without any protection, where the risk of contagion is obviously very high (Bonapace, Perino 2020). The deterioration of the situation does not go unnoticed either by the population or the local authorities, and is part of the never fully resolved conflict between the countries that emerged from the Yugoslav war in the 1990s (as well as within the national communities coexisting in Bosnia and Herzegovina).

Also here (as already seen for Greece), Europe intervenes essentially in the attempt to prevent asylum seekers from reaching the heart of the continent. One of the instruments used is Frontex, the external border control agency created in 2004. The Agency, which until now has relied exclusively on police forces provided by the Member States, is now setting up its own autonomous quota of 10,000 men to build up the European Border and Coastguard. The Commission proposal was officially approved by the Council on 8 November 2019.[11] The full operation of the Guard, which will have its own aircraft, boats and ground vehicles, is scheduled for 2021.[12] A small, fully-fledged army, ready to intervene at any request of the Member States, under their command.

Bosnia itself – as reported by the already mentioned No Man's Land – has moved in the direction of agreements with Frontex – which the European agency has already signed with Serbia and Montenegro – for the containment of illegal immigration, but in the course of yet another dispute between Bosnian Serbs and the state, Milorad Dodik, although a member of the presidency, halted the signing of the agreement, voting against the decision. It is interesting to see the motivation given by Dodik and collected by *Balkan Insight*:

> It is a bad decision. Frontex would only go to the border between Bosnia and Croatia, and I think it is a bad decision. This would hermetically seal off Bosnia and Herzegovina and keep the migrants here. (Kovacevic 2020)

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11 See "Guardia di frontiera e costiera europea: il Consiglio adotta un regolamento riveduto", in `https://www.consilium.europa.eu/it/press/press-releases/2019/11/08/european-border-and-coast-guard-council-adopts-revised-regulation/`.

12 See European Commission, "A Reinforced European Border and Coast Guard", November 2019, in `https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/system/files/2019-11/20191108_managing-migration-factsheet-european-border-and-coast-guard_en.pdf`.

The issue of the 'substitution of the nation' that is perceived in this declaration returns frequently and is reinforced by some of the leaders' statements.

This quick review of the joint effect of COVID-19 and xenophobia towards migrants on the Balkan Route brings us directly to Italy, where the situation is also in continuous progress.

As it is well known, a profound transformation hit the international protection system in Italy in 2018, *de facto* abrogating the possibility of granting a residence permit for humanitarian reasons, renamed for the occasion protection for special humanitarian cases, which are strictly listed. In addition to this, the public system of the so-called diffuse reception has been hollowed out of its contents, pursuing

> a lucid and unscrupulous political design aimed at producing a situation of confusion and uncertainty throughout the entire country [...] in order to perpetuate and cultivate an eternal emergency dimension in the management of the issue.

This legislative intervention of 2018 has thus

> constantly fuelled a state of alert and hostility towards asylum-seekers and refugees so as to take full advantage of the political fallout of what many commentators have called [...] the fear factory. (Schiavone 2019, 192)

This is, very briefly, the situation in which we were at the beginning of the Coronavirus spread in the first weeks of 2020. The current situation of irregular migrants (mostly denegated asylum seekers) in the Coronavirus crisis, however, has its roots in the recent history of migration in Italy, and affects already vulnerable people. As we will see in the next paragraph, this proves what was said above, i.e., that the great crises are but accelerators of already existing problems.

3 The Impact of the Coronavirus on Labour Migration in Italy

The dismantling of the public reception system has created new irregular migrants in Italy. According to ISPI (Istituto per gli Studi Politica Internazionale) estimates, there are more than 26,000 people (26,722, to be precise), in addition to the approximately 70,000 that would have represented the increase in irregular migrants since June 2018. In other words, the tightening of reception conditions in Italy has accelerated the growth of irregular immigrants by almost 40%. This brings the overall total (again according to ISPI estimates) of irregular migrants to 611,000 at the end of 2019, and a forecast of

649,000 at the end of 2020 (Villa 2020a). In the meantime, however, the COVID-19 pandemic has occurred, just in time to prevent tens of thousands of farm workers from coming to Italy for the spring fruit and vegetable harvest. At this point, in the early months of 2020, agricultural producer associations sounded the alarm about the shortage of seasonal labour that would have affected the sector had they not taken action in good time.[13] We do not have the space here to go into detail about the Italian agricultural sector and its labour market, but a few basic data will enable the reader to have an idea of the situation. Italian agriculture is worth 2.1% of national GDP, with a total production of almost EUR 56 billion.[14] According to CREA (Council for Research in Agriculture and Analysis of the Agricultural Economy) there are over 400,000 foreigners in agriculture, both regular and irregular.[15] The numerically most important group is represented by far by Romanians (107,591 in 2018) followed by Moroccans (35,013), Indians (34,043) and Albanians (32,264) (Magrini 2019, 284). It is interesting to note that, in the two-year period 2017-18, the foreign component of agricultural workers tends to increase, a sign of a progressive lack of interest in the sector on the part of Italian workers. Agriculture, in Italy, is a highly difficult sector from the point of view of labour relations, often characterised by exploitation and illegal work. The "indecent work" (as defined by the Placido Rizzotto Observatory of Flai/CGIL in its latest report[16]) in agriculture provides in some cases average wages between 20 and 30 euro/day, piecework, half of the salary indicated by the collective labour agreement. In extreme cases, migrant workers can be paid as little as 1 euro per hour. Exploitation is also partly due to the increasing role played by the large-scale organised retail trade, which in recent years has almost completely replaced traditional detail selling, and tends to impose ever lower prices on producers.[17] In the Southern regions of Italy, it is estimated that there are about 60,000 seasonal harvesters, and up to 17,500 may live in illegal settlements. In other words, real ghet-

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13   Confagricoltura (2020), "Comunicato Stampa". https://www.confagricoltura. it/ita/area-stampa/comunicati/a-rischio-l%E2%80%99ortofrutta-italiana.-in-tervenire-per-evitare-il-lockdown-del-comparto.

14   2018 data, in ISTAT, "Andamento dell'economia Agricola. Anno 2018", 14 May 2019.

15   According to the Ministry of Agriculture, foreign workers legally employed in the sector would be 346,000. See declaration of the Minister of Agriculture before the Senate's Schengen Commission on 27 May 2020. https://www.redattoresociale.it/ article/notiziario/regolarizzazione_bellanova_migranti_impiegabili_da_2_ giugno_corridoi_verdi_difficili_?UA-11580724-2.

16   Flai-CGIL, Osservatorio Placido Rizzotto 2020.

17   Between 24 February and 1 March, sales in supermarkets rose by 12.2%. https://www.nielsen.com/it/it/insights/article/2020/coronavirus-continuano-a-crescere-gli-acquisti-nella-gdo/.

tos in which it is easy to imagine that the spread of the Coronavirus could be rapid and uncontrolled, given the precarious living conditions that characterise them. This is therefore, in short, the work situation in the Italian countryside, where the outbreak of the COVID-19 has taken place. In this scenario, as mentioned above, economic reasoning prevailed, convincing the Government to promote the regularisation of certain categories of undocumented foreign workers, including those employed in agriculture. On the one hand, employers of illegally hired workers (both foreign and Italian) can apply for regularisation with a payment of 400 euro, provided that they were already in Italy on 8 March, i.e., the first day of the lockdown. Also foreign workers with a residence permit expired from 31 October 2019, can be granted a temporary residence permit for six months, if they can prove that they have worked in one of the following sectors: agriculture, personal care, cleaning work. In addition, the worker is required to pay 160 euros. It is clear that this amnesty is more useful to the economy than to the human being. The negligible duration of the temporary residence permit granted is certainly not sufficient to enable access to further employment. In other words, the measure responds first and foremost to the logic of profit and not to that of rights, as has been effectively summarised (Filippi 2020, 24). The main limitation of this operation is undoubtedly its selectivity, which clearly reveals its real purpose. The limitation to the three categories envisaged strikes the nerve of strategic sectors completely relying on the exploitation of foreign labour. This is often made up of asylum seekers whose applications have been rejected, or refugees who have left the protection system (which, as we have seen above, is also becoming increasingly selective). In the current emergency situation, it is absolutely irresponsible to leave hundreds of thousands of people uncovered by the prevention and treatment health services. Beyond the strictly sanitary motivations, the simplest public health reasons must also be considered; in emergency situations, the health service must be as broad and inclusive as possible, in order to prevent the excluded from becoming dangerous vehicles of contagion for the whole community. Also for this reason, in the first months of 2020, migration workers and scholars have got together to call for a general regularisation of the migrants living in the country.[18] Though important in many respects, regularisation *per se* is certainly not the only way to guarantee migrants' access to the National Health Service (SSN in the Italian acronym, i.e., *Servizio Sanitario Nazionale*), which is a fundamental right enshrined in the Constitution since 1948. Full access to the Italian national healthcare system, has been guaranteed by law

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[18]   Among the most relevant, the GREI250 group, which issued a detailed position paper containing innovative proposals (`http://www.grei250.it`).

to all undocumented migrants for the past 20 years. Unfortunately, concrete access to this fundamental right has been subject to many *de facto* limitations, due to the increasingly hostile environment *vis-à-vis* migrants (Perna 2018).

In this respect an interesting example comes from Portugal, which, though hit by the Coronavirus as it was, as early as last March granted resident status all migrants with on-going visas and asylum requests, hence allowing them full access to health care and social services. It is a temporary measure, due to last until the end of June, but it does represent a first step in the right direction.[19]

Back to the regularisation launched in Italy, the proposal made by various organisations for the protection of migrants' rights, including ASGI, was actually rather different: according to this proposal, all foreigners presently on the national territory since 29 February 2020 would have been able to obtain a residence permit of 1 year, with the payment of 500 Euros by their employer, if any, but without any expense for the worker (see ASGI 2020). It is difficult to say, at the time of writing, how many workers will be affected by the regularisation. As far as agriculture is concerned, its workforce is extremely varied: if before the crisis of 2008 it was a sector of first employment for many foreigners, waiting to find something better, from 2010 onwards agriculture has become a second-best choice for those who had lost their jobs as a result of the crisis (Ciniero 2019, 289).

Let us briefly look at the other two sectors affected by the recent regularisation (cleaning service and care, mainly for the elderly and children), for which specific COVID-19 legislation provides some extra facilities. It is estimated that in Italy there are approximately two million workers including housemaids, caregivers and baby-sitters, of which 1,200,000 with no contract, and 200,000 irregular foreigners (Zini 2019, 296). This sector has been particularly affected by the Coronavirus crisis: the employers' association Assindatcolf estimates a 30% increase in redundancies in the first quarter of 2020 compared to the same period in 2019. In April, new recruitments are expected to be halved. The situation was created essentially by the combined effect of the fear of contagion and the economic difficulties of families whose incomes fell due to the loss of employment by one or more members. Many caregivers have also tried to return to their countries of origin, frightened by the levels of spread of the pandemic in Italy. Also in this case the regularisation measure largely protects the interests of families (i.e. employers), who have the possibility to stabilise irregularly employed workers. As for agricultural workers, also in this case household workers will benefit from regularisation,

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19 For more details on Portugal's innovative initiative, see Henriques 2020; Ramiro 2020.

or, in case they are unemployed, from a temporary residence permit of six months. In fact, in this way it is possible to obtain labour supply in a period of emergency and in a key sector for the whole national economy (as a matter of fact, domestic work allows a higher participation in the labour market by family members, often women). Unlike agricultural workers, an emergency two-month benefit of 1,000 euros (500 for April and 500 for May) has been made available to domestic workers (provided they do not live in the same household) under certain conditions. These are obviously temporary measures dictated by the emergency, without any guarantee that they will be made available again in the future. One of the fundamental issues that has been stressed for both categories of workers (domestic and agricultural) is the sum of 500 euro to be paid for regularisation: though the payment is due by the employer, it is likely that, as already happened in the past regularisations, it will be charged to the worker, considered by the employer as the 'real beneficiary' of the measure. All the more so in the case of household workers who will benefit from the 1,000 euro allowance.

4 Is Coronavirus Hitting Foreigners Harder Than Nationals?

In the first part of this chapter we have tried, with the few available data, to throw light on some aspects of the impact that the COVID-19 outbreak might have on foreign residents in general, and in particular on asylum-seekers and refugees, in other words on the most precarious group, in Europe and especially in Italy.

Besides, it would be now interesting to understand whether, and why, different nationalities are being hit harder by the virus. Unfortunately, available data in this respect are rather scarce and unreliable, at least for the time being. This is true for Coronavirus-related data in general, and all the more so for specific data concerning foreigners, who are not a central topic in the present public discourse. It is surely not by chance that, in a recent essay published on a leading Italian newspaper the author concludes that we have now lost contact to the spread of the virus among the general population (Villa 2020b).

The British ONS (Office for National Statistics) recently published a paper which tries and breaks down by ethnicity the number of deaths related to the Coronavirus in England (i.e., excluding Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland). The study shows that

> when taking into account age in the analysis, Black males are 4.2 times more likely to die from a COVID-19-related death and Black females are 4.3 times more likely than White ethnicity males and females.

Only

> after taking account of age and other socio-demographic characteristics and measures of self-reported health and disability at the 2011 Census, the risk of a COVID-19-related death for males and females of Black ethnicity reduced to 1.9 times more likely than those of White ethnicity.[20]

This last statement clearly highlights the crucial role that "socio-economic disadvantage" (as the ONS puts it) or, in plain words, worse living conditions, play in the spread of the disease. The Coronavirus does not hit at random, but carefully selects its victims among those who are already discriminated in their access to a decent livelihood. Though socio-economic inequality cannot completely explain the gap among them (a remaining part of the difference has not yet been explained, says the ONS in its paper), it is certainly an important element of the analysis. The initiative taken by the ONS is all the more important, if we consider that not only does the public discourse in many manpower-importing industrialised countries of the West tend to minimise the role played by migrant work in their economy, but even attempts to depict them as scapegoats of economic crises.

Would it be possible to make the same analysis on the Italian case, and try to understand whether the Coronavirus is colour-blind or not? First of all, we have to remark that Italian demographic statistics do not consider 'ethnicity', but rather 'citizenship'. Unfortunately, at the time of writing this chapter, there is no comprehensive report on analysing the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak by nationality, and the Italian national institute for Statistics (ISTAT) has not yet made similar data available. However, the Italian ISS (Istituto Superiore di Sanità) recently published an interesting data set on the impact of the Coronavirus in Italy by citizenship. At a first glance, foreign residents in Italy would be affected in only 5.1% of the cases (i.e., 6,395 foreigners over a total of around 126,000 residents). In other words, foreigners (who, according to ISTAT latest figures, at the end of 2018 account for 8.7% of the Italian population) seem to be underrepresented among the victims of the COVID-19. However, a closer look at the figures paints a less rosy picture.

20   Office for National Statistics, "Coronavirus (COVID-19) related deaths by ethnic group, England and Wales: 2 March 2020 to 10 April 2020", release date: 7 May 2020. https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/articles/coronavirusrelateddeathsbyethnicgroupenglandandwales/2march2020to10april2020.

Table 1 Impact of COVID-19 on major migrant communities (Italy)

Country of origin	Foreign residents in Italy	Percentage of total foreign residents	% residents in Lombardy out of total residents of the same national group in Italy	COVID-19 cases	COVID-19 cases per 1,000 residents
Romania	1,206,938	23.0	14.6	1,046	0.9
Peru	97,128	1.8	44.1	787	8.1
Albania	441,027	8.4	20.9	602	1.4
Ecuador	79,249	1.5	46.3	335	4.2
Morocco	422,980	8.0	22.2	307	0.7
Ukraine	239,424	4.6	22.7	267	1.1
Egypt	126,733	2.4	67.8	225	1.8
Moldova	128,979	2.5	16.5	188	1.5
India	157,965	3.0	30.0	182	1.2
Bangladesh	139,953	2.7	15.9	167	1.2
Philippines	168,292	3.2	34.7	159	0.9
Nigeria	117,358	2.2	13.7	133	1.1
Pakistan	122,308	2.3	32.9	132	1.1
Total foreigners	**5,255,503**	**100.0**	**22.5**	**6,395**	**1.2**

Source: ISMU (Iniziative e Studi sulla Multietnicità) elaboration on ISS and ISTAT data 2020

The information regarding citizenship was in fact available only for 69.3% of the people infected, which inevitably jeopardises the relevance of the dataset. Data on citizenship are reportedly missing for the whole population of the Emilia-Romagna region, where 23,397 COVID-infected people have been detected, as well as for 31,599 citizens from other regions. If we assume that infected foreigners are also 5.1% of the aggregated data (i.e., almost 55,000 persons-54,996), we should add to the 6,395 COVID-infected foreigners 2,804 people who have not been reckoned. The total figure of COVID-positive reported foreign citizens in Italy would be 9,199, i.e. around 7.3%. This calculation still ignores (due to lack of available data) not only the relevant number of foreigners without a valid residence permit, but also all the asylum-seekers in reception centres all over the country. The total reported figure of 6,395 appears therefore grossly underestimated. Concerning nationalities involved, the available data set only allows a limited analysis, because figures show inconsistencies among national communities, that are not easy to explain. As we can see from the table, the incidence of COVID-19 cases for 1,000 residents differs according to citizenship. If we consider the impact of the disease in absolute figures, at the first place we find the Romanian community, with just over 1,000 cas-

es, followed by Peruvians, Albanians, Ecuadorians, and Pakistanis in the last place. If we compare this list with the classification of resident migrant communities in Italy, we will see that they do not overlap with each other: less than one in 1,000 Romanians, for instance, who represent almost one fourth of all foreign residents in the country, are reported to have contracted COVID-19. On the other hand, Peruvians, and, to a lesser extent, Ecuadorians, stand out as the COVID-19 most-hit national groups in Italy, despite their limited presence in the country (1.8% and 1.5% respectively). This seemingly contradiction could find its explanation considering that both groups are mainly concentrated in Lombardy, the Northern Italian region where the pandemic first appeared and where 54% of the total casualties occurred.[21] However, if we scroll down the list, we will see that Egyptians, two thirds of whom are resident in Lombardy, were only marginally hit by the pandemic (1.8 in a thousand). Clearly, the fact of living in the epicentre of the pandemic cannot explain everything. In other words, the foreign communities most affected by the virus are not necessarily the most numerous in Italy, but neither, as one might suppose, are those with the highest percentage of residents in Lombardy, or at least not all of them. In fact, the ISS, in its press conference, simply grouped the different countries of origin according to their Human Development Index (HDI), without going into further detail. However, it is not easy to find a link between nationality and the impact of the disease, and the available data do not provide other evidence. It might be interesting to try a quick comparison between two national groups (Peruvians and Egyptians) equally present in Lombardy, but with a very different incidence of COVID-19 cases, in order to try and highlight other features that can explain at least in part these differences. According to the data provided by the Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali (Ministry of Labour and Social Policies) in 2018 (MLPS 2019a; 2019b), the two communities present rather different data from different points of view: while among Egyptian immigrants women represent 32.4% of the total, among Peruvians they are 58.2%. Peruvians also have a higher average age (37 years) than Egyptians (28 years). However, the element that considerably distinguishes the two groups, and which could partly explain the different impact of COVID-19, is certainly their position in the labour market: while 36% of Egyptians are employed in the trade and catering sector, 59% of Peruvian immigrants work in the public, social and personal services sector. In fact, the presence of this community especially in household services (cleaning, elderly care) is well known and might have led to a high-

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21 See Ministero della Salute (2020), "COVID-19 – Situazione in Italia", https://tinyurl.com/hjhjmhdc.

er exposure to contagion. Having said that, it is necessary to make it clear once again that these are assumptions that should be verified in the light of more precise information and reliable data. What is certain is that sectors and working conditions play a major role on exposure to contagion. While migrants (regardless of their origin) are predominantly employed in the low-end of the labour market, ethnic specialisation in different communities leads to different degrees of potential exposure to contagion.

5   In Place of Conclusions

Obviously it is not possible to draw conclusions from a story while it is taking place and that is still in full swing. However, it is possible to look ahead, and try to understand what some of the consequences of COVID-19 might be, in the knowledge that the crisis is far from being over.

We have seen, at least in part, the consequences of the pandemic on the lives of migrants in Europe and Italy, regardless of their legal status and socio-economic conditions. To put it bluntly, their life will become more difficult simply because they are foreigners.[22] But foreigners, it is well known, are by definition transnational,[23] and they retain a more or less significant part of their lives in their country of origin. And they often look back on that part of their lives to imagine their future. This is why the COVID-19 crisis directly and heavily affects the countries and communities of origin.

According to a short-term forecast recently made by the World Bank, "remittances to lower – and middle-income countries (LMICs) are projected to fall by 19.7% to 445 billion USD, representing *a loss of a crucial financial lifeline for many vulnerable households*" (World Bank Group, KNOMAD 2020; emphasis added). In 2019, remittances had reached 554 billion USD. Even following the 2008 crisis, remittances fell much less (5%), which gives us a measure of the impact of the crisis generated by the Coronavirus. Forecasts for 2021 (+5.2%) tell us that

the recovery from the crisis is likely to be prolonged and arduous. (World Bank Group, KNOMAD 2020, 8)

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[22]   Life will probably get tougher for the so-called 'non-foreign migrants' too, i.e., for all those people (currently around 1.2 million in Italy) who, despite becoming Italian citizens by naturalisation, have obviously kept their names, accent and complexion. But this issue would deserve to be considered separately.

[23]   Foreigners are in fact immigrants and emigrants at the same time, as Sayad (2004) explained.

Talking about the foreseeable future,

> the present crisis will not lower the income gap sufficiently to re-
> duce migration pressures. On the contrary, income inequality be-
> tween the low-skilled and high-skilled is likely to increase due to
> the crisis. (World Bank Group, KNOMAD 2020, 5)

This bleak outlook should be coupled to the forecast made by the
WFP (World Food Programme), according to which the world, due to
COVID-19, will soon be facing a humanitarian catastrophe, by which

> an additional 130 million people could be pushed to the brink of
> starvation by the end of 2020. (WFP 2020)

We started this chapter by saying that people on the move do so in
search for a better life.

If the above forecasts are realistic, it is to be expected that en-
tire communities will be pushed in the near future to move from
their places of origin and swell the ranks of migrants, generating a
migration similar, at least in numbers, to that originated in 2011 by
the Arab Springs. How will we react? How will we welcome them?
By raising walls? By creating new ghettos in which to lock up those
who have managed to climb over the walls? Once the vaccine will
be available (hopefully before too long) will we have the foresight to
make it globally accessible, or will we once again say "Europe first",
"Italy first", "America first"? The COVID-19, which started as a health
emergency, is definitely becoming a global social catastrophe. The
risk is that, as some authors have highlighted, of

> normalizing exceptional policies that restrict freedoms in the
> name of crisis and public safety.[24]

While leaving it to others to deal with the necessary ecological turn-
ing point to be given to the economy, it is necessary, by everyone,
a double quantum leap: in fact, it would not be sufficient, as many
hope, the return to a social state capable of levelling out the grow-
ing inequalities and ensuring the decoupling of health services from
the logic of profit. Even the most fair and far-sighted state organisa-
tion with its own citizens can stop in front of those who knock on its
doors and say that "the boat is full". In fact, it would make no sense
to provide, for example, 'food stamps' for citizens, and exclude those
holding a different passport.

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[24] Sandro Mezzadra (2017), *Migration – Talking Migration*. https://www.hkw.de/en/
app/mediathek/video/55855.

From this point of view, the recent regularisation, with all its uncertainties and distinctions, is unfortunately not a very promising example.

A purely defensive attitude is not enough: the current crisis can be an opportunity to focus on the structurally unequal character of foreigners' rights and reverse the trend. But this requires civic and political courage.

While the fate of migrants depends to a large extent on the policies of governments and the attitude of citizens, we must not make the mistake of forgetting that they are themselves an active part of society, partly responsible for the success (as well as the failure) of their own migratory project. In all the great periods of crisis (as in the last crisis of 2008) migrants have shown a strong resilience, thanks to which they have been able to absorb, at least in part, the negative impact of the crisis. It will be interesting to observe, in the coming months and years, the strategies they will put in place to adapt to the global change imposed by the pandemic.

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Asylum Seekers and Immigrants in Italy during the First Phase of the Pandemic
A Medical Perspective

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Abstract   Health conditions of asylum seekers and immigrants during the COVID-19 pandemic have worsened: the analysis in this chapter refers to the first wave of the pandemic (until August 2020). Early evidence from Anglo-Saxon countries, which showed a disproportionate impact for the foreign population and "ethnic minorities", was confirmed also by the Italian data of resident foreigners. In addition, management problems were found with respect to the infection containment in the reception facilities and phenomena of social stigmatization were highlighted. The impact was generally worst for socially disadvantaged groups, the available data support a non-biological origin but linked to the role of social determinants, highlighting a theme of equity.

Keywords   Immigrants. COVID-19. Italy. Public health. Inequalities.

Summary   1 Social Inequalities and Unequal Impact of the Virus. – 2 The Italian Uncertainties: Fake News, Ports Closure and Lack of Indications for the Management of Migrants Receptions. – 3 The National Framework: Between Protection and Instrumentalisations. – 4 Conclusions.

Edizioni Ca'Foscari

This chapter aims to provide a key to understanding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on asylum seekers, refugees and, more generally, immigrants in Italy, using materials and data available until August 2020.

Starting from surveys carried out in Anglo-Saxon countries, where the scientific community is historically inclined and attentive to a reading of data distinguished by "racial-ethnic groups",[1] the impact of the pandemic is greater in the population of foreign origin and ethnic minorities, reflecting the underlying economic and social inequalities that can be found with specific national characteristics also in Italy.

The second paragraph presents what happened in Italy, during the first months of the emergency, in terms of political and institutional uncertainties and management criticalities, also linked to delays in guaranteeing precise and shared indications on the prevention and contrast of the pandemic among asylum seekers, refugees, immigrants and other particularly vulnerable groups.

In the following paragraph, we report the national data on the immigrant population already permanently present on the national territory and on asylum seekers and recently arrived immigrants within the reception system. On the one hand, these data make it possible to discredit fake news and the related political exploitation aimed at attacking immigrant populations or populations of immigrant origin; on the other hand, they confirm the role of social inequalities in the differentiated impact of the virus, in line with what has already emerged in Anglo-Saxon countries.

1　Social Inequalities and Unequal Impact of the Virus

By the end of August 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic had caused more than 25 million confirmed cases and almost 800.000 deaths; 209 countries in the world had at least one confirmed case (to date, some islands in Oceania and other particularly isolated territories are uninfected); the continental areas with the highest number of infections were the Americas (almost 13 million cases) and Europe (more than 4 million) (WHO 2020).[2]

For migrants, refugees and ethnic minorities, who are already more exposed to inequalities, the advent of COVID-19 has worsened

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1 The use of the term 'racial-ethnic groups' refers to the categories used in the literature reviewed.

2 These figures increased, by August 2021, to a cumulative number of cases reported globally of nearly 216 million and a cumulative number of deaths just under 4.5 million (WHO 2021).

conditions both in terms of health risks and protection of rights. Every situation of serious crisis, including health crises, inexorably affects, in a more or less predictable timeframe, the most vulnerable people in society, causing further inequality and marginality. In Italy, statistics and health data, hardly disaggregate by migrant status, while in the Anglo-Saxon world this variable is also taken into account in official data. It is therefore possible, based on such data, to state that the social and material conditions that characterise different social, racial-ethnic groups lead to a differentiated impact of the virus in terms of viral spread, symptoms and the evolution of the disease. Social inequalities, which existed before and during the spread of the pandemic – such as the cohabitation of several households in the same housing unit, occupational exposure, socio-economic status, access to treatment – constitute a risk factor and are reinforced with the pandemic itself. COVID-19 clusters with pre-existing diseases and conditions (such as diabetes and hypertension), interacts with them, and is driven by broader social, economic, and political factors (Gravlee 2020), to the point where it is not a 'pandemic' but rather a 'syndemic' (Horton 2020).

The theory of syndemics allows us to focus and highlight how social and political factors (Marmot 2016) determine, reproduce or exacerbate the emergence and clustering of diseases. This trend becomes clear if we look, for example, at the mortality rate by ethnicised and racialised groups in the United States, one of the countries with the highest number of infections in the world. In July 2020, it was 69.7/100,000 for 'black Americans', 51.3/100,000 for 'Native Americans' and fell to 30.2/100,000 for 'white Americans' (APM Research Lab Staff 2020). Analysing the data by age group and in relation to the white population, the differences were even more marked: blacks > 3.8 folds; natives > 3.2 folds; native islanders > 2.6 folds; Latinos > 2.5 fold; Asians > 1.5 folds. Black Americans experienced the highest actual COVID-19 mortality rate nationally, more than double that of white and Asian Americans, who have the lowest actual rates, but the disproportionate impact is also significant for Native Americans (both American and Islanders) and Latinos. The differences were dramatically reinforced during the pandemic.
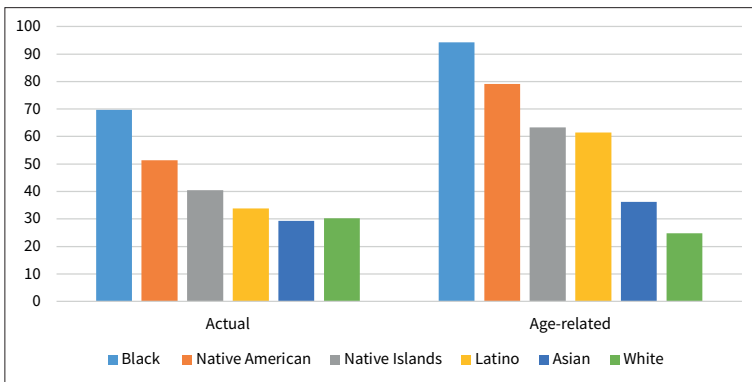
The factors causing such higher mortality vary in different communities and are linked to pre-existing elements of inequality. Some are linked to the world of labour, with greater exposure to infection due to lower protection (poor safety at work, greater difficulties in working from home or accessing other means of protection). In addition, factors such as poorer housing conditions and greater use of public transport, as well as post-infection factors related to health conditions and the outcome of the disease, lower access to testing, higher incidence of pre-existing conditions such as diabetes, hypertension and asthma, and delayed or lower quality of care due to lack of health insurance/coverage may also have contributed to higher exposure.

This evidence was confirmed by a systematic review of the international literature (Pan 2020) which compared data from more than 1,000 articles published, between December 2019 and May 2020, in medical-scientific journals and grey literature and suggested an increased exposure of the so-called 'BAME groups' (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic)[3] to the risk of infection and worse clinical outcomes from COVID-19, mainly in the US and the UK.

In the case of the UK, as reported by the UK government itself (Public Health England 2020a), by June, an excess of mortality was indicated among BAME populations compared to 'White ethnic groups',

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[3]   The literature referring to UK data, as well as data released by Public Health England (2020b), use the 'BAME' definition in reference to the Office for National Statistics classification system based on the self-definition of a presumed 'ethnic' membership by census participants.

and in terms of infection, among people of 'Bangladeshi ethnicity',[4] for example, the infection rates were almost double those of 'white' British citizens.

2 The Italian Uncertainties: Fake News, Ports Closure and Lack of Indications for the Management of Migrants Reception

Italy was the first country in the 'global North' to be affected by the epidemic and, following the Chinese example, declared a state of emergency and instituted a lockdown. Against this backdrop, news spread that immigrants would be 'immune' to the SARS-CoV-2 infection (Gonzato 2020).

The apparent absence of immigrants among those first hospitalised for COVID-19 had led to a cautious interpretation, yet to be verified, of the 'virus door' being closed or half-closed in certain ethnicised and racialised groups. In the mainstream communication, during the first phase of the pandemic, and thanks to the instrumental attitudes of social entrepreneurs and the media, this was enough to attribute a supposed immunity to anti-malarial therapies or to anti-tubercular vaccination (more widespread in the African continent). These dynamics, in their amplification, have been fed and strengthened by the myth of black immunity (Carter 2020), which spread in the United States and rebounded in Italy, where it reinforced interpretations – which can be defined, borrowing from the journalistic jargon, "fake news" – denied by the facts, even before than the scientific community did. In Italy, such anti-scientific statements were refuted in April by the data, published by the *Istituto Superiore di Sanità* (National Health Institute), indicating that the under-representation among the in-patients was due to a delay in access – most likely ascribable to the subordinate working, housing and social conditions of the immigrant populations and, often, to the internalisation of this subalternity.

Once again, the issue of immigration entered ideologically into the media discourse and political debate: on 7th April 2020, with an inter-ministerial decree, the Italian Government declared Italian ports to be 'unsafe places' because of the pandemic, effectively circumventing the mandatory constitutional and international obligations regarding the right to asylum, protection from the risk of inhuman and degrading treatment and search and rescue at sea, and condemning hundreds of people to be abandoned at sea. Many refugees from African

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4 The statistical category used by Public Health England is reported, without supporting its perspective.

countries, but also from war zones such as Syria and Afghanistan, therefore found themselves marginalised in Libya, Greece or Turkey because they were stigmatised as alleged carriers of the virus.

In the same weeks, there was a growing concern among civil society associations, due to the risks linked to considerable housing discomfort and poor access to water and sanitation, particularly in informal settlements, where many immigrants are forced to live also as a result of 'expulsion factors' triggered sometimes by Italian institutions themselves (see, for example, Legislative Decree 113/2018), in the fear that these factors could determine a marked risk of infection (Geraci et al. 2020). For months, the issue of health safety in reception facilities in Italy was not on the political and organisational agenda, as illustrated by a survey carried out by the National Asylum Table and the Immigration and Health Table (Camilli 2020; Tavolo Nazionale Asilo, Tavolo Immigrazione e Salute 2020).
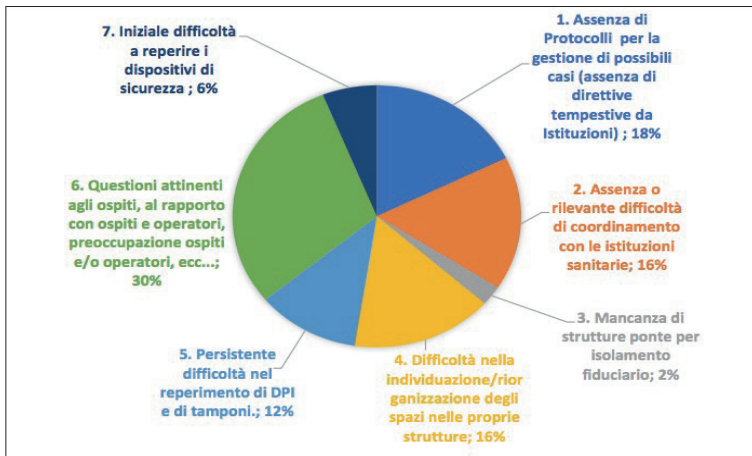
Figure 2 Main issues reported in the management of Italian reception centres, in the COVID-19 emergency (source: Tavolo Nazionale Asilo, Tavolo Immigrazione e Salute 2020[5])

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5 1. Lack of protocols for the management of possible cases (lack of timely directives by institutions) (18%); 2. Lack or considerable difficulty in the coordination with health institutions (16%); 3. Lack of bridging facilities for fiduciary isolation (2%); 4. Difficulty in identifying/organising spaces in their structures (16%); 5. Persistent difficulty in obtaining PPE and diagnostic tests (12%); 6. Issues about guests, guests-operators relationship, concerns by guests and/or operators, etc. (30%); 7. Initial difficulty in obtaining protective equipment (6%).

The survey included almost 200 reception centres throughout Italy and took a snapshot of what had happened since the start of the pandemic until the end of June, i.e., before specific institutional indications were given. In the absence of institutional guidelines concerning "Pathways, Procedures and Processes" for safe reception, in 60% of cases there was an autonomous activation of the subjects involved through the identification of a "do-it-yourself solution", aimed at the management of infected people, through the use of isolation rooms or, when possible, by transferring them to another structure, provided by the same managing body. Only 28% reported transfer to a dedicated facility provided by the local authority. Similarly, 46% of suspected cases were isolated by the organisation itself, while only 21% received an institutional response.

The report shows how, before the definition of organic and specific indications, the managing bodies worked to protect their staff and the migrants already hosted within the structures. The precautions and measures, determined by a correct willingness to prevent the spread of the virus with the available means and tools, determined, for a long period, a significant slowdown of new admissions in reception: about one third (29%) reported to have interrupted them because of the lack of safety procedures, 15% instead declared not to have interrupted new admissions for reasons other than the lack of procedures and, specifically, for express indications of the Local Authority/Prefecture.

Those who did not discontinue their reception adopted their own procedures, which were necessarily heterogeneous and diversified throughout the country: 24% asked for a negative result to the PCR or serological test; 15% activated 14 days of fiduciary isolation in a 'bridge' facility; 13% required asymptomatic persons to carry out a 14-day quarantine with active surveillance within their facility; in 4% of cases, a health screening was carried out for asymptomatic persons who had not been in contact with positive or suspected cases.
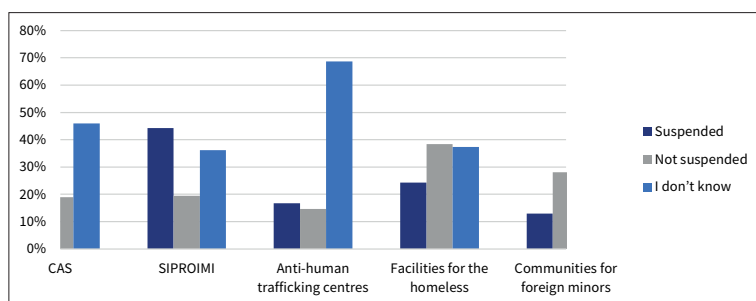

Figure 3 Admissions by type of reception centre
(source: Tavolo Nazionale Asilo, Tavolo Immigrazione e Salute 2020)

Disaggregating the data by type of centre, in the SIPROIMI (Protection System for Persons with International Protection and Unaccompanied Foreign Minors[6]), the managers declared with more certainty than the others that new insertions are suspended. The people in charge of the CAS (Extraordinary Reception Centres) also confirmed the suspension of new entries. On the other hand, facilities for the homeless cannot avoid new admissions: in 38% of cases – the highest percentage – new admissions have not been suspended.

At the end of July, in line with international indications (WHO Regional Office for Europe 2020; ECDC 2020), following the request by the associations belonging to the aforementioned tables and on behalf of the Ministry of Health, the "Interim operational indications for the management of facilities with people with high fragility and socio-health marginalisation in the framework of the COVID-19 epidemic" were published, edited by the National Institute for the Health Promotion of Migrant Populations and for the fight against Poverty-related diseases (INMP Publishing Group 2020). As for the reception, even following institutional indications, significant uncertainty has remained regarding entry procedures, particularly for the homeless – among whom are both foreigners and Italians.

The lack of indications, in terms of "Pathways, Procedures and Processes", regarding the safe reception of the newly arrived immigrant population and vulnerable Italian groups, including the homeless, is even more striking when compared with the vastness of indications, infographics, technical reports, circulars, decrees on all aspects of prevention, management and control of the SARS-CoV-2 infection that have been produced for the indigenous Italian population.

3 The National Framework: Between Protection and Instrumentalisation

At the end of April 2020, as previously mentioned, the Istituto Superiore di Sanità published the first pandemic data on the foreign population in Italy (ISS 2020; Quotidiano Sanità 2020). By 22nd April, 179,200 cases had been diagnosed, out of which, of those with known nationality (69.3%), 5.1% were attributable to individuals of foreign nationality. This is much lower than the percentage of foreigners in Italy, which is 8.7%. At that time, except for the two Chinese nationals diagnosed at the end of January, there were no cases of COVID-19 among foreigners that could be traced back to infections imported from abroad.

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[6] Now SAI (Reception and Integration System).

The distribution of foreign cases, classified according to the Human Development Index (HDI) of their country of origin, showed that most of them came from countries with a medium HDI (57.5%), represented mainly by Latin American countries and European countries outside the European Union. They were followed by foreigners from high HDI countries (25.1%, mostly from EU countries) and those from low HDI countries (17.4%, mainly from Asia and Central and Southern Africa).
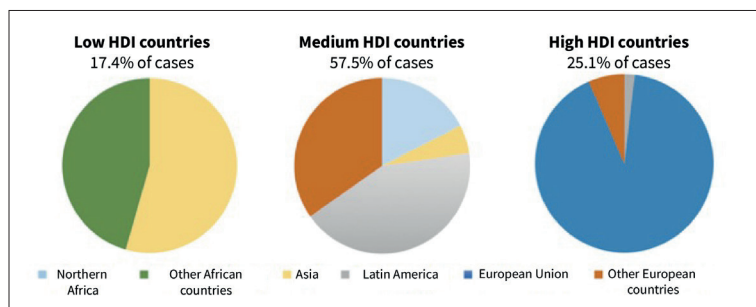
Figure 4   Origin of foreign cases diagnosed in Italy by Human Development Inde (source: ISS 2020)

In that period, a significant part in the spread of the infection in the foreign population was likely played by occupational exposure, especially in the care and domestic work professions, occupational sectors characterised by the over-representation of the immigrant population, with a large representation in Northern Italy of South American people. The number of cases per 1,000 residents is in line with the above: there is a markedly higher value in the Peruvian community (8.1 × 1,000) than in the total number of foreigners (1.2 × 1,000) (Mennona 2020). On the other hand, there is a clear absence of the Chinese population among those infected, since, alerted by the events in their country, they took effective preventive and self-isolation measures, anticipating what was later imposed by the government. Finally, asylum seekers, mainly from sub-Saharan Africa, were relatively "protected", albeit amidst the uncertainties mentioned above, in reception facilities (Geraci, Declich, Marceca 2020).

Again referring to the data published by the Istituto Superiore di Sanità, the demographic structure of the foreign casuistry was different from that of the Italian casuistry, reflecting, in part, the differences observed in the general population, resident in Italy. Foreign cases were more frequently women (56.4% vs. 50.8%) and with a much lower median age (46 years, IQR: 37-55), compared to that of Italian cases (64 years; IQR: 54-80): the most affected age group among foreigners was 30-64. The geographical distribution also dif-

fered between the two groups, showing a higher concentration of foreign cases in the Northwest (72.8% vs. 57.5%) and in the country's urban areas (52.1% vs. 31.0%). Clinically speaking, they had 1.4 times higher risk of hospitalisation and admission to intensive care than Italians. The epidemic curve of COVID-19 was similar to that of the Italians, albeit with a delay of 8-10 days and with more serious manifestations in relation to age, probably due, as mentioned above, to a delay in diagnosis due to late recourse to health services.

The pandemic in Italy, as in the rest of the world, is constantly evolving, as is its impact on immigrants, accompanied by constant attempts at instrumentalisation: the prejudice of immigrants as spreaders of the plague, invaders and profiteers strongly re-emerges (Ambrosini 2020; Della Puppa, Perocco, 2021; Marceca 2018).

Yet, data paint a different picture: In particular, for immigrants accommodated in reception facilities, significant research – on 5,038 reception facilities out of the 6,837 surveyed by the Ministry of the Interior, with a coverage of 73.7% – carried out by the National Institute for the Health Promotion of Migrant Populations and for the Fight against Poverty-related Diseases (Costanzo et al. 2020), in a period from 11 May 2020 to 12 June 2020, reveals that, out of 59,648 immigrants received, only 239 tested positive for COVID-19 (0.4%), distributed in 68 facilities, 97.1% in the North, particularly in Lombardy (27.9%) and Piedmont (22.1%).

60.7% of confirmed cases were under 30 years of age and 80% between 20 and 34 years of age. They were mainly men (90.8%). Of the positive cases, 25.9% (62 persons) required hospitalisation, including two in intensive care. The disease outcomes were similar to those in the corresponding age groups of the native population. No deaths were reported. The prevalence of positive cases is similar to that of the general population, with a geographical distribution of cases showing a North-South gradient consistent with that observed in the country.

These data confirm how proper attention to the prevention of contagion can prevent the spread of the virus even in potentially critical environments such as reception centres, but, precisely for this reason, adequate institutional interventions are needed in terms of planning and prevention and in support of the managing bodies.

Table 1   Facilities participating in the study, guests, confirmed cases, by region

Regions	% participating facilities (n = 5,038)	Guests	Confirmed cases	Confirmed cases by no. of guests (%)
Piedmont	81.4	5,860	61	1
Valle d'Aosta	93.1	94	0	0
Lombardy	86.2	8,827	61	0.7
Trentino-Alto Adige	86.0	973	40	4.1
Veneto	89.1	4,215	36	0.9
Friuli Venezia Giulia	97.5	1,967	0	0
Liguria	89.1	2,267	8	0.4
Emilia-Romagna	86.0	6,268	30	0.5
Tuscany	84.2	3,604	0	0
Umbria	86.5	693	0	0
Marche	81.5	1,542	0	0
Latium	84.9	5,994	2	0
Abruzzo	80.5	1,303	0	0
Molise	66.4	658	1	0.2
Campania	59.7	3,358	0	0
Apulia	66.5	2,837	0	0
Basilicata	73.7	1,108	0	0
Calabria	66.1	2,704	0	0
Sicily	71.1	4,415	0	0
Sardinia	51.3	961	0	0
Italy	79	59,648	239	0.4

Source: Costanzo et al. 2020 (modified)

Towards the end of the first phase of the pandemic and with the arrival of the summer, the attention, especially in the media, shifted to those entering or returning to Italy as tourists or from travelling abroad, Italians and immigrants, and to immigrants arriving by sea from the central Mediterranean route, or crossing the country's Eastern borders from the so-called 'Balkan route'.

At the end of July, following the discovery of a significant number of infections among immigrants (all asymptomatic) hosted in a reception centre in the Treviso area (129/315, or about 41% of those examined), the political debate against the immigrant component of the population gained new momentum. The situation was essentially repeated a few days later in a reception centre housed in the former Cavarzerani barracks in the province of Udine.

The health alert situation was clearly the inevitable product of the inadequate management of reception (linked in that area to the abandonment of widespread reception in small centres) which, by

producing ghettos, risked presenting the victims (i.e., immigrants crammed into centres without effective protection) as responsible for the spread of the epidemic (Giovara 2020).

The potential issues of places such as reception centres, in the absence of adequate measures, can, therefore, explode and, sometimes, they did. The close correlation between overcrowding and the risk of infection was confirmed in the above-mentioned research by the National Institute for Health Promotion of Migrant Populations and for the Fight against Poverty-related Diseases, in which the so-called "saturation index" of the facility's capacity (the number of guests against the number of beds) was assessed. It was observed that while the regional average of the saturation index, calculated among the centres where no positive case was observed, was 78.6%, the same index calculated among the centres where at least one positive case was observed was 87.7%.

However, in the public and political debate, following these events, the aforementioned rhetoric of the immigrant as a spreader of the plague has taken hold, emphasised by an ideological and instrumental use of language feeding unjustified fears, on which the President of the National Health Council, Franco Locatelli, had to comment, stating, on 20th August 2020:

> 25-40% of cases were imported by fellow citizens returning from trips or by foreigners residing in Italy. The contribution of migrants, i.e. people fleeing desperate conditions, is minimal, no more than 3-5% are positive and some become infected in reception centres (ed. note: particularly hotspots) where it is more difficult to maintain adequate sanitary measures. (De Bac 2020)

4   Conclusions

In this chapter, we have shown how the pandemic has highlighted how the lack and difficulty of having specific data on the immigrant population, both resident and recently arrived, relating to health status and socio-economic determinants, makes it difficult to support interpretations with adequate scientific evidence. Hence, the need to support the general framework of the analysis also with data from different national contexts. The centrality of the data and the issues in their collection and systematisation in relation to the immigrant population is well known and does not only concern Italy, so much so that several parties, also at an international level, have recommended the integration of variables such as "country of birth", "citizenship", "years since arrival in the country", "country of birth of the parents", in the routine data collection system and the promotion of data linkage.

Furthermore, we have highlighted how, in a broader international framework and from a global health perspective, it has been ascertained that the inequalities in the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the immigrant population are not justified from a biological point of view, but rather can be traced back to inequalities between this component of the population and the native population in the so-called determinants of health (behavioural, socio-economic, cultural, environmental factors, living and working conditions etc., that influence the state of health of an individual or a community), as well as in the access to services for the prevention, control and treatment of Sars-CoV-2 infection.

It is therefore necessary to address this aspect of the COVID-19 pandemic in a consistent reference to the Global Health approach, therefore integrated into research and action and aiming at giving full meaning and implementation to a vision of health as a state of bio-psycho-social well-being and as a fundamental human right, in which health and disease are considered as the results of not only biological but also economic, social, political, cultural and environmental processes, transcending and exceeding the perspectives, interests and possibilities of individual continents, individual nations, individual regions, individual local contexts.

> The pandemic has revealed the deeper meaning of global health, not only showing a propagation that follows the routes of human exchange, but also highlighting the link that health has with other dimensions of our lives, such as the economy, work and the environment. (Carraro 2020)

Migration is also a specific declination of the global approach to health, with attention being paid to all those proximal, intermediate and distal determinants that build social unease and illness, and to the increasingly close interconnections between human beings, the environment, development and peace. Adopting international, national and local policies, collective and individual behaviours to strengthen the human capital of each and every one, to increase social cohesion, to leave no one behind is the only way out of this crisis and a real opportunity for change in a perspective of justice and health for all (Geraci, Affronti 2020).

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Asylum Seekers Excluded from the Reception System in the COVID-19 Emergency

Expulsions, Restrictions, Administrative Extensions and Access to the 'Surfacing' Procedure

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Abstract This contribution analyses the main consequences of the emergency regulations caused by the pandemic crisis by COVID-19 on non-EU citizens and, in particular, on asylum seekers; from health risks to movement restrictions, from difficulties in accessing administrative procedures to the critical issues of the regulations on the emergence of irregular work referred to in Law Decree 34/2020, as an emergency and ineffective response to the closure of the borders, within the framework of the current Italian reception system, generally without long-term planning and with access preclusions for homeless, 'sur place' or 'dublinati' asylum seekers.

Keywords Asylum seekers. Coronavirus emergency. Emersion procedure. Regularisation. Protection void.

Summary 1 From the Right to Reception to Reception as a Reward Measure. – 2 The Condition of Asylum Seekers during the Italian Lockdown among Administrative Suspensions and Extensions, Restrictions on the Freedom of Movement and Sanctions. – 3 The Strict Regulatory Funnel of the New Emerging Regulations Provided for by the Recovery Decree: Relevant Features and Critical Aspects of the Access to Asylum Seekers' Procedures. – 3.1 The Regularisation Cases Provided for by Article 103 of Law Decree 34/2020 Converted into Law 27/2020: Regulatory Hints and General Criticalities. – 3.2 The Difficult Access of Applicants for International Protection to the 'Surfacing' Procedure.

1 From the Right to Reception to Reception as a Reward Measure

In the last decade the Italian legislator seems to have forgot that the right to reception is closely linked to the procedure for the recognition of international protection.[1] Reception is, in fact, functional to the effectiveness of the right to apply for asylum, in so far as it allows the asylum seeker to properly arrange his or her application, which, for instance, requires the gathering of full and adequate documentation on the fear of persecution or on the danger of serious harm.[2]

The functional role of reception shows why it should be intended as a genuine right to hospitality, rather than a mere 'qualified interest' to it, as the caselaw has proved to consider it If correctly intended and implemented, reception would be consistent with the function of guaranteeing the effectiveness of the application for international protection, and it would also contribute to safeguard the extensive protection that the constitutional charter provides to the right of asylum.

In particular, after the amendments introduced by Law Decree 113/2018 (converted into Law 132/2018), Art. 14 of Legislative Decree 142/2015 now submits the access to all reception measures to a decision of the Prefect, meaning that the person concerned could not only be denied the transfer from the 'first' to 'second' reception,[3] but even be excluded from the reception system as a whole. This mechanism increases the risk of being forced into sufferings that the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) has repeatedly considered to amount to a inhuman and degrading treatment against Art. 3 ECHR. If, according to Directive 2013/33/UE (the so-called 'Reception Directive'), Member State authorities are bound to provide asylum seekers with housing and to care for their basic needs. The obligation for Member States to provide asylum seekers with adequate reception

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[1] The 'subjective right' consists of a legal situation of advantage accruing to a person in respect of a good, protected in full, immediately and against all. In Italian law, in addition to the subjective right, there is also the 'legitimate interest', which consists in a position of advantage that the legal system reserves to a subject with regard to a utility or an asset of life subject to administrative power. That position is undoubtedly less strong than the subjective right, since, for the purposes of its satisfaction, the intermediation of the public administration is necessary.

[2] On the right to reception as a subjective right recognised by Art. 10 of the Italian Constitution, see Bonetti 1999.

[3] The reception system in Italy is abstractly conceived on two levels: the first reception, which includes hotspots and first reception centres providing only basic services, and the second reception, made up of smaller structures, inserted in the local communities, which assist the asylum seeker in his/her path of socio-occupational integration. With Art. 4, §§ 3-4 of Law Decree 130 of 2020, the second reception is now called Reception and Integration System (SAI), which replaces the Protection System for Persons with International Protection and Unaccompanied Foreign Minors (SIPROIMI, previously SPRAR).

conditions in kind, or through the payment of vouchers or allowances, descends directly from Article 13 of the Convention, according to which contracting Parties must ensure adequate reception conditions for political asylum seekers.[4]

Access to reception measures should occur whenever the asylum seeker does not have adequate means of subsistence. Despite this, there are frequent cases of exclusion from the reception system or withdrawal of reception measures against asylum seekers who, having found a job, even a short one, are considered capable of supporting themselves.

Although the caselaw on withdrawal of reception has proven to be rigorous (Ferrero 2019), the illegal practices resulting in the exclusion of asylum seekers from reception still appear to be rarely brought to the attention of the judges. Similarly, national legislation does not seem to offer any direct protection to asylum seekers who find themselves – and will increasingly find themselves – living in precarious reception conditions, within structures that often lack the necessary standards to guarantee the possibility of integration and interaction with the surrounding territory. At least in the most serious cases, it may be necessary to refer the matter to the European Court of Human Rights, recalling the need to provide asylum seekers, as disadvantaged persons, with enhanced special protection and highlighting how, in the face of particularly vulnerable persons, conditions of extreme poverty can constitute a inhuman and degrading treatment.

Moreover, it should be remembered that Art. 4, § 4 of Legislative Decree 142/2015, which states that access to reception measures and the granting of a residency permit for international protection applications cannot be subject to the existence of requirements other than those expressly required by law, is constantly disregarded by the Italian Public Administration. This provision must be interpreted in the light of Art. 6(6) of Directive 2013/33/EU, according to which Member States must not require unnecessary or disproportionate documents or impose other administrative requirements on applicants before granting them the rights conferred by the direc-

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4 See first of all M.S.S. v. Belgium and Greece [GC], case no. 30696/09 21 January 2011, which was followed by other rulings including: V.M. and others v. Belgium, case no. 60125/11, 7 July 2015; A.E.A. v. Greece, case no. 39034/12, 15 March 2018; Khan v. France, case no. 12267/16, 28 February 2019. Similarly, the Court of Justice of the European Union has stated that in order to ensure decent living conditions, subsistence and physical and mental health, reception must be sufficiently stable and adequate to meet the material health needs of those who are in the context of the asylum procedure and that, while Member States have discretion regarding concrete forms of reception, they must apply standards which are normally sufficient to ensure a decent living and comparable living conditions in all Member States (CJEU, judgment of 27 February 2014, Saciri, C-79/13). For a critical reading of the judgment M.S.S. v. Belgium and Greece [GC], see Syring 2011.

tive. However, this obligation is consistently disregarded by a large number of *Questure* (Police stations), which require asylum seekers to prove their residence in the territory by means of a 'declaration of hospitality' or other similar documentation, even when they declare themselves to be without means of subsistence and homeless. The illegality of this practice, which hinders access to the procedure and reception and infringes both Art. 6, § 6 of Directive 2013/33/EU and Art. 5 of Legislative Decree 142/15, has been assessed by several Courts, before which the matter has been brought before them following urgent proceedings.[5]

Access to reception measures is hard to obtain not only for immigrants who have entered Italy for the first time, but also for those who are transferred to Italy from other Member States in application of the Dublin Regulation (in Italian, so-called 'dublinati'), who frequently do not receive any information and are forced to apply autonomously to the competent *Questure* and *Prefetture* (Prefectures) in order to re-access the procedure and reception measures.

In particular, according to the circular of 14 January 2019 of the Ministry of Interior on the application of Law Decree 113/2018, if the person under the Dublin procedure had already applied for asylum in Italy, upon return, the prefecture of the airport of arrival, at the indication of the Central Dublin Unit, shall facilitate the transfer to the province where the application had been first submitted. If, on the other hand, the applicant had not formalised the application in Italy before leaving the country, reception must be arranged in one of the centres of the region where the airport of arrival is located, according to the criteria set out in the regional coordination table.

The Circular does not clarify how prefectures should facilitate the transfer of the person under the Dublin procedure: therefore, it is likely that competent authorities will simply notify an invitation to report to the *Questura* where the application was formalised.

The consequences of this reform of the Italian asylum system appear to be have major impact on the safety of applicants for international protection who are in other European countries and who, under the Dublin Regulation, could be transferred to Italy, especially vulnerable ones.

It is precisely because of this imperfect correspondence between the CEAS (*Common European Asylum System*) and the Italian system resulting from the amendments made by Law Decree 113/2018.

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5 Trieste Court order of 22 June 2018; Milan Court order of 25 July 2018; Rome Court order of 29 November 2018; Palermo Court order of 13 September 2018; Rome Court order of 26 February 2019.

2   The Condition of Asylum Seekers during the Italian Lockdown among Administrative Suspensions and Extensions, Restrictions on the Freedom of Movement and Sanctions

The above mentioned regulatory and administrative context, which already renders the condition of applicants for international protection very precarious, was further aggravated by the recent provisions adopted to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since the very first days of March, in fact, the Italian government has implemented, with a pressing overlapping of decrees of the Prime Minister, ministerial decrees and circulars, measures restricting the freedom of movement, allegedly in order to reduce the risk of contagion in favour of the protection of collective health.

In the first place, in order to buffer the effects deriving from the generalised lockdown of public offices, Art. 103, § 1 of Law Decree 18/2020, converted with amendments by Law 27/2020,[6] provides for the suspension of the preliminary, endoprocedural and conclusive terms of most of the administrative proceedings pending at the *Questure* or at the prefectural immigration offices.[7]

The purpose of the regulation is clear: by deferring the deadlines for the conclusion of proceedings considered to be non-urgent, it has intended, not to lead to an indiscriminate interruption of the activities of the public administration, but rather to justify its slowdown, also in the face of the forced continuation in home working of all administrative activities closely related to the management of the emergency, ordered by D.P.C.M. (decreto del Presidente del Consiglio dei ministri, 'decree of the President of the Council of Ministers') of 11 March 2020.

Therefore, the practices adopted by those *Questure* that refused to process urgent requests for residence permits for special cases (e.g. for medical treatment), previously included in the so-called humanitar-

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[6]   With regard to immigration, the most relevant regulatory interventions are Legislative Decree 9/2020 of 2 March 2020, classified as "administrative procedures falling within the competence of Public Security Authorities"; Art. 78, § 3-*sexies*, Art. 83 and Art. 103 of Law Decree 18/2020 of 17 March 2020, as converted into Law no. 27 of 24 April 2020, containing provisions concerning the suspension of the terms of administrative and judicial proceedings and the extension of the effectiveness of expiring administrative acts. Among the many decrees issued by the President of the Council of Ministers, the Prime Minister's Decree of 11 March 2020 on the closure of police headquarters to the public is of particular note here.

[7]   They have therefore been suspended until 15 May 2020 the terms of sixty days, referred to in Art. 5, § 9 of Legislative Decree 286/98, established for the conclusion of administrative procedures for the renewal or conversion of pending residence permits, and the ninety-day term for the issue of authorisations for family reunification by Art. 29, § 8 of Legislative Decree 286/98, to seasonal work, as well as for particular cases of entry for extra-quota work (such as, among others, for scientific research, blue card, intra-corporate transfers).

ian protection (which was repealed by Law Decree 113/2018, so-called 'Security Decree', converted into Law 132/2018), by virtue of the alleged impossibility of carrying out the photo-signalling procedure until the end of the lockdown, are not legitimate, and that according to the first paragraph of Art. 103 of Law Decree 18/2020 itself, which requires administrative bodies to guarantee "the rapid conclusion of the procedures, with priority for those to be considered urgent".

Similarly, is against the law the tendency of some immigration offices to formally guarantee the reception of the application for international protection, in compliance with the international obligations set out in Art. 6, § 2 of Directive 2013/32/EU,[8] limiting, however, the ways in which this will could be conveyed to certified e-mail only, which asylum seekers in almost all cases are deprived of.

In any case, the legislator intervened relatively promptly to at least order the extension of the validity of expired residence permits in the full force of the COVID-19 restrictions. Also the six-monthly permits for request of asylum, therefore, are now valid until 30 April 2021, as lastly provided by Law Decree 2/2021. This also affects the social rights connected to the residence permit for request of asylum, such as the extension of the validity of the enrolment in the National Health Service and, the possibility to continue to work or look for a new job.

As for the fate of judicial proceedings already pending and aimed at the recognition of international protection, on the other hand, they cannot reasonably be included among the "proceedings of a precautionary nature, having as their object the protection of the fundamental rights of the person", for which the postponement of the hearings should excluded in accordance with the third paragraph of Art. 83 of the same Law Decree 9/2020.[9] It is clear, in fact, that these pro-

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[8]   This is clearly stated in the circular of the Ministry of Interior, Central Directorate of Immigration and Border Police, no. 20359 of 9 March 2020: "It is understood that activities related to the expulsion of irregular foreigners and those related to the reception of the manifestation of willingness to apply for international protection must be ensured". For a closer examination of the illegitimacy of the expulsions during the COVID period, also in view of the objective impossibility of repatriation following the closure of the borders and the high risk of contagion within the Centres of Permanent Residence for Repatriation (CPR), please refer to the ASGI form Emergency COVID-19. The impact on the rights of foreign nationals and the necessary protection measures: a first reconnaissance of 22 March 2020, p. 6 (`https://www.asgi.it/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/EMERGENZA-COVID-19_DIRITTI-STRANIERI-22-marzo-finale.pdf`), and the statements of the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, made on 26 March 2020 and available at `https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/commissioner-calls-for-release-of-immigration-detainees-while-covid-19-crisis-continues`.

[9]   It should be noted that the Court of Appeal of Venice has adopted a contrary orientation, already subject to litigation of legitimacy, with which it decided not to suspend the proceedings pursuant to Art. 702-*quater* of the Italian Criminal Code for the recognition of international protection due to their alleged urgent nature.

ceedings are not urgent, since they are aimed at reforming a measure rejecting protection, the effects of which are automatically suspended at least for legal proceedings started before 17 August 2017.[10]

This is all the more true for the judgments referred to in Articles 35 and 35-*bis* of Legislative Decree 25/2008, which still require a personal hearing of the applicant in the first instance and which therefore cannot be turned into a paper or electronic hearing. Thus, the practices of some courts aimed at qualifying *tout court* international protection proceedings as urgent because they have as their object the protection of the fundamental rights of the person, do not appear to be justified.[11]

The legislative willingness to suspend all non-urgent activities, in order to limit travel to a minimum and to prevent the increase in contagion, finds pale but positive expression also in the new Art. 86-*bis*, § 2, introduced by Law 27/2020 of conversion of Law Decree 18/2020, which provides for the stay in the reception system of asylum seekers, holders of international or humanitarian protection and other vulnerable persons, even in the face of the lack of the necessary requirements to continue to access them.[12]

Exit from the reception system is also appropriately postponed, at least until the end of the epidemiological emergency: an extension of a few months, which, however, is unlikely to offset the negative repercussions suffered by incoming applicants, who have been hard hit by the economic crisis, let offs and the hiring freeze resulting from the interruption of production activities.

On the other hand, the opportunity has not been taken to set up reception facilities for beneficiaries who are not already included, leaving the issue of health protection of applicants for international protection outside the reception area and of the community at the mercy of fate, relying on – meritorious but – often partial solidarity measures, implemented by private social workers and a few virtuous local authorities.[13]

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10   For an examination of the effects of the amendments introduced by Legislative Decree 13/2017, read: Contini 2018.

11   See the case of the Court of Appeal of Venice, the subject of a complaint to the CSM by the CAIT, Chamber of Immigration Lawyers of the Triveneto, motivated not only by the obvious deflatory purpose of the litigation pursued by the celebration of the international protection hearings in full lockdown, but also in light of the percentage of rejections that is close to 100% of appeals, which has no equal throughout the peninsula.

12   These include MSNAs (unaccompanied foreign minors), upon reaching the age of majority, other vulnerable subjects, holders of residence permits as per Articles 19, § 2, letter d-*bis*), 18, 18-*bis*, 20-*bis*, 22, § 12-*quater*, and 42-*bis* of Legislative Decree no. 286 of 25 July 1998, at least for those included in the protection system *ex* Art. 1-*sexies*, § 1 of Legislative Decree 416/89.

13   For all of them see the public-private emergency intervention, carried out in Padua during the lockdown. https://www.difesapopolo.it/Diocesi/Coronavirus.-Casa-Arcella-mette-al-sicuro-chi-e-senza-dimora.

In any case, new provisions regarding reception have also been issued by Law Decree 34/2020, the so-called 'Recovery Decree', which has provided for the mere possibility (not the obligation) of temporarily allocating the places available in the SIPROIMI to applicants for international protection, in derogation of Art. 1-*sexies* of Legislative Decree 426/1989.[14]

It should be remembered that, following the amendments introduced by Law Decree 113/2018, converted into Law 132/2018, the aforementioned Art. 1-*sexies* has stripped the reception of its function of guaranteeing the effectiveness of the application procedure for international protection, giving it an almost 'rewarding' nature, since reception in SIPROIMI today is guaranteed only to those who have already been granted refugee *status* or subsidiary protection. For this reason, the possibility to use the places in the reception system also for homeless asylum seekers is a weak corrective, aimed at addressing some asylum seekers in smaller structures than the first reception DACs, in order to reduce the gathering of people within the large centres which, as ASGI and other associations for the protection of migrants' rights have pointed out, constitute a dangerous receptacle at high risk of contagion.[15]

Despite the clear legislative intent underlying the above mentioned rules is to avoid the precarious housing of asylum seekers during the pandemic period, the travel prohibitions, imposed by Art. 2 letter a) of Law Decree 19 of 25 March 2020 during the most acute phase of the epidemiological emergency from COVID-19, have had serious consequences both on asylum seekers included in the reception system and on those who, outside the reception circuits, do not have a permanent residence.

Those who are included in the reception system, in fact, during the lockdown, have suffered a strong limitation of their freedom of

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14   With the reform of the second reception system carried out with Art. 12 of Law Decree 113/2018, the SPRAR network is replaced by the protection system for holders of international protection and for unaccompanied foreign minors (acronym SIPROI-MI). For a closer examination of the consequences on the reception system of the security decree and on the access of asylum seekers only to first reception services, please refer to the ASGI contribution, "Il diritto all'accoglienza dei richiedenti asilo in Italia: quali sfide dopo la legge 132/2018", by Anna Brambilla (2019).

15   On the health hazards of the large concentrations of people found in first aid centres, please refer to the ASGI planning document of 22 March 2020: COVID-19 emergency. The impact on the rights of foreign citizens and the necessary protection measures: a first reconnaissance. https://www.asgi.it/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/EMERGENZA-COVID-19_DIRITTI-STRANIERI-22-marzo-finale.pdf. If we consider the current reception system, mostly characterised by large centres and with funds almost halved by the reform implemented by Law Decree 113/2018, it seems very difficult to implement the prescriptions given by the Ministry of Interior with the circular of April 1, 2020, which requires to ensure health care and information services and that "within the centres the necessary hygienic-sanitary and preventive measures are adopted, as well as to avoid forms of particular concentration of guests".

movement, whose legitimacy can certainly be doubted. In fact, many prefectural measures were adopted by the Ministry of the Interior on the basis of the Ministry of Interior's circular of April 1st, 2020, which conferred to the heads of the reception centres the power to adopt coercive measures to prevent asylum seekers from leaving the facilities, in contrast with the provisions of the ministerial decrees that allowed people to leave for proven occupational or health reasons, i.e., to do motor activities, even if they were close to their place of residence.[16] This new legislation raises once again the issue of the role of reception centres' managers and staff, who, especially with Law 40/1998 and the entry into force of Law Decree 113/2018, are increasingly renouncing their role as promoters of inclusion in order to assume mere containment and control functions (Spinelli, Accorinti 2019).[17]

In large reception facilities and, to an even greater extent, in the informal camps that host a large number of former asylum seekers who have left the reception system and have become irregular, the risk of contagion was and is very high, given the poor hygienic-sanitary conditions, the restricted spaces with a high concentration of housing, the lack of any information on the precautions to be taken and the difficulties in accessing health services in the area.[18]

In addition to being more exposed to the risk of contracting COVID-19, those who live in marginal conditions and are homeless, because they have never been admitted to reception or have been expelled through informal and illegitimate procedures, during lockdown also had to deal with the criminal and administrative sanctions issued by the government to those who violated the travel ban: therefore obliged to remain on Italian territory waiting for the outcome of a procedure, deprived of the necessary reception, forced to live on

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16 Reference is made to the circular of the Ministry of Interior, Department for Civil Liberties and Immigration of April 1, 2020, available at https://www.interno.gov.it/sites/default/files/modulistica/circolare_covid-19_prot_del_1_4_2020_ulteriori_indicazioni_protocollo_3728_1_.pdf, in which it is explicitly requested that reception managers primarily ensure strict compliance with the containment measures provided for at national level.

17 In this regard, consider the provisions of Art. 11, § 3, in the new wording introduced by Law Decree 13/2017, converted with amendments by Law 46/2017, which gives the person in charge of the reception structure the task of providing for the notification of the measure of rejection of protection, with the obligation to certify that the notification has been made, similar to those imposed on the public administration. In the same way, the provisions of the so-called 'Security Decree', which exempts the reception management bodies from guaranteeing social and work integration services and almost halves the *pro capite* funds available to reception centres, only impoverish their role, relegating them to a parking place pending the outcome of the asylum procedure. For an interesting analysis of the effects of Law Decree 113/2018 on the role of the reception system, see Spinelli, Accorinti 2019.

18 This aspect is also found in the policy document drawn up by Brambilla 2019.

expedients and even sanctioned because they did not comply with an order from the authorities impossible to execute. Art. 3, § 4 of Law Decree 6/2020 of 23 February 2020 establishes, in fact, that failure to comply with the prohibitions of containment is punished with the offence referred to in Article 650 of the Criminal Code, which punishes non-compliance with the measures issued by the Authority for reasons of safety, health and hygiene with imprisonment for up to three months and a fine of up to 206 euros. In view of the inability of a large number of homeless people to comply with these provisions, the introduction of this provision has led to the sudden and unfair initiation of a large number of criminal proceedings.

In addition, in the first half of March 2020, there was an uncontrolled proliferation of regional and municipal ordinances that closed access to parks, green areas and cycle-pedestrian routes, notoriously refuge areas for those who are temporarily homeless, which made the existence of almost all asylum seekers, relegated *ex lege* out of reception, even more difficult.

With the enactment of Law Decree 19 of 25 March 2020, following vehement critics such conducts were eventually decriminalised and turned into administrative sanctions, however salacious they may be (from 400 to up to 3,000 euros).

On the other hand, in accordance with the guidelines of some courts, the violation of the absolute ban on people who tested positive and are thus subject to stay quarantined in their homes is subsumed in an offence provided for back in 1934 by a royal decree,[19] which provides for imprisonment from 3 to 18 months and a fine from 500 to 5,000 euros.

This sanctioning framework raises numerous concerns with regard to the actual suitability of these instruments to guarantee compliance with the containment rules, sanctioned by the cases outlined. It cannot be ignored that, in relation to homeless people, and in particular asylum seekers expelled from reception centres, the number of criminal complaints registered in the first period of the pandemic prior to Law Decree 19/2020 (about 50,000 complaints already as of 20 March 2020), largely concerned irregular foreigners, with all the complications associated with the initiation of criminal proceedings (election of domicile, assignment of a trusted defender, notifications). It follows that even following the decriminalisation of the offence of mere violation of the exit ban without justified reason, many administrative proceedings will not be challenged within the legal deadlines because notified to fictitious domiciles or already abandoned by the violator of the rule.

Not to mention the numerous complaints for false declarations to public officials, originating from the declarations, which subsequent-

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19 Royal Decree no. 1265 of 27 July 1934, Consolidated text of health laws.

ly turned out to be untrue, but sometimes are merely the result of a linguistic misunderstanding or bad information, contained in the self-certifications imposed to justify the trips.

A rather bleak picture therefore emerges, where those who are the most vulnerable and exposed to the danger of the pandemic are also the first and privileged victims of the legislative and factual countermeasures adopted to contain it.

3 The Strict Regulatory Funnel of the New Emerging Regulations Provided for by the Recovery Decree: Relevant Features and Critical Aspects of the Access to Asylum Seekers' Procedures

The forms of regularisation provided for by Art. 103 of Law Decree 34/2020, not by chance included in the so-called 'Recovery Decree' among the measures to react to the epidemiological emergency, have the primary intent of encouraging the immediate employment of labour in some limited productive sectors, undoubtedly affected by the closure of borders and the failure to adopt, for 2020, the decree that yearly regulates the entry into Italy for work, almost exclusively of a seasonal nature.

Even more than in the past, therefore, this regularisation procedure is an emergency intervention that, as it cyclically happens, aims at correcting *ex post* the distortions that derive from a short-sighted management of migration policies that, more than sectoral remedial interventions, would need a radical, reasoned and profound rethinking.

Suffice it to think how, for years, the entries for unskilled workers have concerned only seasonal work, by its very nature of short duration, and few hypotheses of self-employment. The purpose of the 1998 legislator, first with Law 40/1998 and then with the Testo Unico sull'Immigrazione (Immigration Law – Legislative Decree 286/98), is to guarantee a structured planning of entries for work, so much so that Art. 3 of Legislative Decree 286/98 prescribes the three-yearly issue of a planning document on the management of migration policies. In spite of this, for several years now, the more and more meagre way to regulate entry for work has been relegated annually to the so-called 'decreto flussi', which establishes the number of 'slots' available for entry and conversions for work reasons.

Entry for work subject to the 'slot' system is subject to a cumbersome procedure which, due to bureaucratic formalities (request for authorisation from the Prefecture, call for names) and the time required for its definition (from the request for authorisation to the signing of the residence contract, on average, no less than six months elapse), does not meet the needs of the labour market, nor does it allow an organised management of migration flows caused by work requirements.

As a direct consequence of the lack of a far-sighted planning and management of migration policies, and even of any kind of mechanism allowing for legal matching of labour supply and demand abroad, there is a massive recourse to the asylum procedure to regularise at least temporarily one's position of stay for work purposes, thanks to the limited preclusion to enter the labour market, now reduced to only two months after the submission of the application for international protection.

In this context, the government decided to resort to a so-called 'sanatoria' (amnesty), which is disciplined by Art. 103 of Law Decree 34/2020 and by the interministerial decree published in the Official Gazette on 29 May 2020.

Thus, these new legal instruments set a regularisation of irregular migrants, the eighth in the history of Italian migration policies, which not by chance have made use of it in a recurrent and somehow structural way. Morevover, this new regulation has already become the subject of several ministerial circulars which only partly contribute to smoothing out the many interpretative knots which remain difficult to understand.[20] The regulatory framework, at least in the declared intentions, aims, on the one hand, at favouring the surfacing of undeclared work, counteracting the widespread phenomenon of labour exploitation and the distortions to competition on the market caused by the use of low-cost irregular labour, and, on the other hand, at stabilising the position of those who are irregularly present on the territory, or, even if regularly, are still in a precarious condition of stay.

This regularisation mechanism should therefore primarily concern applicants for international protection who, provided they have a six-monthly permit of stay renewable until the outcome of the procedure but not convertible, have lingered for years in a condition of regularity that is only temporary. The asylum seeker is only granted a permanent residence permit if his application for international protection is accepted. However, those purposes were massively missed, since the discipline on surfacing from irregular work provided for by Art. 103 of Law Decree 34/2020 is not only very difficult for asylum seekers to access, but also risks to generate distorting phenomena that may even worsen their precariousness.

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20 Even the regular frequency of the so-called amnesties, regularisations, or the resurfacing of irregular work, as the case may be, is emblematic: 1986, 1990, 1995, 1998, 2002, 2009, 2012, 2020.

3.1 The Regularisation Cases Provided for by Article 103 of Law Decree 34/2020 Converted into Law 27/2020: Regulatory Hints and General Criticalities

With no claim to be exhaustive on the regulatory details of the discipline, it is important, however, to highlight its scope of application and its fundamental features, in order to focus on the effects on the regularisation of asylum seekers.

As already mentioned, despite the declared intent of Art. 103 of Law Decree 34/2020 is to fight labour exploitation and encourage the surfacing of irregular work, the legislator has limited the applicability of the rule to a few limited productive sectors of the market. In fact, it only allows for the regularisation of workers employed by natural persons, companies or other bodies whose activity is related to agriculture, breeding, fishing, zootechnics and aquaculture, as well as in the sectors of assistance to people who are not fully self-sufficient and of domestic work.[21] There is a clear reference to sectors that require a low profile of specialisation and that largely employ foreign workers, because of the widespread 'glass ceiling' for racial reasons, the extreme difficulty in recognising qualifications obtained abroad and the low wages.[22] As is evident, the needs of other large segments of the market, such as construction, textile, engineering and tourism sectors, which are also affected by employment restrictions and the economic repercussions deriving from the epidemiological emergency, remain forgotten and unheeded and lend themselves as fertile ground for more or less widespread forms of exploitation of foreign labour.[23]

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21 The narrowing of the scope of application of Art. 103, § 1, letter a) of Law Decree 34/2020, implemented with the Interministerial Decree of 27 May, to which the regulation does not provide details on this point, will be the subject of extensive litigation. While, on the one hand, the wording of the provision is extremely broad, since it also includes "activities connected" to agriculture, breeding, zootechnics, fishing, aquaculture, in the list of sectors concerned by the regulation, on the other hand, Annex 1 of the Interministerial Decree, with an opposite excess of restrictive zeal, identifies the Ateco codes as the only "connected activities" that can be considered for the regularization procedure. Therefore, there is no doubt about the possibility of access to the sanctuary for those workers who are employed with tasks that can be perfectly attributed to the production sectors of the amnesty but who operate within companies whose prevalent Atheco code of activity goes beyond those listed in the Interministerial Decree.

22 The metaphorical expression 'glass ceiling', refers to the sociological phenomenon whereby certain categories of people are denied access to top jobs and positions of responsibility and enjoy full equality of rights, due to gender or racial discrimination.

23 Of interest is the report drawn up by the Inter-University Research Centre on Prison, Deviance, Marginalisation and Governance of Migration, in collaboration with FLAI CGIL, which analyses and monitors the progress of legal proceedings initiated since 2018 on the national territory against labour exploitation. `http://www.adir.unifi.it/laboratorio/primo-rapporto-sfruttamento-lavorativo.pdf`. The study notes that the agricultural sector is not the only one affected by heavy forms of labour exploitation,

The discipline introduced with the Recovery Decree, published in the Official Gazette on 19 May, is improperly referred to as "surfacing from irregular work", since, in addition to the regularisation of existing non-regular employment relationships, it also provides for the possibility of concluding new employment relationships, while respecting strict minimum limits on working hours and monthly pay. The first paragraph of the above mentioned article, therefore, which is very similar to the previous amnesties while adding new and stringent requirements, outlines the main road for the regularisation of the stay. This presupposes the declatration of an employer that an irregular relationship already exists or, more likely, that he is willing to hire a non-EU citizen, regular or irregular but present in the territory as of 8 March 2020, with a new contract, in order to employ him/her in the sectors concerned by the amnesty.

In the legislative design outlined by the law, therefore, the administrative procedure, which is entrusted to the Prefecture if the worker is a non-EU citizen and to the INPS (National Institute of Social Previdence) if he is an EU citizen, is activated by the employer and leads, or should lead, to the regularisation of illegal employment relations, granting of a residence permit for work.

With the submission of the application, the employer has the opportunity to shield himself from the criminal and administrative consequences of the use of irregular labour, even if the procedure for the surfacing turns out eventually unsuccessful for reasons for which he is not responsible. This causes a clear disparity with respect to the position of the worker, who, on the other hand, completely depends on the employer accomplishing the subsequent duties in order for his procedure to be successfully terminated.[24]

In order to avoid the risk of entry into Italy as a result of the application for amnesty, the rule requires foreign citizens to give proof of their presence on the territoryas far as – at least – 8 March 2020. Evidence of presence is proof of having been subjected before that date to photodactyloscopic surveys aimed at issuing a residence permit or administrative identification, or having made the declaration of presence as Law 68/2007 at the *Questura* within eight days of the entry from another Schengen Area country or with the stamp on the passport affixed at external Italian crossings. Likewise, proof of pres-

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since 12 of the 46 criminal proceedings for serious labour exploitation under Art. 603-*bis* of the Italian Criminal Code, to the attention of the study, concern the construction, textile, manufacturing, logistics sectors.

24 Reference is made, in this regard, to § 15 of Art. 103 of Law Decree 34/2020: "The Immigration Desk [...] summons the parties to stipulate the residency contract, for the compulsory notification of employment and to fill in the application for a residency permit for subordinate work. Failure to present the parties without justified reason will result in the procedure being closed".

ence is provided by dated certifications issued by public bodies, such as public, private or municipal entities that perform a public function or attribution.[25]

Alongside the hypothesis of the triggering of the procedure by the employer, there is another way, more risky and less secure, which is open to non-EU citizens who have recently lost their regularity of residence (after 31 October 2019, the norm states) and who can prove that they have already worked in those productive sectors affected by the amnesty. Those who meet the above mentioned conditions can obtain a six-monthly permit for the purpose of seeking new employment, thus benefitig from a temporary regularisation, the stabilisation of which is subject to the stipulation – within six months after the formalisation of the application – of an employment contract in one of the activities already listed.

There are, however, many flaws to this second procedure: first of all, previous work in the sectors concerned by the amnesty must be ascertained by the National Labour Inspectorate, in accordance with the combined provisions of Art. 103, §§ 2 and 16 of Law Decree 34/2020.[26] This results in the exclusion of those who, in the past, have been exploited in precisely those sectors that are largely plagued by the scourge of illegal exploitation of workers. Furthermore, the time limits set for the successful outcome of the application are very strict: the worker must have been irregular for a few months, must have already and recently worked in the sensitive sectors affected by the amnesty, and has only six months to find an employment, always in the same sectors, with the requirements of incensorship under § 8 of Art. 103.

The attempt to release the procedure of surfacing on employer's impulse through the procedure referred to in § 2 of Art. 103, will presumably lead to a very poor effectiveness thereof, as has already occurred previously, particularly in 2012, because all the stringent requirements mentioned are required.

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25   For a non-exhaustive list of admitted evidence of presence, please refer to page 10 of the circular of the Ministry of the Interior, Department for Civil Liberties and Immigration, dated 30 May 2020.

26   The list of evidence of employment provided by ministerial circular of 29 May 2020, presupposes the existence of a regular employment relationship. Only the final provision of the aforementioned list, which authorises the production of "any paper correspondence between the parties during the employment relationship, originating both from the employer and the employee, from which the identification elements of the parties necessary to confirm the work activity can be obtained (e.g.: the list of evidence of work). communications of changes in working hours, requests for holidays or leave or absence for any reason whatsoever transmitted to the employer, disciplinary disputes, application of contractual institutions, etc.)", seems to broaden the scope also to those black relationships, rarely found, where the employer has left a written record of the employment relationship.

In common with the previous legislation on emersion from irregular work, there is, however, the full safe-conduct for employers, protected from any repercussions resulting even from the negative outcome of the procedure; which makes way once again to the trade of fake employment contracts and, at best, to the establishment of fictitious employment relationships, whose related costs are fully borne by the workers, which is yet another form of exploitation or extortion.

3.2 The Difficult Access of Applicants for International Protection to the 'Surfacing' Procedure

From a brief examination of the regulatory requirements to access regularisation, it is clear that asylum seekers, except for very limited cases,[27] can only trigger the procedure disciplined by § 1 of Art. 103 of Law Decree 34/2020, namely that dependant from the employer, since they cannot submit the autonomous request for a six-monthly permit referred to in the second paragraph. In fact, as long as the application for international protection is pending, they remain excluded from this latter procedure, precisely because the regularity of their stay, however fragile and temporary, rules them out of the subjective scope of application of the second paragraph, which refers only to foreigners who have a residence permit that expired after 31 October of last year.

What about asylum seekers? Can they apply for this kind of regularisation? If it is true, in fact, that also asylum seekers can be holders of a "residence permit expired on 31 October, not renewed or converted" – especially in this historical moment, characterised by the prolonged closure to the public of the police headquarters and by widespread delays in renewing permits –, it should not be forgotten that they are basically regular in Italy until the outcome of the procedure that ascertains the need for protection, regardless of the events of the administrative attestation of regularity of stay. In spite of the silence of the law, the Ministry of the Interior intervened with a circular letter specifying that asylum seekers could also have access to this form of regularisation.[28]

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27   Reference is made only to asylum seekers who have received a rejection order after 31 October 2019 and only when the appeal against the rejection order has not resulted in the suspension of its effects (the effects of administrative measures declaring the application for international protection to be manifestly unfounded are not suspended *ex lege* by means of a judicial appeal, which is particularly the case in the case of a repeated application for asylum).

28   In this sense, moreover, the Ministry of the Interior expressed itself in circular 44360 of 19 May 2020.

The only way to access regularisation provided for by Article 103, § 2, consists, therefore, in withdrawing the application for international protection, which corresponds to an absolute subjective right strongly protected both at constitutional and international level, in exchange for a job search permit of only six months, which – in the current context of economic crisis – appear to be decisively few.

However, the increasingly restrictive guidelines of some Courts in relation to recognition of international protection and the repeal of humanitarian protection by Law Decree 113/2018, will make even the option to withdraw the application for asylum attractive.

This waiver, which, by the way, must take place within the very strict time limits set for the submission of applications, as it is a procedural condition for the assessment of the application, is far from painless, since, due to the general procedural principle according to which the defeated party must pay the costs of the judiciary process, it usually entails an order to pay the legal costs of the other party.

Therefore, in the face of the substantive non-applicability of Art. 103 § 2 to asylum seekers, the latter have no choice but to persuade those who already employ them illegally to expose the irregular employment relationship, or persuade a new employer to consent to the conclusion of an employment contract.

According to the literal wording of the law moreover, whoever accesses regularisation on the basis of an employer's request will have to work only for that employer; Article 103, § 6, leaves little room for different interpretations, since it provides, in the hypothesis of § 1, that "the foreign citizen will work exclusively for the employer who presented the request". This leads, as is evident, to a paradoxical effect, which is contrary to the very purpose of the law, since it leads to the forced interruption of previous employment relationships, often of indefinite duration and in activities that are more remunerative and professionalising than those affected by the amnesty.[29]

What fate awaits, then, the application for international protection pending the application for emersion of the employer? The non-incompatibility between the application pursuant to Art. 103, § 1 of Law Decree 34/2020 and the continuation of the application for asylum lies in the very nature of the right whose recognition is requested in the latter case. In fact, the administrative condition of regularity of stay, in this case for work reasons, cannot be confused and is perfectly compatible with the verification of the status of refugee or foreigner deserving subsidiary protection.

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[29] On this point, only with the circular of the Ministry of the Interior of the 24 July 2020 was clarified the possibility of maintaining a job that existed before the application for emersion, provided that it is part time.

If these considerations are not sufficient to avoid the administrative practice of forcible renunciation of the asylum application for the admissibility of the application for amnesty, Ministerial Circular no. 44360 of 19 June 2020, provides for the possibility to continue the procedure for the recognition of international protection even after the stipulation of the contract of stay at the Prefecture, expressly legitimises the coexistence of the two procedures.

Moreover, since the entry into force of Law Decree 34/2020, some *Questure* have adopted questionable practices, which were later curbed by law making the issuance of passports subject to the withdrawal of the asylum application, aware that the passport, detained at the time of submission of the application for international protection, is often the only identity document in the possession of most asylum seekers.[30]

What is certain, however, is that from the moment the application for emersion is submitted, the stay in the reception facilities is at risk. Despite the fact that the revocation of the measures for income reasons can only be ordered when the state of poverty referred to in Article 14 of Legislative Decree 142/2015 has effectively ceased to exist, i.e. when, on the basis of an *ex post* factual judgement, an amount higher than the annual amount of the social allowance (5,977.79 euros for 2020) is received, in recent years there has been an illegitimately restrictive prefectural practice, which requires expulsion from the reception even for those who have just started working, without having yet achieved the expected income.

More shadows than lights, therefore, characterise the newly-introduced discipline of emersion, which with its unjustifiably tight mesh risks directing the same workers towards fictitious working relationships that it would apparently like to bring out and regularise.

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[30] In this regard, see the circular issued by the Ministry of the Interior, Department for Civil Liberties and Immigration on 30 May 2020, which, on page 10, when listing the worker's identification documents, equates to a passport the EU or border pass, the travel permit for foreigners, stateless persons, refugees, the identity certificate issued by the diplomatic authority of one's own country in Italy, as well as, exceptionally and, just to make the application, the expired residence permit. With a circular issued by the same Ministry on 19 June 2020, the asylum seeker can obtain from the Police Headquarters a certified copy of his or her passport, which was withdrawn when the application for international protection was submitted.

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The Emergency Management of Migration and Agricultural Workforce during the Pandemic
The Contradictory Outcomes of the 2020 Amnesty Law

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Abstract   The chapter aims to illustrate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and, in particular, of the of amnesty law passed by the Italian government in May 2020 for migrants working in agriculture, highlighting the continuity of the latter measure with the previous policies regulating migration and agricultural labour. For decades, these policies have managed both international migrations and domestic mobility of the seasonal labour force through an emergency approach. The chapter resorts on data collected through statistics, interviews and participant observation inside informal settlements in the South of Italy. In conclusion, we argue that the health emergency accelerates the resort to administrative and bureaucratic emergency practices in the management of migrations, thus contributing to the reproduction of an emergency frame, that relegates labourers to the role of 'victims of exploitation', and at the same time regulates their possibility of movement and their employment opportunities.

Keywords   Amnesty. Emergency. Migrant farmworkers. Agriculture. Reception system. Informal settlements.

Summary   1 Introduction. – 2 The Construction of the Emergency in the Migratory Policies and the Management of the Agricultural Workforce. – 3 The Amnesty Law: Expectations and Critical Aspects. – 4 The Effects of the Amnesty Law. – 5 Conclusions.

1   Introduction

The health crisis following COVID-19 virus has seen a marked difference between people who are inserted in more protected contexts and have kept their jobs, often transferring their own activities to working from home with fewer health risks, and those, instead, who have continued to guarantee the essential services in the front line, albeit with difficulties and a fear of being infected. Apart from the doctors, the health service workers and the care-home workers, these also included farmworkers, those occupied in the food industry and logistics, live-in domestic caregivers, all of them employed in sectors that usually see a high rate of migrant workers (Pastore 2021; Baglioni, Calò, Lo Cascio 2020; Ambrosini 2020; Triandafyllidou 2020; Campa et al. 2020; Fasani, Mazza 2020).

In the agricultural sector, the explosion of the pandemic and the measures adopted to contain the infection rates made farmers all across Europe fear a lack of seasonal workforce for the summer crop harvest, highlighting the fundamental role of a mobile workforce, both at the international level and inside the national territory, which guarantees daily supplies of foodstuffs to the supermarket shelves (Palumbo, Corrado 2020). In an overtly functionalist manner, some countries like Germany, provided for the opening of *ad hoc* entry mechanisms for the seasonal farmworkers, forced to rigid health checks and to the limitation of free movement inside the country (Caprioglio, Rigo 2020). Other countries, like Spain, have implemented measures addressed to curbing the likely increase in irregular workers as a result of the difficulties caused by the pandemic, extending the residence permits, but above all temporarily reducing the income thresholds and the requisites needed to access the ordinary forms of legalisation required by the laws (the so-called *arraigo*, Palumbo, Corrado 2020).

In Italy, the government has responded to the farmworkers' demands[1] and to the claims of networks in support of migrants,[2] by issuing an amnesty law[3] which, on the one hand, declared as its purposes the fight against irregular work and illegal recruitment as well as the safeguarding of public health, and on the other hand rigidly established the sectors in which migrants can be legalised, thereby answering the employers' demand for labour force.

The aim of this chapter is to illustrate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and, in particular, of the of amnesty law passed by the Italian government in May 2020 for migrants working in agriculture,[4] highlighting the continuity of the latter measure with the previous policies regulating migration and agricultural labour. Indeed, for several years these policies have managed both international migrations and domestic mobility of the seasonal labour force through an emergency approach that, by using the instruments typical of a "humanitarian regime", relegates labourers to the role of 'victims of exploitation,' and at the same time regulates their possibility of movement and their employment opportunities (Rigo, Dines 2017). Hence, we argue that the health emergency simply accelerates the resort to ad-

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[1] The employers' associations circulated an alarm for a "workforce shortage", arguing that the measures taken by the governments to deal with the COVID-19 emergency had made impossible the arrival of thousands of Eastern European workers, essential for the seasonal harvests. On 10 March 2020, in particular, Coldiretti (one of the main associations representing Italian farmworkers) sounded an alarm in regard to the possible shortfall of 370,000 migrant workers employed in harvesting, a figure definitely overestimated. The demand for government interventions to guarantee the arrival of foreign labourers has been accompanied by the claim for greater 'flexibility' in workers' employment. All the main political parties have supported the employers' demands, while the concerns relating to agricultural workers' living and working conditions had not too much room in the debate (on this aspect, see Caruso, Lo Cascio 2020).

[2] Among the proposals for regularisation circulating before the approval of the amnesty see, in particular: Boeri, Briguglio, Di Porto (2020). *Chi e come regolarizzare nell'emergenza coronavirus*. https://www.lavoce.info/archives/65966/chi-e-come-regolarizzare-nellemergenzacoronavirus/; the proposal of ASGI, *Emergenza COVID: è indispensabile la regolarizzazione delle persone straniere*. https://www.asgi.it/primopiano/regolarizzazione-stranieri/; and the campaign *Siamo qui. Sanatoria subito*. https://www.meltingpot.org/+-Siamo-qui-Sanatoria-subito-+.html.

[3] The amnesty measure is contained in Art. 103 of Law Decree 34 dated 19 May 2020 which adopted "Urgent measures on health, support for labour and the economy, as well as social policies connected to the epidemiological emergency COVID-19".

[4] In Italy, in 2017, the agricultural companies with dependent workers were 188,000, and the workers formally hired 1,060,000, for a total of 110.7 million working days. Even without taking account of the large share of irregular workers, the agricultural sector in Italy employs up to 13% of workers, one third of whom migrants. Of these labourers, in 2016 INPS counted almost 364,000 (in 2006 they were 126,000), and the CREA (*Consiglio per la Ricerca in Agricoltura e l'Analisi dell'Economia Agraria*) estimated 405,673 of them (while they were 23,000 in 1989). The most represented nationalities were Romanian, with over 120,000 workers, followed by Indian, Moroccan, and Albanian (around 30,000 people altogether).

ministrative and bureaucratic emergency practices in the management of migrations, thus contributing to the construction of a frame that conceives mobility as a matter of public order, a contingent problem, unpredictable and hard to manage. The double-edged emergency paradigm, which combines migratory and health emergencies, obscures the structural presence of migrants in the agricultural labour market and shrouds the functionalism implicit in the Italian and European migratory policies, of which the 2020 amnesty law is just the latest expression.

The chapter in the first part briefly reviews some of the debates regarding the processes of social construction and the effects of the emergencies, to then illustrate – through the Italian case – how the emergency is produced by adopting specific policies for the management of migrations and internal mobility of the agricultural labour force (§ 2). Secondarily, the chapter reconstructs the context in which the Italian government passed the amnesty laws following the COVID-19 pandemic in May 2020 and describes its content (§ 3). In the last part, this contribution focuses on the effects of the regularisation both at the aggregate level and in the rural ghettoes that we were able to visit directly during the pandemic (§ 4). In particular, in this chapter we refer to the data collected from March to October 2020 in some contexts of agricultural work and informal settlements in Sicily (Vittoria, RG, and Campobello di Mazara, TR) and in Puglia (Borgo Mezzanone, FG). In these contexts, we collected five interviews addressed to trade unionists and members of the NGOs, and we conducted several hours of observation thanks to the participation of one of the authors in a social-legal helpdesk that conducted their reaching-out activities among the labourers resident in the informal settlement of Campobello di Mazara (Trapani, Sicily). On the basis of the empirical data, the last section of the chapter puts forward some conclusive remarks.

2 The Construction of the Emergency in the Migratory Policies and the Management of the Agricultural Workforce

In the last decades, social sciences have widely dealt with the topic of the emergencies – whether they are defined as such by means of a legal act or following a particular social and media alarm – as an interesting field of study, in which seeing at work processes of construction of a specific frame capable of suspending normality and normalising the exception (Fassin, Pandolfi 2010). In social sciences perspective, emergency has been studied both as a way of thinking and as a manner of making the world comprehensible, as well as an arena of political, economic, and symbolic conflict. Whilst not denying the presence of unexpected events that trigger moments of

crisis, therefore, different disciplinary fields have reflected deeply on the causes and on the social and political effects of the so-called 'emergencies'.

Social sciences have often empirically observed the bureaucratic practices and routines designed to govern the exceptionality. Such practices, legitimated by the need to intervene timely and urgently (Agamben 2003), on the one hand conceal the causes and the responsibilities of the phenomena (De Senarclens 1999), on the other involve a strong top-down structure and open spaces of discretionality for those who govern them, excluding these subjects from the possibilities of collective assessment of some fields that are thus delegated to the management of technicians and experts (Pandolfi 2005). The emergency practices, in turn, contribute to fuelling a sense of precarity and fear (Calhoun 2004), which leads to invoking an authoritarian and top-down management of the processes (Cuono 2013).

The management of the emergency is also a frame with an ambivalent nature: the demand for greater control is habitually accompanied by the need for safeguarding and caring for the so-called 'victims'. "Care, cure and control", in the words of Michael Agier (2005), thus represent two sides of the same coin, which combines the safety drives with an ethical-moral dimension of 'caring' for the (so defined) vulnerable subjects. Hence, the victim becomes by definition a 'body to be saved,' a passive beneficiary of the interventions, a subject without autonomy and without the capacity of self-representation (Pitzalis 2018; 2020).

In the management of migrations in Italy, an emergency approach has been adopted for a long time both in the national policies and in the local administrative practices (Colucci 2018; Scotto 2018). For several years, the regulation of migration through juridical tools typical of the emergency paradigm, such as urgent decrees and government administrative acts (Cuono, Gargiulo 2017; Gjergji 2013; 2020), as well as the periodical recourse to amnesties,[5] has contributed to constructing the image of a naïve country, unprepared to handle a phenomenon repeatedly defined as 'new' and 'uncontrollable'.

Although starting from the post-war years the movements of population have implied the adoption of forms of containment of mobility typical of the emergency approach (Colucci 2018), it is especially from the early 1990s, with arrivals from the sea, that migrations have become an 'exceptional' and 'spectacularised' event also from a legal and media standpoint (Cuttitta 2012; Ciabarri, Pinelli 2015). The phenomenon of the landings, which since then have succeeded

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[5] A distinctive trait of a migratory policy based on the emergency is the frequent recourse to amnesty laws. In Italy from 1986 to 2013 this instrument was used nine times for a total of over 2.5 million applications (Colombo 2012, Bonifazi, Strozza 2020).

one another with a certain continuity both in terms of frequency and in terms of numbers, is promptly framed as an emergency and it is in these terms that interventions are organised, by merging a securitarian and humanitarian approach (Campesi 2011; Dal Zotto 2014).

In the last decade, arrivals from the sea and the reception of the asylum-seekers have become pivotal in the public discourse and in the Italian political agenda on migrations. Two events, in particular, have characterised this transformation: on the one hand, the so-called *Emergenza Nord Africa*[6] of 2011, that inaugurated a period characterised by the increases in the number of landings of people who, once in Italy, handed in an asylum application;[7] on the other hand, the closure of the ordinary access routes and the reduction in the number of permits to a few, mostly for seasonal work, granted sporadically by the quota system – the so called, *decreti flussi* (Bontempelli 2018; Chiaromonte, D'Onghia 2020).

In 2011, the decreeing of the state of emergency before the intensification of departures from North Africa allowed the Italian government to introduce an extraordinary reception system, parallel to the ordinary one (historically undersized) managed by local authorities through the network known by its acronym SPRAR (*Sistema di Protezione per Richiedenti Asilo e Rifugiati* 'Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees') (Marchetti 2014; Dal Zotto 2014). To face the 'landing emergency,' then, alongside the existing governmental reception centres (the so-called *Centri di Accoglienza* and the *Centri per Richiedenti Asilo*) and the previously cited SPRAR projects, extraordinary centres have been opened, on the basis of a convention with the operators of the *Protezione Civile*, by public and private subjects. Besides the lack of a homogeneity in the service standards and the limited competencies of some managers (Dal Zotto 2016), these structures had in common the absence (in some cases total) of measures of inclusion also due to their peripheral position on the territory. Indeed, they were located mostly in isolated and marginal spaces, surrounded by barbed wire, so as to make it unclear to the observer whether they were built to protect the guest or, vice versa, to protect the people on the outside (Sanò 2018a).

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[6] *Emergenza Nord Africa* (North Africa Emergency) is the name of the extraordinary reception plan organised for migrants arriving from Libya and managed by the Civil Protection with Presidential Decree dated 13 April 2011.

[7] With the North Africa Emergency a phase is opened that would last at least until 2016 (with a peak in 2014 within the scope of the operation called 'Mare Nostrum') in which all the people reaching Italy from the sea were addressed towards reception system (Marchetti 2015). In 2011, the decision to proceed in this way for those who arrive from Libya (almost all of citizens from Sub-Saharan and Asian countries who have lived and worked in Libya for some time) led to an increase in the applications for protection by 208.1% as compared with the previous year.

Following the end of the North Africa Emergency, in 2013, Italian reception system continued to follow a dual track constituted, on the one hand, by SPRAR (in the meantime enlarged, but not yet sufficiently so) and, on the other hand, by the Extraordinary Reception Centres (*Centri di Accoglienza Straordinaria* – CAS), whose creation was made necessary due to the 'new emergencies' of the following years, and that still represent the centres with the highest number of beneficiaries in the last years (Bonesso et al. 2020). The management of these centres is outsourced to third sector entities by the Ministry of Interior through tendering procedures implemented at the local level (by *Prefetture*). In regard to what happened during the North Africa Emergency, the tendering procedures have guaranteed minimum standards and financial auditing (to which, in the name of urgency, the first phase of the North Africa Emergency had derogated). At the same time, the presence of contracts signed by each tender bind the quantity and the quality of the interventions aimed to asylum-seekers' inclusion to resources that are unpredictable and volatile.

As widely argued, the 'extraordinary' character of this type of reception system can lead to situations of institutional abandonment, into pathways that not only fail in the integration of the asylum-seekers and refugees, but actually risk passivising and reducing the latter to mere 'beneficiaries' limiting their agency, albeit allowing some room for informal spaces of adaptation and resistance (see, amongst others, Altin, Sanò 2017; Ciabarri, Pinelli 2015; Marchetti 2017).

Less discussed, instead, are the implications of the emergency management of the reception system on the labour market. For asylum seekers and refugees, the chances to find a proper job are limited also due to the precarity of their legal status and the presence of some limitation (such as the income or the possibility of mobility) that those living inside the reception centres are compelled to accept. For example, those who live in reception centres, often peripheral and decentralised with respect to the working opportunities, can leave their domicile for just a few days, and this greatly limits the chances for mobility both on the urban and the national territory to look for a job. Moreover, the beneficiaries must waive the right to accommodation in the reception centres if their income from employment exceeds the threshold of the social security allowance (i.e., around 5,000 euros per year); in many cases this constraint turns into an incentive to opt for informal or partially-informal labour. In addition, the problem of the uncertainty of the legal status makes it hard and less convenient for the employers to legally hire asylum-seekers, creating further leeway for resorting to informal labour. The precarity of the legal status, therefore, along with the rigidity of the regulations in migrant reception facilities, produce as an effect a workforce employable in marginal and irregular jobs, such as those needed in the agricultural sector.

In parallel with the emergency management of the reception of asylum-seekers and refugees, also the seasonal presence of migrants employed in agriculture has been for long time conceived and managed, on the national territory, as an emergency phenomenon. Indeed, as argued by Rigo and Dines (2017, 91) speaking about an "humanitarian exploitation" of labour, "the mixture between humanitarian and securitarian apparatus in the management of the migrations goes beyond the phases of migrants' arrival and transit, and pervades fields, such as those of management of the labour force, that before had been excluded". The demand for migrant labour during the harvest seasons, therefore, is cyclically accompanied by a housing 'emergency' for farmworkers who usually live inside informal settlements and abandoned farmhouses, that is in the so-called 'ghettoes' scattered around the countryside of Southern as well as Northern Italy.[8] The national and local policies that in the past few years have tried to tackle the diffusion of irregular labour and illegal recruitment practices have had as their declared objective that of improving also the living situation in the countryside.[9] This objective has materialised via interventions characterised by an emergency approach, above all implying the creation of temporary camps to accommodate farmworkers, managed by the *Protezione Civile*, the Red Cross or other entities of the third sector (Semprebon et al. 2017; Lo Cascio, Piro 2018; Brovia, Piro 2020). The price to pay for an improvement, albeit limited, in the living conditions in the countryside (i.e., access to drinking water, showers and hygienic facilities) is represented by the exercise of a greater control over the working and non-working life of the labourers hosted in camps. The latter, portrayed as 'victims' of the exploitation implemented by foremen and employers, are constructed as vulnerable subjects who need safeguards, instead than potential subjects of rights; the only exercise of *voice* envisaged by the current system concerns the possibility to denounce the 'oppressors' (indeed recognising oneself in the role of 'victims') while other forms of *exit* (such as geographical and working mobility) and of col-

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[8] Perrotta, Sacchetto 2013; Filhol 2016; Semprebon et al. 2017; Caruso 2018; Ciniero forthcoming.

[9] We are referring, in particular, to Law 199/2016 (the so-called *Legge sul caporalato*), which was followed in 2017 by a document called *Experimental protocol against illegal intermediation and exploitation in agriculture. Care – Legality – Exiting the Ghetto*, signed by several Ministries, Regions, unions and employers' associations, by which it was possible to create local steering committees to monitor and provide accommodations for migrant labourers, identifying informal settlements as a problem of hygiene and security. More recently, in February 2020, the national, regional and local institutions have underwritten the *Three-year plan to fight labour exploitation in agriculture and illegal intermediation 2020-2022*, which envisages similar prevention and control measures (https://www.lavoro.gov.it/temi-e-priorita/immigrazione/focus-on/Tavolo-caporalato/Documents/Piano-Triennale-post-CU.pdf).

lective action in the workplaces are neither facilitated nor contemplated. Moreover, limiting ourselves to identifying in the illegal recruiters (in Italian *caporali*) the worst of all evils, these policies do not cast any doubt over the relations of production, nor the organisation of the agri-food supply chain that produce the conditions for the existence of precarious labour. That is, they do not act, if not to a limited extent, on the structural causes that produce demand for underpaid and precarious labour in the agricultural sector (Corrado, De Castro, Perrotta 2016).

Starting from 2011, most of the people who have found accommodation in the institutional camps and in the informal settlements situated close to the harvesting areas came via reception system, thus moving from one camp to another and experiencing alternatively one and the other 'emergency' (Palumbo, Corrado 2020). In March 2020, the explosion of the COVID-19 pandemic had potentially devastating effects for those who found themselves at the time of the lockdown in particularly crowded centres or in informal settlements.[10]

As said previously, in answer to the health concerns, but above all in response to the demands advanced by employers' associations, the Italian government has passed an amnesty law. The introduction of this amnesty can be considered as a continuation of emergency migratory policies, considering irregularity as a situational element (and thus solvable) and not as the structural result of the closure of the legal access (hence, as the product of the policies itself). The amnesty law thus contributes to reproducing the frame of the emergency with a delicate health situation, rather than acting on the structural causes that produce irregularity and precarious conditions of life and work. As will be shown in the following paragraphs, the effects that it determines in the rural contexts, then, do not only epitomise the scarce efficacy of such measures, but allow to show how the emergency frame is repeatedly reproduced, till becoming the paradigmatic form of management of geographical and labour mobility.

3 The Amnesty Law: Expectations and Critical Aspects

We should add to the long series of amnesties concerning migration, that succeeded one another in Italy starting from 1986, the one included in the Law Decree 34 dated 19 May 2020 that adopted *Urgent Measures on the Subject of Health, Employment Support, and So-*

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10 See, for example, the reports on the health conditions in the informal settlements at the time of the pandemic, made by the NGOs MEDU (Medici per i Diritti Umani) (2020). https://mediciperidirittiumani.org/medu/wpcontent/uploads/2020/07/pandemia_rosarno_rapporto_completo.pdf; and Intersos (2021). https://www.intersos.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/La-pandemia-diseguale_INTERSOS.pdf.

cial Policies Connected to the Epidemiological Emergency COVID-19, amongst which the emergence and legalisation of irregular employment contracts that in particular saw the involvement of foreign workers present on the national territory irregularly. In the text of the decree, it is stated that the urgency of the measure is mainly linked to reasons of a health nature, as we can read in clause 1 of Article 103.[11] Given this premise, fostering work in conditions of safety and the access to the basic health services recognising the rights of those who find themselves in a state of invisibility seems to be a shared pathway for the containment of contagions and the pandemic. However, the fact that the measure refers to a restricted field and to specific situations, instead of finding a broad application, makes us think that the measure represents more a response to the demand for labour supply in some sectors of the Italian labour market than an actual attempt to contain the spread of the infection rate (Caprioglio, Rigo 2020; Chiaromonte, D'Onghia 2020).

Indeed, first of all, the economic sectors for which it was possible to request the legalisation of informal labourers were only three: agriculture, animal rearing and livestock breeding, fishing and similar activities; caregiving; domestic work. For these sectors Article 103 envisages two possible pathways: a first one, foreseeing the emergence of irregular employment relations through the underwriting of a contract with foreign citizens present on the territory before 8 March 2020, upon application by the employer and at a cost of 500 euros; and a second option to obtain a temporary work permit for an irregular migrant, following an application by the migrant him/herself (ANCI 2020).

Those who were able to benefit from the regularisation were foreign citizens with a permit expiring from 31 October 2019 who had already worked in the sectors identified by the measure, and irregular foreign citizens, who could prove they had been in Italy by 8 March 2020, who were legalised and hired in the three sectors listed above. For them, a temporary six-month permit was envisaged convertible into a permit for reasons of work. Notwithstanding the requisites to access regularisation highlight again the limited scope of the measure, the granting of a temporary permit for job-seeking (albeit exclusively reserved to those who had already worked in the past in the sectors identified) in any case represents an important novelty brought by this measure: "For the first time in the Italian legal framework for what concerns the arrival and permanence of for-

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11   The measure is issued "in order to guarantee adequate levels of safeguards for individual and collective health as a consequence of the contingent and exceptional health situation connected to the crisis stemming from the diffusion of the infections from COVID-19 and to favour the emergence of irregular employment relations".

eign citizens is introduced the possibility, albeit granted by way of simple concession and for a very short period of time, to be able to move from a condition of irregular sojourn to one of regularity to look for a job, thereby foreshadowing a norm present in other European legal frameworks" (Schiavone 2020; Campomori, Marchetti 2020).

The ISMU Foundation estimated that at the time of discussing the amnesty the number of so-called 'irregulars' present in Italy was around 690,000 people. This number included asylum-seekers whose application had not been accepted: a group that was growing in 2019 following Law 132/2018, the product of the anti-immigration policies of the Italian government, that abolished the form of humanitarian protection, granted in most of the cases of successful applications by asylum-seekers in Italy.[12] As regards the process for the recognition of protection it was completed with the passage to a situation of irregularity, the access to regularisation was possible in the case of possession of the requisites indicated (residence permit expiring on 31 October 2019, presence in Italy before the 8 March 2020, prior employment in one of the sectors specified in the measure).

Instead, it was not possible for the asylum-seekers with the procedure for recognition of protection still in progress to convert their own document into a work permit, except once again for the three above-mentioned sectors. This meant, in the case of a negative outcome of the procedure for the asylum application, the passage – incontrovertible – to irregularity of around 120,000 people in 2020.[13]

The critical aspects of the amnesty measure were numerous, first of all that of remaining confined to some sectors of the labour market "in which foreign labour seems more useful, or even unavoidable, being hard to substitute" (Campomori, Marchetti 2020, 320). A further critical element is represented by the fairly high costs, which it is reasonable to presume have mostly been borne by migrants. Lastly, the difficulty of access for asylum-seekers is a further example of the limits of this regularisation, limits undoubtedly due to the need to identify a compromise between the political forces in government at the time the Decree was issued, but also emblematic of an emergency policy that produces *ad hoc* measures based solely on the urgency.

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[12] According to the data of the Ministry of the Interior, the rejections went from 59-60% of the period between 2015 and 2017, to 67% in 2018, to 81% in 2018 and 76% in 2020.

[13] This is an estimate of GREI 250 (*Gruppo Emergenze e Inclusione*) on the grounds of the rejections and the likely negative outcomes of the applications of asylum-seekers still pending in late 2019 (Bonesso et al. 2020).

4 The Effects of the Amnesty Law

The dual emergency paradigm, produced by the combined migratory and health emergency, during the early months of the pandemic translated into an apparent contrast between the identification of migrant workers as essential and at the same time, the invisibilisation of the processes ongoing in the countryside. If for thousands of workers this has meant remaining 'stuck' in informal settlements where the physical distancing and the safety measures imposed for the containment of the infections actually was a denied right, for others this translated into an increase in the pace and the risks of illness at work with no guarantees and safeguards.

In this section we refer to the effects of the amnesty on the conditions of the workers employed in agriculture who live in the informal settlements because this group in particular was functional, in the past few years, to the transfer of the emergency approach already tested in the reception system also to the management of the seasonal workforce in agriculture. The progressive adoption of an emergency approach, which holds together control and care, underpinning the normative interventions addressed to migrant workers has been possible by using the informal settlements to construct a pietistic rhetoric on which to base the need for interventions aimed at 'saving lives from exploitation'.

For this reason, in analysing what has happened following the amnesty, it is useful to take into consideration the alarmist overtones used by the employers' associations regarding the risk of shortages of agricultural labour needed to make the Italian agro-industrial system working, the expression of the same vision of the Agriculture Minister, Teresa Bellanova. In this sense what is interesting is the emotion with which the Minister presented the intervention to make sure that the "invisible shall be invisible no longer",[14] and match it with the quantitative and qualitative outcomes of the amnesty that show a failed possibility, by the 'invisibles' to whom reference is made, to concretely use this instrument.

In a context in which the number of irregular workers is estimated to be around 164,000 units,[15] the forecast by the government to receive around 75,000 applications for emergence in agriculture clashed with a reality in which the applications presented were only 29,555 for the agriculture sector as compared to 176,848 applications collected for domestic work (despite an extension of the deadline for applications from 15 July to 5 August 2020). The latter data is

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[14]   Press conference presenting the Recovery Law Decree, 13 May 2020.

[15]   Ministry of Employment and Social Policies, 2020, *Piano triennale di contrasto allo sfruttamento lavorativo in agricoltura e al caporalato*.

at the same time to be associated to a further two elements that suggest looking critically at the high number of applications for emergence in the domestic sector: the first one concerns the fact that in the last few years, the domestic employment relationship has been seen as the simplest path for emergence and thus for regularisation; the second has to do with the structure of the amnesty itself which, by reinforcing the position of the employer in the working relationship, has actually created a further space of commodification of the possibility for contractualisation.

In general, the overall figure of regularisation applications is ambivalent because if on the one hand it indicates a failure of the measure in respect to the objectives declared by the government, on the other hand it had the effect of opening spaces of action for those who managed to access it and at the same time of frustration for those who attempted to do it without ultimately managing to.

In view of the fact that of the 364,000 migrant workers in agriculture surveyed by INPS (Italian Social Security) in 2017 (CREA 2019) the most represented nationalities are Romanian, with over 120,000 workers of both sexes, and then Indian, Moroccan and Albanian, around 30,000 units, a further significant factor is that relating to the countries of origin of those who applied for emergence. The top ten nationalities represent over 80% of the 29,555 applications for regularisation in agriculture; and yet among these the only sub-Saharan component is constituted by the Senegalese nationality (1,265 applications). What stands out instead is the record of Albanian (5,176) and Moroccan (4,556), with respect to which rarely, in the past few years, a condition of diffuse irregularity has been reported, in particular among the agricultural workers. These data thus allow the difficulty of access to the amnesty emerge on the part of the informal settlements' residents – mostly sub-Saharan – to whom the intervention was addressed via the media. At the same time, it reflects the stratification of the agricultural labour force that is also confirmed by the empirical data collected thanks to the ethnographic incursions to the informal settlements in Sicily and Puglia between May and October 2020.

In particular, it was possible to conduct interviews and participant observation with the *Casa del Mutuo Soccorso Fuori Mercato* at the *ex Calcestruzzi* in Campobello di Mazara, the latter being the place where a deeper ethnographic research has been conducted since 2014 by one of the authors of this chapter. This was the main place of field observations that was then compared with some interviews carried out in other areas of intensive agriculture particularly in the South-East of Sicily (between Vittoria and Cassibile) and in Puglia (around Foggia in Borgo Mezzanone and Contrada Antonacci). The second part of the data collection is focused on some interviews with privileged witnessed; particularly useful was the encoun-

ter with Francesco Caruso, a researcher active for several months in Puglia at the USB (grassroots union) helpdesk of Contrada Antonacci with whom one of the authors held discussions.[16]

Such settlements are to be found in areas characterised by different productive systems that have given rise to different processes of stratification based in all cases on the employment of migrant labour with a variety of working and living conditions.

In particular, it is interesting to look at the province of Ragusa where the diffusion of the greenhouse production techniques has made it possible to go beyond seasonality, allowing for the stabilisation of a big share of male and female migrant workers, above all Romanian, Tunisian and Albanian, who habitually live in the town or inside the companies (Sanò 2018b). With 2,005 applications for regularisation for dependent work, this province is second only to Caserta for number of applications handed in. To deepen the reasons for this peculiarity we report the words of a trade unionist interviewed in Vittoria, during a ethnographic incursion in July 2020 hinging on the need for a discussion on the effects of the ongoing amnesty, who states:

> Here the procedures of regularisation have mostly been started by stable migrants who find it easier to find an employer or an established intermediary who can find [in his turn an employer] available to start up the amnesty procedure. Obviously to have the chance to have an employer to activate the procedure costs money! This possibility and its costs are not accessible to the asylum-seekers or to the sub-Saharan migrants in general. (Trade unionist in Vittoria (RG), Sicily, July 2020)[17]

So according to the trade unionist, Article 103 has paved the way to the possibility of regularisation in particular for the migrants residing stably and with higher social capital. It also seems to be an instrument that has further reinforced the position of the employers and the intermediaries, paving the way, as usual, to a further segment of informal market for the sale of labour contracts.

The situation appears to be different in a context like that of Foggia (Puglia) during a visit in July 2020 to the settlements of Borgo Mezzanone and Contrada Antonacci. These two settlements, hosting farmworkers almost all coming from sub-Saharan Africa (Caru-

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16 These discussions led to the writing of the article "Invisible Yet Indispensable: Emergence Among Farm Labourers in Southern Italy", in Cigna 2021.

17 The interview took place at the headquarters of the union in July 2020 during a fieldwork aimed at drawing on elements of evaluation on regularisation and work transformations after the first phase of pandemic.

so, Lo Cascio 2020), are among the best known for number of people present and the structured organisation of the spaces. They are the most important among the many disseminated in the territory and are permanent even though the workers are mainly employed on a seasonal basis and informally in the tomato harvest. This is a component of the agricultural labour force that occupies positions characterised by low wages, temporary work above all during the seasonal harvests, extreme precariousness, heavy tasks and continuous turnover (Caruso, Lo Cascio 2020). According to a unionist active inside the largest informal settlement of the area, out of hundreds of potentially interested workers, only a few dozen actually managed to have the requisites to reactivate the amnesty application, often adopting the first procedure included in Article 103, that is the access to the regularisation for migrant workers with permit of stay expiring after 31 October 2019, with at least one working day in the sectors indicated by the measure, without the need to resort to an employer:

> A residual possibility of emergence remains, which has to be valorised. It is not by chance that [among the applications handed in] there are Senegalese workers who have a more stable situation, others [workers] would have been interested [in taking part] but have not had the chance because in most of the cases, in particular the asylum-seekers of the last few years have ended up being tangled up in the ghettoes, they have a residence permit that expired before 31 October, often as a direct result of the Security Decrees. (Operator of the grassroots union in Foggia, Puglia, October 2020)[18]

Even in this extract from an interview it is underlined how the Senegalese component, the only one to have been able to present a total of 1,265 applications for regularisation, was able to activate a certain type of relational and social capital, as can be deduced from the data collected in the past few years that show how in the hierarchical scale among workers of the informal settlements they are those who often fill the positions as intermediaries or reference points of the worker communities in the settlements. They have been present on the territory for longer and, notwithstanding this social capital, they are still relegated to conditions of informality. The difficulties of maintaining regular work, which also regard workers with higher social capital, also emerges from an interview with a Senegalese worker from the area of Touba, known by one of the authors from the

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18 One of the authors met the operator in July 2020 during an ethnographic incursion and then she had the opportunity to talk over the phone in the following months and in particular this excerpt is taken from a telephone interview.

start of his ethnographic camp in 2014, who lived for five years in the informal settlement of Campobello di Mazara (Trapani, Sicily) and for two years in a house in the same village. In view of the sheer number of jobs piled up, Moussa has managed to work almost constantly beyond the olive harvest season. In July 2020 he turned to a union help desk of the *Casa del Mutuo Soccorso Fuori Mercato*[19] to have information as to the chance of have access to the furlough scheme provided to labourers by the Government measures of March 2020:

> I called my employer to tell him to send something that says I had worked for more than 100 days even though you just need 50. I discovered that he had registered [for INPS, that is to say, officially] just 15, but I am sure I had worked many more days. (Farmworker, Campobello di Mazara, Sicily, July 2020)[20]

What emerges from the conversations with the migrant workers residing inside the ghettoes is that the stratification of the legal status has implications not only on the living conditions, but also on the actual possibilities of emerging from irregularity. During the legal aid desk of the Casa del Mutuo Soccorso Fuori Mercato in the ghetto of Campobello di Mazara it has been possible to detect the interest shown by the most fragile workers in looking at the possibility of emergence. That interest has allowed the operators of the help desk to reach out to the asylum-seekers, in particular of Gambian nationality, usually less inclined as compared with the Senegalese migrants resident in the ghetto to relate with 'the whites'.

> For the first time we managed to enter the area opposite the informal settlement. The part of the ghetto which we had access to previously was limited to the one run by the Senegalese who have the monopoly of the relations with the outside and with the resources that come from lawyers, institutions and in any case the monopoly of contacts with the 'whites'. We manage to access 'the Gambian part'[21] because there is an urgent demand for contacts

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19   The help-desk was born within a long-lasting project consisting of two local and one national realities (Partinico Solidale, Contadinazioni and Fuori Mercato autogestione in movimento), which in April 2020 focused their activities with the launch of the campaign 'Let's take water to the ghetto' which, on the one hand, provides for a collection of funds to supply water to support the life in the settlement and on the other hand provided legal and union support to satisfy individual and collective needs, one of which is access to the amnesty.

20   This excerpt is taken from a conversation with a worker who has been present in Campobello di Mazara for many years and with whom the relationship of trust and exchange with the group with which I enter the ghetto is very solid.

21   This settlement was born in March 2018 and it is mainly organised by the Senegalese who manage the central square that offers from September to December, the

with the lawyers: they want information about the amnesty. This part of the ghetto is visibly poorer and organised with found materials besides being dirtier than the Senegalese one. Right from the start we meet Faraji, who organises a line of people in an area with a sofa and a table. They all need to speak with a lawyer or just talk. We are able to talk with nine people and make appointments for the coming Friday: they all have an expired work permit, were physically stuck from start of the pandemic, no one could access the amnesty or thinking of having an employer to a 'favour' of concerning the start of the procedure of emergence. Faraji is definitely a reference point in this part of the ghetto, seeing that he has a few years' experience of living in Italy. He prefers to speak about his personal situation only at the end of the day. This turns out to be rather critical. Indeed, Faraji has a criminal record and a sentence, the ghetto is his refuge, like that of many others who are not there because they recognise themselves as labourers. They have simply been expelled from society and have fallen into a vicious circle: it costs less to live in the ghetto and at the same time they lost every contact with all the rest. (Fieldnotes, Campobello di Mazara (TR), Sicily, 3 July 2020)[22]

The latter note supplies us with important elements with which to understand how the ambiguity, pertaining to the emergency paradigm, represents the rationale underlying the amnesty. It has reached some migrant workers and has opened in their imagination a space of possibility that in this case is translated into the choice of the workers to come to terms with the legal aid activists. However, it turns out to be an instrument that has further reinforced the process of stratification and hierarchisation among the workers themselves. As also emerged from the data on the countries of origin of those who applied for the amnesty, the possibility to access the measure or not has involved the emergence of new stratifications.

As a whole, the data relating to the number of applications handed in, besides being indicative of the fact that the measure of amnesty has not had an effective diffusion among those living inside the informal settlements, coming mainly from sub-Saharan Africa, show above all the ambivalent character of the intervention itself. The latter, on the one hand, borrows some constitutive elements from the

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month of the olive harvest, activities of catering, prayer and sale of utensils or clothes. In the same months around this central zone there are 'peripheral' quarters mostly divided by nationality and visibly organised with fewer resources.

22 This ethnographic note is taken from the field diaries in Campobello di Mazara where the observation has been ongoing since the time of the doctoral thesis started in 2013. The intensity of this moment is the attention that is placed on this is the result of an overall analysis of years of research.

paradigm of asylum management, on the other, it uses the spread of COVID-19 as a scenario with a view to consolidating an emergency management approach of farm workers, subordinate to the functioning of the labour market.

This approach has been partly questioned by some workers who have underlined the functionalist limit of the amnesty measure. The latter have summarised their position with the slogan "People, not disposable arms" launched during a strike held on 21 May 2020 in the cities of Rosarno (Calabria) and Foggia (Puglia), which saw the participation of hundreds of migrant workers. Such a protest was supported by a broad front of associations that came together to carry forth a communications campaign titled "We are here, amnesty now" with the aim of casting light on the interdependence between health salute, migration and work, and the need for an effective regularisation without conditions of thousands of invisible workers of both sexes.

5 Conclusions

As the chapter has showed, the amnesty passed by the Italian government during the COVID-19 pandemic situates itself in continuity with the emergency policies for the management of migrations and agricultural labour adopted in the past few decades. Indeed, the regularisation appears like a contingent measure, with limited scope and a temporary nature, which does not envisage a substantial modification in the legal conditions (in particular, the possibility to legally access Italy for work reasons and the restrictions in the reception and asylum policies) which produce situations of irregularity among migrants. Moreover, being addressed to particular sectors and including several strict requisites, it has excluded from access numerous potential beneficiaries, amongst whom many residents in the informal settlements and asylum-seekers.

This type of measure, hardly effective in order to solve the irregularities in a generalised and long-lasting was, has however fostered the reproduction of an emergency frame, whose elements have been highlighted throughout this chapter.

The emergency paradigm has, first of all, allowed to represent some groups of migrants (the irregulars, and in particular among them, those living inside ghettoes and informal settlements) as particularly vulnerable and as subjects to be protected (in this case with respect to the threat of the diffusion of COVID-19 and with respect to labour exploitation). The definition of migrants not as workers bearing rights, but as 'victims' of exploitation also facing informal living, which exposes them to several health risks, further legitimates the reproduction of an "humanitarian exploitation" regime (Dines, Rigo 2017): migrant labour force employed in agriculture can continue to

be managed with tools pertaining to the humanitarian paradigm, that is living in camps and reception centres where control and care represent two sides of the same coin.

Furthermore, the reproduction of an emergency frame on the one hand may have given greater visibility in regard to the precarious living and working conditions of migrant workforce in the agricultural sector, while on the other hand it has given less emphasis to the structural and historically crucial causes of such conditions. In the problem-solution approach typical of the emergencies, constantly focused on the present, measures such as that of amnesty law have given public opinion the impression that the problems of irregularity and informal labour had been solved, whereas actually they were only postponed or transferred to an administrative level, characterised by a quite large amount of discretionality.

Lastly, the adoption of an emergency paradigm has meant a simplification of the complexities. Not only the individual trajectories, the aspirations and the desires of migrants have been overlooked, but also the forms of segmentation of the labour force have been obscured. What emerges from observing the data relating to the applications for amnesty, as well as taking part in the daily life of the ghettoes, is that the agricultural workforce is highly fragmented and stratified on the basis of nationality and legal status. If the Eastern European workers have been among those who have had the easiest access to the amnesty it is because the latter find themselves in more stable working positions with easier access to networks and resources on the territory. Instead, those who live inside informal settlements, usually coming from sub-Saharan Africa, in the last few years in a growing number asylum-seekers and refugees, represent the more marginal fringes among farmworkers, those who experience the most precarious living and working conditions, tied to the seasonality of the production and the harvest. The amnesty law in 2020, which falls within the track of emergency policy to manage migrations and agricultural workforce, without taking into account the complexity of biographies and the variety of migratory and working situations, has actually constituted a measure that has been accessed in a selective way, and that, in turn, has had the effect of filtering and hierarchising the labour force present on the territory.

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Ghettos, Work and Health
Immigration Policies and New Coronavirus in the Gioia Tauro Plain

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Abstract   In Italy, the new Coronavirus pandemic has dramatically highlighted the contradictions evident in the relations between the agri-food sector and the political-economic treatment of a work force whose productive contribution is nowadays perceived as highly necessary. In a short time, in fact, slowdowns encountered by the agricultural sector during pandemic endangered the subsistence's conditions of thousands of rural workers. In this contribution, I'll try to examine, in the background of the current medical emergency, the relation between reception policies, differential inclusion of migrant work force in the labour market and the production of urban and political marginality in Southern Italy, more specifically in the Gioia Tauro Plain.

Keywords   Ghettos. Tent city. Pandemic. Immigration policies. Gioia Tauro Plain.

Summary   1 Introduction. – 2 Situating, Researching, Acting. – 3 Humanitarian Exploitation. – 4 Health Emergency. – 5 Mobilisation. – 6 Conclusions.

1   Introduction

In this contribution, I will discuss the emergence of the new coronavirus experienced by migrants who live in the informal camps and centre in the Gioia Tauro Plain.

The ethnographic description and the consideration entrusted in the following pages intend to examine precisely whether and how the pandemic situation has influenced the political treatment faced

by the foreign population of the Plain. In other words, the governance of migration and migrants. At the same time, it is proposed to turn our sights to the counter-politics of groups and organisations, which during the months of the lockdown, took action to make political claims and of a social and economic nature, starting from the improvement in the living conditions of migrants (especially labourers) using the prevention of contagion from COVID-19.

The theoretical framework that forms the background of the contribution draws on the definition of *humanitarian reason* as a preeminent moral economy in contemporary politics and which directs actions, investigates the care of suffering, rather than to the political meaning of the subjects.[1] Revealing itself as a governmental device used to guide and regulate conduct, at the same time enlists care and control functions, alternating a compassionate ethos and disciplinary if not security orientations (Agier 2005).

This political and moral orientation is not divorced from the functioning of the accumulative machine of global capital, which establishes – even in the social and economic spaces of capitalist countries – heterogeneous productive and legal regimes through the differential and hierarchical incorporation of subjects and territories (Lo Cascio, Piro 2018). The segmentation of the labour market is one of the most obvious consequences of this dynamic that, articulated with a differential assessment of cultural, economic and social diversity, generates a process called racialisation (Piro 2020; Mellino 2012; Curcio, Mellino 2012).

Compassion, control and racialisation: although these concepts, and the provisions, representations and practices that underlie it can be considered different and contrasting, I believe that they co-exist in territories such as the Gioia Tauro Plain, which are crossed by a very heterogeneous range of agencies. From a methodological point of view, it means conceiving the research setting as an arena in which forces institutions and actors that refer to both local and transnational processes confront each other. The humanitarian moral economy that presides over the confinement of the foreign population, making itself evident in sites such as camps and tent cities, alternates emphasis on the suffering and care of migrants (provisions which are not exempt from more conflicting activists and organisations) to others in which control devices are prominent. Finally, this stratified moral economy takes shape within a socio-economic configuration of the labour market that associates specific tasks and salaries according to the ethno-national origins of workers. The care of the basic needs for the physical survival of migrants is not incompatible, I believe, with a differential evaluation of political and economic rights that are not recognised as significant. The *refugeeisa-*

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[1] Fassin 2011; 2006; 2005; Fassin, Pandolfi 2010; Agier 2010; 2005.

tion of the workforce (Dines, Rigo 2015), which I will refer to in the second paragraph, fits into this context.

This contribution provides for an initial framing of the Plain of Gioia Tauro and, in particular, San Ferdinando in a wider economic-productive context. Later, I will focus on the visible confinement to which the migrant population is subjected and then move on to an ethnographic description of the first months of the health emergency due to the pandemic. The last part is dedicated to the political action with which groups and actors (both Italian and migrants) have resorted to. The emergency of the pandemic situation has led to claims for better living conditions and political significance for the foreign population of the area, in the expectation, largely misplaced, generated by the amnesty promoted during the lockdown by Teresa Bellanova, the Italian minister for agricultural policies (Caruso, Lo Cascio 2020).

2 Situating, Researching, Acting.

Lastly, a clarification is needed on the scientific and ethnographic positioning that is a prelude to this paper. For two years I have been participating in the activities of the 'Soumaila Sacko'[2] legal desk, jointly created by the USB union and the Nuvola Rossa association. The legal desk mainly supports the foreign population of the Plain from a legal, bureaucratic and documentary point of view. However, as time as gone on, the help desk has also taken on a more political function, becoming a platform for claims which does not hesitate to give life to moments of political mobilisation as well as close discussions with the institutional actors of the territory.

The research I expose in these pages is the result of a political commitment that nourishes, being in turn shaped by it, an extremely precious anchor in the field for collecting data and information. Therefore, it's a kind of engaged anthropology which, if made explicit in the conditions in which it is carried out, does not detract from the scientificity of the facts described, if the reflective season within anthropology has allowed to crack the myth of neutrality or objectivity of work in the field (Pavanello 2009; Geertz 1988; Bourdieu 2003) and considering the transition to observant participation (Tedlock 1991). Active and voluntary participation in the activities of the help desk represented an important resource for scientific research; but in turn, thinking

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2 Soumaila Sacko was a labourer and trade unionist of the Unione Sindacale di Base shot and killed in the Vibonese area, not far from the old San Ferdinando ghetto, in 2018. When he was shot in the head, he was recovering with two of his companions some pieces of sheet with which to make the shacks of the settlement less precarious.

scientifically about the political processes in which I was involved, allowed me to critically reflect on the social transformation action in which, together with other subjects and organisations, I was engaged. The relationship between observer and observed produces unavoidable effects in the subjectivities of the participants in the research setting as well as in the results of the latter, making vain (as well as misleading) the observer's claim to be an impartial spectator of reality and practices in which he expects to be immersed (Bourdieu 2003).

The pandemic health emergency can be defined as a "total social fact", not only because of its global extension and because of the consequences it is producing in the most varied areas of social life. The pandemic is a total social fact because it is susceptible to multiple codification, producing meaning in various contexts and implying in its understanding the total set of relationships that make up the society in question (Clifford 2010).

This is why it can aspire to represent the prism from which to start an overall vision of the relationship between reception policies, the differential inclusion of migrant labour in the labour market and the production of urban and political marginalisation in the Plain district and beyond.

The mobility limitations that everyone has experienced during the pandemic has made it impossible to acquire first-hand data and ethnographic documentation, except for some personal visits to the institutional tent city of the municipality of San Ferdinando and the Contrada Russo ghetto, located in the neighbouring countryside of the municipality of Taurianova, which I will explain in the following pages.

Although I have been conducting political and ethnographic activity in those sites for years (focusing in particular on the bureaucratic production of marginalisation and social suffering), the reflections presented in this chapter will mainly feed on the experience of the members of non-profit humanitarian organisations and local trade union activists on whose testimonies I will draw to describe how the health emergency constituted the litmus test of the contradictions that characterise the Italian agri-food chain and its political management in relation to the needs of the global articulation of capital. In addition to acting to prevent and limit the economic and health discomforts caused by the epidemic, the associations and organisations active on the Plain have coordinated themselves with pressure on local and national institutions by exploiting and reorienting the same emergency rhetoric with which political decision-makers usually deal with the presence of labourers and foreign subjects in order to produce concrete results for long-term problems.[3]

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[3] I distinguish between 'labourers' and 'migrants' in order not to homogenise a composite and heterogeneous presence of foreign subjects who in recent years, as will be

In short, these organisations have grasped the potential in the COVID-19 emergency to alter policies and generate a social transformation that has so far struggled to manifest itself. It is interesting to note that this platform, whose rhetorical-claiming core is located in the health emergency and the unhealthy living conditions of migrants in the fields and ghettos of the Plain, repoliticises biopolitics by developing a critical etiological perspective and contrasting the discriminatory effects that power relations produce on suffering bodies and beings (Comaroff 2006).

In this sense, while moving from within the biopower, the counter-politics that originated during the pandemic and focused, at least initially, on the prevention of contagion and on the 'care' of the lives of labourers and other foreign subjects, overturns its meaning and restores value to lives that abandonment had made bare (Comaroff 2006).

First, however, it is necessary to describe the context under consideration by placing ourselves as close as possible to the experience of the migrants who live in the Plain of Gioia Tauro.

3 Humanitarian Exploitation

Located along the coast that connects the Tyrrhenian Sea with the Plain of Gioia Tauro, San Ferdinando is at the heart of an agricultural economy focused on monoculture and seasonal citrus harvesting, mostly entrusted to foreign labour.[4]

Care must be taken when considering San Ferdinando, Rosarno, Taurianova and the other small municipalities of the Plain that are marginal centres of the productive economy (as poles with no links to the routes of global development). In fact, on the Plain the workforce comes from Eastern Europe and West Africa, the orange juice comes from Brazil to the port of Gioia Tauro, the contributions to crops come from Brussels and finally the oranges are exported to Russia, Germany, Poland, United Arab Emirates and the United States (MEDU 2018).

It is the exploitation chain through the decisive role played by large organised distribution: migrant labour, juice multinationals, large merchants and supermarkets are all players in the game (MEDU 2018).

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specified below, have reached the Plain of Gioia Tauro not only as workers in the agri-food sector but as expelled legally and politically by the institutional system of reception. In this sense, the Italian legislative production appears substantially uniform (Dal Lago 2004), although the Law Decree 113 of 2018 represents an undoubted and nefarious leap in quality.

4 MEDU 2020; Perrotta 2020; Manisera 2019; Iocco, Siegmann 2017; Garrapa 2016.

The entire Plain district represents a network of 'global' cities as indicated by Saskia Sassen (2001). I.e., part of economic-financial networks extended on a planetary scale in which different proportions of shares of global capital, transnational professionals, marginalised pockets of resident or trans-migrant population are concentrated (Corrado, De Castro, Perrotta 2016; Gertel, Sippel 2014).

In recent years, the fields and *ghettos* of the Plain have seen their nature change, following the recent Italian legislation. The 2020 MEDU (Doctors for Human Rights) report certifies that the vast majority (90%) of residents in the former San Ferdinando slum are legally resident.

The changes that have affected the Plain in recent years have also affected the socio-economic composition of the area. An originally seasonal workforce has gradually been joined by a now permanent population, mostly made up of asylum seekers and beneficiaries of forms of protection coming mainly from sub-Saharan Africa.[5]

This statistical survey is fully part of that *refugeeisation* of migrant labour in the agro-industry sector pictured by various studies (Perrotta, Sacchetto 2012; Castronovo 2015; Dines, Rigo 2015), a process linked in turn to the hegemonic affirmation of humanitarian reason in the representations of common sense and in the governance of migratory flows. The humanitarian reason corresponds to the affirmation of a naturally 'apolitical' moral economy that bases the recognition of the Other on the primacy of suffering and the violation of human rights rather than on political and social injustice (Fassin 2006) that crosses migratory itineraries from the country of origin to the one of arrival, passing through those of transit. The ethos of compassion at the basis of this moral economy then finds expression in governmental and national institutional practices (Dines 2018) as well as in international migration management, not without relation to the differential inclusion of migrants in the labour market (Mellino 2012). In this framework, moral sentiments, clearly translated into the suffering of the body or the violation of 'universal' human rights, are the reward criterion for the attribution of forms of protection that sanction access to and permanence on European territory. On the level of migrant work in agriculture, this political-moral device implies that the recognition of the agricultural workforce takes place within the same moral and legal categories of humanitarian reason: workers are increasingly asylum seekers when they are not refugees or holders of various forms of protection – especially those of former humanitarian and its derivatives: special protec-

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[5] Of the 213 people whose legal status MEDU has investigated, two thirds are asylum seekers or holders of international protection or other forms of protection. Only 7% have a residence permit for work reasons.

tion and protection for special cases. This trend is linked to the failure (or renunciation) of European migration policies when creating migration corridors for skilled labour (the flow of workers from third countries are increasingly limited and with tighter controls) and is accompanied by an emergency management of the social contexts crossed by the migrant workforce (the same applied to natural disasters or 'exceptional' situations experienced by populations or social groups) rather than by the implementation of labour or economic policies specifically addressed to the workforce of the countryside. More briefly, drawing on the aforementioned work by Nick Dines and Enrica Rigo (2015, 3), the *refugeeisation* includes

> the preeminence given to human rights violations over labor relations in the representations of migrant workers' conditions; the growing phenomenon of asylum seekers and international protection holders employed as a low-skilled labor force; and the use of measures originally deployed for displaced persons in order to confront "emergency" situations that occur during peaks in arrivals of seasonal workers, often managed by the Civil Protection Department.

Humanitarian reason, therefore, can paradoxically reproduce the conditions of vulnerability and marginality experienced by the 'damned of the earth' in the protean juridically, politically, economically differentiated spaces of contemporary global capital (Mellino 2012). Despite a superficial reference to the conditions of suffers, it is not a prelude to the recognition of a 'political subject' and nothing changes in the framework of the relations of power and economics. On the contrary, the systematic and total aphonia of the large agro-industry conglomerates, almost never reached the technical tables convened by prefectures and other agencies.[6] Indeed, as we will see with regard to the San Ferdinando tent city, it participates in the processes of securing neo-liberal societies.[7]

Finally, I believe that humanitarian reason applied to the contexts of migrant labour reiterates the liberal idea of migration as an autonomous individual choice of subjects eager to fit into the mesh of the free market, without any reference to the constraints and determinants objective – historical, economic, social, political – that give shape to diasporas and transnational itineraries (Taliani, Vacchiano

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6 However, this does not at all mean that workers/migrants cannot apply resistance practices even within the same disciplinary mechanisms, negotiating social statutes and legal conditions useful for the continuation of the migration path (Perrotta 2015).

7 I define 'neoliberal societies' – as a cast of English neoliberalist – those societies in which neoliberalism constitutes the dominant rational technique of government in the articulation of sovereign rules and regimes of citizenship (Ong 2006).

2006). Furthermore, it feeds the alteration and culturalisation of labour and labour relations, given that the differential inclusion of migrants in the labour market feeds on the use of every difference (cultural, ethno-national) as a function of capitalist enhancement (Mellino 2012; Düvell 2004).

Returning to the Plain of Gioia Tauro and the profiles of rural workers. In the last year and a half the picture seems to have partially changed. The concentration of invisible people living in conditions of administrative irregularity and adhering to non-contractual work relationships has significantly increased, waiting for legal-legislative openings, often then moving to the North. Therefore, it is no longer just or above all labourers entitled to protection, but a larger population of 'denied' and irregular workers produced by Italian migration policies. However, this does not radically decentralise the discourse initiated in the previous pages regarding the refugee or migrant labour. Despite the absence of protection, the vast majority of foreign workers encountered during the ethnographic work benefited from some forms of protection later losing it for various reasons, such as possession, albeit in negligible quantities, of drugs; failed to obtain it at the end of the long asylum application process; has not renewed the document (due to the stringent rules that link residence to the permit, for example [Ronchetti 2012]) or has not appealed a rejection or denial. In short, it is always part of the humanitarian reason that governs the entry of foreigners into host societies and the labour market. In this context, the contrast between *ghetto* and city stands out even more than in the past – between spaces of care, cure and control (Agier 2005), in which humanitarianism and security show their most perverse ties, and spaces of citizenship – within a border method (Mezzadra, Neilson 2013) first applied to the world of work (in the distinction between professional tasks and unfair wages) and now elected to govern the society partially independent of income.

Despite the recent evacuation of the ghetto of San Ferdinando – come to light after the famous 'facts' of Rosarno in 2010 and one of the largest *ghettos* in Italy – which has had the effect of multiplying informal settlements, the management of the local foreign population in the Gioia Tauro Plain continues to feed on the logic of the concertation camp from the point of view of housing and differential from the point of view of legal, economic and political treatment.

An example is the case of the State tent city of San Ferdinando, which is added to the informal settlements that became known after the events of Rosarno in 2010 (Contrada Russo, Taurianova; Testa dell'Acqua, in Rosarno, to name the major ones), access to which is self-managed. The tent city, regulated by the local administration and the Ministry of Interior, was initially conceived to select entrances according to the legal position of the migrants, thus reproducing the social and cultural taxonomies of exclusion politically.

Despite the expectations of the municipal administration of San Ferdinando, the pressure on the tent city, due to the expansion of the lines of illegal immigrants that I mentioned in the previous pages, has made this space a military camp. Police patrols and carabinieri surround the camp to prevent anyone from climbing over the fence and entering without having the right to. Nevertheless, someone who emerges from the dense surrounding scrub to find refuge there at least at night always comes out.

To prevent it from becoming too full, the town's administration has decided that those who leave the tent city for a few days, for work or other reasons, should be revoked from the camp. It is therefore evident that the camp does not only constitute a physical boundary of territorial delimitation but the invisible boundary that establishes the distinction between desirable and unwanted.[8]

4 Health Emergency

The health emergency caused by the new Coronavirus has amplified and exacerbated existing premises and established social relationships. Let us see what happened as soon as the health emergency touched Southern Italy and the settlements mentioned in the previous pages. Organisations that have long been conducting medical assistance work on those sites (such as MEDU) and trade union protection or various others (USB, Nuvola Rossa, Mediterranean Hope) immediately saw serious dangers to public health. In a period in which gathering seems to have a horrific powers and a source of disaster for the community, the fields and *ghettos* of the Plain are places of overcrowding without remedy. The marginalisation of foreign population following the so-called 'security' decrees launched by the Lega-Movimento 5 Stelle government in 2019, produced unmanageable pressure in the institutional tent city, to which more and more people have had access from side passages and in a completely informal way. The social panic generated by the pandemic has also increased the demand for control but paralysed the interactions between law enforcement, workers of the cooperative that took over the management of the camp and guests of the latter. Thus, many people continue to sleep in the tents, not even being able to track the people entering and leaving the tent city. In addition, the stop to intra- and extra-regional mobility due to the measures taken in March 2020

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8 From a purely residential point of view, the presence of slums and tent cities in Calabria, and in the province of Reggio Calabria in particular, contrasts with the huge amount of new or unused housing stock. In the province of Reggio, the ISTAT estimate certifies the proportion of empty housing as second only to the province of Milan (Ziparo 2017).

to stem the epidemic has meant that dozens and dozens of migrants have remained stranded in Calabria. These mainly young adults have come to the Plain from other regions to stay there for the time necessary to renew their documents at the competent police headquarters.

The hygienic-sanitary issue is a useful looking glass for the purpose of evaluating the aporia of institutional rhetoric. In *Purity and Danger*, Mary Douglas ([1966] 2014) wrote that the beliefs in contamination exercise a precise function in ratifying positions and social relations, since they express a general point of view on the social order. The reports during the lockdown, which actually emerged after its conclusion, refer to migrants hosted in reception projects who died of unknown causes, not rescued by health personnel for fear that they were sick with COVID-19, and whose corpses remained for days to lie on the bed in a room shared with other people until the providential intervention of a priest, an activist, or sympathetic citizen.[9] Moreover, the body, animated by vitality or removed from the vigour of death, always bears upon itself the signs of the unequal social order that assigns a differential evaluation to human beings (Fassin 2019).

While the Italian Government issued communication at all hours regarding personal care and hygiene, setting up a significant biopolitical legal and moral system, on the Plain, especially in the informal ghettos such as Contrada Russo in Taurianova, the water was also cut off, with the motivation that the relative connection was abusive. Human waste is therefore emitted outdoors; waste piled up and burned without anyone intervening; humans and animals (chickens, dogs, cats and mice) live in conditions of risky proximity. This also happens, albeit to a lesser extent, at the institutional camp, whose overcrowding generated electrical overloads, collapsing sewers, no available water, insufficient chemical toilets (presently in the ratio of one per hundred people) long before the pandemic explosion. The pandemic therefore reveals the contradictions of the institutional rhetoric on health matters. Alternatively, if we want, it dramatically grasps its differential nature in terms of class and 'race'. Just as the lockdown is not the same for those who have a large sunny and well-ventilated home and those who live in a damp and smelly basement, in the same way the attribution of the qualification of 'essentiality' to goods whose possession is considered obvious, indeed, an indication of little attention to higher values and stakes, reflects inequalities and structural violence. Such as when some institutional exponents of the local authorities of the Plain reproached the migrants who are guests of the tent city for expressing requests regarding food and drinking water, elementary needs, crude, subhuman, im-

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9 A tragic example is represented by the story of 20-year-old Ali Saibu, a Ghanaian resident in the province of Agrigento, reported by *L'Espresso* of 5 July 2020.

plicitly asserting their inability to abstract from 'traditional' meaning references and therefore to modernise. Without starting a reflection on the theorisation of the cultures of poverty (Lewis 1959), it may be sufficient, after all, to recall that the culturally and socially mediated nature of needs (Sahlins 2004) emerges in all its crudeness in the areas of experialism. A concept coined by David Foster Wallace, this neologism was recently taken up by Francesco Faeta (2017) who defines it as a tendency – on the part of the State – to cede sovereignty over territorial areas considered more problematic, delegating to other States or subsidiary bodies their management. De facto, the State expels them from the national and imperial border, leaving them in their marginality. The policies of experialism delegate to other groups or elites the management of territories such as the Plain (including patronage and crime networks, which have specific local functions in the articulation of capital).

Thus, disinfectant gel and soap have been procured, in recent months, by the associations present on the Plain, which have installed bins containing instructions for the use of the cleaning material. The strategy of the associations is to play attack: take advantage of the emergency to get out of the emergency. They denounce the unhealthy conditions of camps and ghettos to relaunch the issue of widespread housing on the Plain. But in this way there is a risk of giving side to those xenophobic interpretations that elect the Other and the sites in which he lives as a privileged source of contagion and danger. Some local media, in fact, did not hesitate to denounce the overcrowding of the tent city, from a more scandalous perspective than concern for the living conditions of the camp guests. Feeding the fear of spaces and people who already bear a considerable stigma in normal times can represent a boomerang.

In fact, the moral economy of suspicion that usually permeates the relationships between old and new inhabitants of the Plain as well as the relationship between State institutions and migrants is charged with new meanings and new ways of social stigmatisation. This is the case of those foreign workers without a contract or with a contract but with an expired residence permit who are blocked by the police while on their way to the workplace and forced to return 'home'.

Furthermore, in a phase in which health facilities are collapsing throughout Italy (especially at the beginning of the pandemic), drawing attention to segregation spaces can represent an extremely minority voice, destined to be unheard. Yet the centre-right government of the Region picked up the cry for help. In particular, the vice-president of the Region, Spirlì, a member of the Lega, the Italian xenophobic party, said he was available for a dialogue aimed at overcoming the ghettos. Pity that this dialogue will leap in a short time, after the attempt by the local Caritas to set up a canteen service in the tent city saw the violent opposition by a small group of the guests of the

structure, to the point that Spirlì discarded the mediator's clothes for thundering in the press that his commitment will henceforth be directed primarily at the Italian population.

The dialogue between the Prefecture and the officials of the Ministry of Interior was proved to be more fruitful. The meetings, requests, appeals and phone calls between associations and institutional representatives constituted a small piece of the proposal for the regularisation of migrants which, however, resulted in a measure well below initial expectations and limited to a few categories of foreign workers.

To worsen the general picture of the situation, the partial slowdown of the agri-food supply chain between March and April 2020 resulted in a pulverisation of the already poor wages of the labourers. But even those who were not employed in the agri-food sector have suffered from the contraction of incomes and the desertification of all employment opportunities.

The possibility of dying from the new coronavirus has therefore been added to the possibility of dying of hunger. Even in institutional sites such as the tent city, the inhabitants began to complain about the shortage of basic food (rice, tomatoes, meat). The associations active on the Plain have thus provided food aid together with masks, gloves and hand disinfectant gel, also creating a popular solidarity fund inspired by the values of mutualism and active solidarity. The popular fund was the subject of donations from all over Italy, reaching thousands of euros in a few weeks.

5　Mobilisation

In this climate, news of an imminent regularisation undertaken by the government to support the agri-food supply chain, at risk during the pandemic paralysis, raised the expectations among those who have become 'irregular' in recent years.

Abubakar Soumahoro, a union leader of the USB during the lockdown,[10] visited the camps and *ghettos* of Southern Italy when the restrictive measures had not yet loosened their grip. He gathered evidence of social suffering, cries of anguish and a desire to overturn social injustice. During the second half of April, Soumahoro visited the container camp of Taurianova (Contrada Russo) and the tent city of San Ferdinando. He brought with him huge quantities of necessities that he had collected thanks to a national campaign that was widespread on social media. The food delivery was preceded by meet-

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10　Soumahoro left the USB at the end of July to cultivate a still shapeless political project as I write.

ings during which Aboubakar specified to the labourers that his visit was not just a distribution of food, but aimed at the political-trade union organisation of migrant labour. It must be said that Aboubakar enjoyed high popularity among labourers, who followed the videos he shot in the fields of Italy and knew the catchphrases he relaunched.

In Taurianova, where the majority of migrants came from Mali or West Africa, he first met dozens of labourers in an assembly that lasted about one hour. This took place mainly in Bambara and in French, and on the occasion he invited the workers to collaborate with local union militants and encouraged some young residents of the settlements to engage in union activity. Then he wandered around the field, met people, took pictures and promised that contacts would be close from then on. In addition, he started the paperwork with which the labourers, with the sufficient number of working days registered by their employer, would be able to access the State subsidies issued for the COVID-19 emergency. This obviously left out a significant number of workers whose contributions were lower than the amount of work actually paid.

At the beginning of the pandemic, a theory circulated in the camps that the new coronavirus affected only whites. Later things changed not just because the spread of the virus had also started to affect sub-Saharan Africa. Now, what is frightening is another consequence of the infection, which is the loss of hope it causes in the countryside, as a side consequence of the loss of work and of hunger.

In national public opinion, the insistent voice of an amnesty involved politicians, journalists and intellectuals. Behind the humanitarian tones of many interventions, however, lies the decisive instrumental reason for the fruit and vegetables left uncultivated in the fields, with the related economic damage to agro-business. This was a pretext, which prompted the government to insert in the 'Relaunch Italy' decree a regularisation provision for foreign citizens. Only those workers working in the sectors of agriculture, breeding and animal husbandry, fishing and aquaculture, personal assistance and domestic work (porterage, construction, catering) with a work contract in 2019 and a residence permit not expired before 31 October, 2019 will be able to access. A quick calculation of the migrant profile of the Plain allows activists to estimate that less than 5% of foreigners could access regularisation. In addition, the duration of the residence permits achieved thanks to the amnesty was only six months, an element that would seem to confirm that the measure aimed almost exclusively at repairing the holes and production delays that the agri-food sector suffered during the pandemic emergency.

These are, moreover, predictable and consubstantial risks to the order of the discourse that political-union activists and militants have themselves assumed during this political phase: resorting to the emergency register to re-signify it in terms of more equitable re-

distribution of social justice. Many activists and organisations close to migrants have in fact relaunched the issue of rotten vegetables in the fields, inviting institutions to act appropriately while protecting workers and the production chain. It is clear that the former have been subjected to treatment in accordance with the ordinary structure of political and working power relations dominant in the Country. The disappointment among the migrants was burning, after they understood the sanatoria's aftermaths. Many had a permit that expired even shortly before 31 October 2019 and asked activists without illusions if they could return to the amnesty.

USB (Unione Sindacale di Base) called for a strike by agricultural workers on 21 May 2020: it was one of the first political mobilisations of the COVID-19 era, during which the participation of local producers (crushed by large-scale distribution) and consumers was sought. A few days before the strike, some activists went to the camps to agree with the migrants what to do. They learned that dozens if not hundreds of these had left for Puglia, trying to repeat the customary geography of production even during the pandemic. In the following days, assemblies were convened inside the camps directly by the labourers, without the input of the union leaders. The migrants were determined, not just because of the disappointment about the amnesty but also because the marginalisation that the decrees wanted by the former Minister of Interior Matteo Salvini constituted apical measures, since they determined the return to the status of asylum seeker. In fact, this has resulted in a spiral of appeals, hearings in courts and territorial commissions, uncertain requests for residence permits for many people suitably integrated under the socio-economic and linguistic profile.

A demonstration was organised in front of the Prefecture of Reggio Calabria, where a dozen migrants (not all labourers) converged on the square in front of the institutional building depositing crates of fruit and vegetables, to denounce how the institutions were concerned more about goods than about people. Among other things, protesters took care not to create a crowd, given the anti-contagion provisions and risk disciplinary sanctions. In technical terms, we cannot say it was a strike, because on a national scale the demonstrators were mainly migrants in an irregular juridical-legal condition and therefore without formal employment relationships. It was more than anything, a mobilisation called to shed light on women and men discarded by all political and economic citizenship, which re-emerged under the spotlight during the COVID-19 pandemic. On May 21, on the national strike day, hundreds of migrants cross their arms. In the Foggia area, a large procession led by Abubakar Soumahoro went through *ghettos* and farmhouses. In the Plain of Gioia Tauro, participation in the strike was very low, but that morning, characterised by intense bad weather, many labourers took photos

in which they were portrayed in the act of holding banners, union flags and signs on which it was written that their rights should be extended to the invisible, without further hesitation. Some of them converged in Reggio Calabria, in which foreign citizens not employed in agriculture and residing for years in the province of Reggio participated. Some of them, equipped with masks and observing the requirements of social distancing, took the floor in a square manned by a strong presence of law enforcement and delivered speeches in which, although the autobiographical element predominated, political criticism was not lacking. In one of the most popular speeches, Abdurrahmane, a 28-year-old employed in catering and now in serious economic conditions, asked himself:

> What will we tell our children one day when we tell them about our life here in Italy? We have worked and we work for you, on your premises, in your fields; we collect your fruit; we want rights not only for immigrants, we want equal rights for us and for Italians!

Thanks to the mobilisation gained in different areas of Italian political and civil society, the government changed the initial regularisation plan, extending its links also to the foreign worker – in addition to establishing a formal employment in the economic sectors mentioned above (whose limited range therefore remains) – able to show any document (health, relating to urban transport, etc.) as proof of its presence in Italy before the pandemic.[11]

6 Conclusions

Within a reflection on the cultural construction of representations and the political status of migrant subjectivity, Ascari and Sanò (2019) warn about the risks and aporia inherent in investing the migrant subject with that political consciousness, necessarily leading to political rebellion, deriving from living an existence in which the contradictions of the political-economic system manifest themselves at their highest level. Migrant labourers are arms that serve the economy of states; they constitute an 'industrial' reserve army that can easily be blackmailed and exploited because their workforce is extorted through highly unfair state legal-political affiliation grids. Their subaltern integration (Ceschi 2014) into the system occurs at a double level, economic and political. Creatures necessary and at

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11 Despite some limited corrective measures, the system of the measure – binding the possession of a residence permit, sanction of regular presence in the territory, to a work contract – remains almost unchanged.

the same time dangerously ambiguous – since with their altered surplus they crack the fragile taxonomic scaffolding that states feed on to shape national affiliations, as Sayad (2002) taught us –migrants would be entitled by virtue of this political-social placement, subversively polysemic, the task of redeeming humanity.

To embody the emergency: this task seems to fall to the majority of citizens of non-Italian origins residing in this Country. The pandemic reproduces this leitmotiv. Who suffers more than others the hygienic-behavioural prescriptions, the socio-economic repercussions, the political inequalities and access to health if not migrants? This is undeniable if on the other hand every pandemic is at the same time a total social fact, that is, subject in the Maussian sense to multiple codifications; or even better, perhaps, a 'hybrid' object (Palumbo 2020) that cannot occur solely in the medicalisation of a pathological condition. Thus, the new Coronavirus fuelled a process of social transformation full of an unprecedented political dynamism. Associations, trade unions and migrants have seized the opportunity of the situation to put the media and institutional spotlight on spaces and people who generally hold social invisibility, linking health policies and labour policies against the background of the wider debate on Italian migration policies.

However, the success of this operation is still far away. In mid-July, during yet another technical table convened by the Prefecture of Reggio Calabria, local officials and administrators evoked, without giving more details, the possibility of overcoming the tent city, to be implemented not through a muscular evacuation but with a less conspicuous removal of guests who are currently elsewhere in the productive geography acted by the migrant workforce (mainly in Puglia or Sicily, as every summer).

"Can anyone who left expect to find their place once they return?" the Prefect official who presides over the meeting commented caustically. Take advantage of the partial summer emptying of the tent city to sanction its shrinkage, the transformation into a limited space that is easier to manage: this was the goal. Two weeks later, the municipality of San Ferdinando circulated an information leaflet in the tent city in which it warned migrants that the space was about to be closed: "Guests are invited to identify a new and different housing solution", the final gloss. The notice is part of a polemical strategy adopted by the mayor of the small town of the Plain, who was disappointed by the lack of commitment that institutions and political class, including his Democratic Party, which led the region for five years. The response from trade unions and associations was immediate: "Will those who fail to find an alternative housing solution independently live on the street? Moreover, even if some of the inhabitants of the tent city will be hosted in first or second reception centres, is it legitimate to treat them as migrants who have just landed in Ita-

ly?". The response of the municipal administration of San Ferdinando was not long in coming: "We are for the overcoming of the tent city", almost wanting to reverse political roles and visions, suggesting that the institutions really want to go beyond the concentration camps, unlike these of the social partners. Contradictions and overlaps of the humanitarian.

In October 2020, during the Coronavirus second wave, which has been impacting hardly Calabria, COVID-19 spread in the informal settlements as well as in the San Ferdinando tent city. Due to the high incidence of infections, those sites have been declared 'red zones'. This decision provoked discontent and tensions among migrants, prevented from getting to work and without subsidies by the State. Many of the migrants tested for COVID-19 didn't receive a certificate which in case of negativity may allow them to work. Furthermore, the impossibility for health institutions to provide COVID-19 tests for all the dwellers of tent city and ghettos made it impossible for them to require health insurance certifications, so to compensate for the lack of payday during quarantine. The opacity of the emergency management caused frustration in the tent city, where several clashes between migrants and police occurred.

Against the backdrop of despair and anger, during the winter several road accidents occurred, due to the absolute lack of street lighting around the ghettos. Many migrants were hit by cars whilst riding their bikes. In December 2020, the day after the death of Gassama Gora, a young Senegalese man run over by a car while coming back from work, hundreds of migrants rose up in a spontaneous protest, recording a very high abstention rate from work. Not even union activists, rushed to the place informed by the migrants themselves, could imagine the massive participation. The strike, initially against the will of Police officers, given the ban on non-static demonstration, consisted of a march from San Ferdinando to Gioia Tauro, where migrants paralysed traffic until they obtained the promise of the involvement of the Minister of Labour and regional institutions. Everyone, including solidarity and civil society associations, was surprised by such a strong manifestation of an unexpected political subjectivity which demanded urgent recognition.

The experience of recent months, oriented towards the search for mutualism, solidarity and popular welfare practices towards the social groups most affected by the economic-health crisis has helped to rewrite the political grammar of the organisations active on the Plain. Activists are reflecting on the possibility of creating Popular Purchase Groups – on the model of the already existing GAS – Solidarity Purchase Groups (Iocco, Lo Cascio, Perrotta 2019; Mostaccio 2016) – that put at the centre of their action the dramatic theme of the absence of income for those who have found themselves or will find themselves unemployed due to the post-pandemic economic contrac-

tion, providing them with self-organised support outside the institutional framework, hoping that this process can generate a surplus of class aggregation and critical consumption. This partial transformation, to which the history of some of the subjectivities present in the movement contributes, could shift organisations' centre of gravity away from political denunciation and from being a movement of opinion able to move freely between different issues and categories (the housing question; civil rights); awareness raising activities in schools against racism; support for a certain vision of a multicultural society; legal-bureaucratic practices; etc. to the almost exclusive adoption of mutualism and trade union self-organisation 'from below'. Furthermore, these GAPs will aim to weave political-relational plots regardless of the nationality of the people who use them. In other words, if neoliberal 'extractivist' capitalism operates by racialisation – that is, redefining the relationship between capital and labour on a racial basis (Nugent 2006), the militant response could resort to a de-categorisation of the subaltern political subjectivity.

However, the outcome of this process is still uncertain.

It is certain that a new season of political struggle is looming on the horizon, in the Plain of Gioia Tauro as elsewhere.

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