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**The city vis-à-vis forced migration:  
Milan between refuge and refuse at the time of the migration crisis**

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## ABSTRACT

Forced migration has globally become a major challenge of our contemporary world. For example, in Europe, where over four million people applied for asylum between 2013 and 2017, forced migration has emerged as a battlefield between nation-states, to the point of jeopardizing the future of the European Union. In North America, furthermore, the USA's president Donald Trump harshly targeted millions of *illegalized* migrants who reside within the country. But while national governments have often embraced an anti-immigration spirit, by resorting to the securitization of migration, local (mainly city) level instead has become increasingly prominent and entrepreneurial in the field of migration governance and often expressed a different view on this phenomenon. From Athens to New York, indeed, mayors of large cities and a big chunk of their civil society have explicitly expressed their commitment to welcome migrants.

In this context, a notion previously 'marginal' in social sciences such as City of Refuge (and similar ones, like Sanctuary City) has come out on top. City of Refuge is, indeed, an 'umbrella concept' that originates from a new interpretation of Derrida's notion of hospitality as well as from a plethora of initiatives that North American cities have put in place to challenge the national policies on migration in the last decades. However, albeit the first steps of this 'movement' have been taken in United States in the 1980s, actually it has increasingly become an international phenomenon: broadly speaking this concept has been used to describe the actions undertaken in cities and by cities with the idea to take direct responsibility for refugees' reception and integration, in doing so decoupling local policies from national policies, and in a context in which often such policies are enacted in an interplay with all kinds of trans-national, vertical and horizontal networks.

The present dissertation aims to investigate the city of Milan. Indeed, Milan, historically one of the top destinations of migrants in Italy, has recently been one of the main urban settings for forced migration in Europe. During the so-called 'refugee crisis' and between 2013 and 2016 (way before the transit migration along the Balkans started), Milan has seen the passage of more than 130,000 refugees, while the city's reception centres have given assistance to thousands of forced migrants in its premises. All this while the arrival, passage and settlement of migrants have been welcomed and assisted by parts of the Milanese civil society and political elites, but also rejected by residents and authorities.

Through a collection of three papers (and accompanying chapters), this dissertation attempts to shed light on the different responses that the city of Milan has given to forced migration in this last period. The research has developed by means of qualitative methodologies, from ethnography-oriented participant observation to discursive interview, applied conveniently for each paper. In particular, the first paper focuses on a part of the civil society that contributed to the 'welcome culture' in Milan. The second paper, instead, examines the building up of 'internal borders' on the part of national authorities that deployed bordering mechanisms at the local-level. Finally, we will see the role taken by a particular form of space within the 'welcoming apparatus' of the city, a drop-in centre, and its contribution to the circumventing of bordering processes and to 'opening' mobility to migrants.

By accounting for different actors that weight in on the Milanese local migration governance and looking at the negotiations, conflicts, settings and actors that impart hospitality or hostility to forced migrants, this work argues that the city represents a site of opposing and different pushes. Shaking off too simplistic reading of the city of refuge, here the city emerges as the arena of migration policy, a space of negotiating practices that includes a multitude of actors, influences and drives.



## INTRODUCTION

Europe has recently faced an unprecedented inflow of asylum-seekers, refugees and other migrants (a heterogeneous *congeries* that we can try to enfold under the concept of *forced migrants*<sup>1</sup>), primarily due to the turbulent conditions of neighbouring countries on the opposite side of the Mediterranean Sea. Between 2013 and 2017, more than four million people applied for asylum in the European Union (Eurostat, 2018). Even if this number constitutes only a fraction of the population of refugees and displaced persons worldwide (Turkey alone has hosted three million migrants in the same period), it has been enough to be considered a European ‘migration/refugee crisis’ (New Keywords Collective, 2016). The phenomenon of migration has increasingly become a central issue in contemporary society. As said by Dikeç (2002:227):

‘[t]he ‘stranger’ has made it again—be it Plato’s *xenos*, the daring Ruth, or Eliot’s *Stranger*—the stranger, the concept of the stranger has always been the one arriving with questions, posing questions, making one pose questions and thus challenging the order’.

Europe has emerged from this phenomenon as a contemporary battlefield of migration (see Ambrosini 2018). Unable to agree on a shared solution, the responses of national governments to the recent influx of refugees were based on ‘emergency logics, aggressive policing and militarised borders’ (Castelli Gattinara, 2017:11). But while the EU national governments revealed all their hostility toward migration, the local—mainly city—level has become increasingly prominent and entrepreneurial in the field of migration governance. Mayors of large European cities have explicitly expressed their commitment to welcome migrants: Athens’s mayor, for example, has launched a call for the creation of ‘solidarity cities’, an initiative that gathered 150 representatives from 50 European cities in October 2016<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, cities also have a wealth of civil society organisations focused on advocacy and support. From Athens to Munich (and Milan), civil society helpers developed a mass movement during the ‘migration/refugee crisis’.

These cities’ positions and their proximity to problems compels them to act, often introducing a decoupling (Scholten, 2015) between local actions and national policies (Mayer, 2017). In this context, a notion previously considered ‘marginal’ in social sciences, the ‘city of refuge’ (and similar ones, like Sanctuary City) has come out on top. City of refuge (henceforth ‘CoR’) is an umbrella concept originating from a new interpretation of Derrida’s notion of hospitality as well as from a history of initiatives in North American cities. Broadly speaking, in academia, this concept has been used to describe the actions undertaken in cities and by cities to take direct responsibility for refugees’ reception and integration, simultaneously decoupling local policies from national policies in a context where such policies are enacted in an interplay with all types of trans-national, vertical and horizontal networks (see Scholten, 2015).

The present study aims to investigate the city of Milan in light of this backdrop. This work has originated from a fieldwork (conducted between January 2017 and February 2018) driven by a *research curiosity* (Åkerström, 2013), more than a precise research question. In particular, it

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<sup>1</sup> In this work, I prefer to use the phrase *forced migrant*, which was developed by Castles (2003). Rather than embracing the ambiguous dichotomy between economic migrants and refugees, this notion problematizes the nature of categories and the process of categorisation by opening it up to asylum-seekers, beneficiaries of international protection, internally displaced persons and generally everyone who is ‘forced’ to escape, even if it is ‘irregular’ in the country of arrival. In other words, by using this term vis-à-vis the complex social reality of contemporary migration (see Ambrosini 2017), I aim to challenge distinctions that do not reflect the reality of contemporary migration (Crawley and Skleparis 2017).

<sup>2</sup> Athens Mayor Giorgos Kaminis presented the municipality’s ‘Solidarity Cities’ initiative during the Eurocities Social Affairs Forum held in Athens to discuss a common platform for migrant-friendly policies across the EU; see <https://news.gtp.gr/2016/10/18/athens-mayor-solidarity-cities-refugee-crisis/>

originates from a single ethnographic and qualitative case-study, motivated by a grounded-theory approach, in Milan between March 2017 and February 2018. Milan, historically one of the top destinations for migrants in Italy (Van Aken et al., 2008) during the so-called 'refugee crisis' and between 2013 and 2016 (long before the transit migration along the Balkans began), has seen the passage of more than 130,000 refugees, according to the municipality. Within the Italian context, Milan has represented an example and a model for migrant reception and integration<sup>3</sup>. It has been able to develop a system of reception and assistance for thousands of forced migrants through cooperation between the municipality and both Catholic and non-Catholic private organisations.

Such circumstances made me wonder if the city, or at least certain cities, can represent a plausible model for the reception and inclusion of forced migrants; a setting that provides assurance to this population that their rights and claims are respected. In particular, I wondered, why has the reception of migrants in Milan been indicated as a model to follow? To what extent can Milan be considered a city of refuge? Which players are contributing to that? How does Milan actually respond to the arrival and passage of migrants through its different actors and stakeholders?

This research curiosity has led me to undertake a fieldwork throughout which I collected information that I then related to and juxtaposed with different bodies of work that intersect migration and urban studies: volunteerism, critical border studies, mobility, and, above all, the literature on the city of refuge. This effort contributes – I believe – to different scholarships, and in particular to the literature on CoR, which has been central to my work across the different papers. The scrutiny of this scholarship and the comparison with the information from my fieldwork shed light on some gaps and shortcomings, many of which pertaining the lack of *depth* (see also the conclusions).

Instead, this work presents a *thick description* (Gobo, 2008) of two sets of actors (pro-migrant voluntary groups and Questura – the local projection of the national Ministry of Interior) and one place (the drop-in centre). These are elements (actors and spaces) rarely discussed in the literature intertwining forced migration and urban studies, and especially in the scholarship on CoR that privileges the analysis of (to some extent) formal policies. Nonetheless, in my case, I chose to zoom in on those elements for two sets of reasons. First, in consonance with a *grounded* approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), I selected the different actors and aspects in the light of categories that have emerged from earlier stages of research, namely because they emerged as particularly relevant during the fieldwork. Second, because they allow me to highlight the different pushes (between 'refuge' and 'refuse') that characterize the city as an arena of migration governance. Indeed, while the earlier stages of grounded theory require maximum flexibility to identify a wide range of predominantly descriptive categories, at a later stage the necessity to refine and select materials according to theoretical aspects (the so-called *theoretical sampling*, see Strauss and Corbin [1990]) arises. This work, therefore, explicitly focus on one space and one group of volunteers that seek to 'give refuge' to forced migrants, and on one other (the Questura) that increasingly rejects and refuses their presence in order to highlight not solely how refuge but also how refuse is enacted in cities.

In this respect, Milan allowed me to observe a city travelled by contrasting solicitations. Between 'refuge' and 'refuse', we will see the role that different players have taken in this context: the part of civil society that contributed to the welcome culture in Milan (paper 1), the national authorities that deployed bordering mechanisms at the local level (paper 2) and the local administration, which tailored innovative policies for the transit migration phenomenon (see

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<sup>3</sup>The so-called 'modello Milano' (namely, the 'Milanese model') has been a benchmark for intervention within Italy ([https://milano.corriere.it/notizie/politica/17\\_maggio\\_18/migranti-80-sindaci-firmano-l-accordo-un-nuovo-modello-milano-dell-accoglienza-50def9b6-3b88-11e7-83da-130c74015a48.shtml?refresh\\_ce-cp](https://milano.corriere.it/notizie/politica/17_maggio_18/migranti-80-sindaci-firmano-l-accordo-un-nuovo-modello-milano-dell-accoglienza-50def9b6-3b88-11e7-83da-130c74015a48.shtml?refresh_ce-cp)) and was even studied abroad (<http://cartadiroma.waypress.eu//RassegnaStampa/LeggiArticolo.aspx?codice=SB55252.TIF&subcod=20150925&numPag=2&>).

context Appendix). Finally, we will see the role taken by a particular form of space, a drop-in centre, within the 'welcoming apparatus' of the city and its contribution to circumventing bordering processes and opening mobility access to migrants (paper 3).

In this introductory chapter, I will engage with the debate on CoR. I will touch upon some concrete applications of CoR across international contexts and some encompassing principles that define this notion. Subsequently, the introduction will focus on the fieldwork and the methodological path before briefly presenting the papers and the common thread that runs through them.

## CITY OF REFUGE ACROSS NATIONAL CONTEXTS

Recently, the notions of 'city of refuge', 'sanctuary city' or 'solidarity city' have increasingly caught the public imagination (see Ridgley [2008], Yukich [2013] and Bauder and Gonazalez [2018]). Due to the bitter clash between US President Donald Trump and the mayors of American cities participating in the city of sanctuary movement, the role that Western cities take in the reception, accommodation and inclusion of forced migrants, particularly *illegalised* migrants (see Bauder, 2014), has come out on top in the public debate.

In this context, the notion of 'city of refuge' has become a topic of academic debate. In recent years, social scientists have come to emphasise the role that the local level plays in challenging issues. Among the most eminent, well-known French philosopher Jacques Derrida (1997/2001), who revived the everlasting question of the open city, argued that cities should be able to constitute a refuge vis-a-vis its nation-state's inadequacy and called for the establishment of 'new cities of refuge', forerunning a trend pointing to the 'return' to the local level in migration studies<sup>4</sup>. This trend as part of a 'local-turn' advances the idea that nation-states often produce difficulties, fragmented policies and political division, while local actors can better address the same challenges, even global challenges like international migration (Zapata-Barrero, Caponio and Scholten, 2017). By mobilising Henri Lefebvre's (1968/1996) concept of the 'right to the city', for example, the academic community has discussed the city as a potential refuge whereby it is possible to articulate 'a more inclusive vision of political belonging based on the idea that all people in the city should have access to the same fundamental rights, regardless of their immigration status' (Ridgley, 2008:56).

Although terms like 'sanctuary city' or 'city of refuge' are rarely applied outside of Canada, the UK and the US, initiatives inspired by these principles exist around the globe. The idea of urban refuge is primarily linked to actual practices that are not limited to a particular national territory but have sprouted across international borders. Although the first steps of this movement were taken in the US in the 1980s, it has increasingly become an international phenomenon in subsequent decades following two sources of inspiration. The first source of inspiration for such movements was the work of 'sanctuary initiatives' in the US and Canada and the emergence of sanctuary cities in the North American context, particularly San Francisco (Hintjens and Pouri,

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<sup>4</sup> The French philosopher Jacques Derrida revisited the question of 'refuge cities' at the end of the 1990s through a series of writings (Derrida 1997/2000; 1997/2001; 1999; 2005). His intervention prefigured and influenced some aspects of the future debate around the City of Refuge. In Derrida's thinking, the question of the 'refuge city' closely associates with the notion of hospitality. The City of Refuge should be hospitable (Derrida 1997/2000). Dichotomic and even aporetic, at the core of Derrida's reading of the notion of City of Refuge is the realisation that while nation-states only produce restrictions, limits and borders (a 'conditional' hospitality), the city, due to its history, represents an emancipatory and democratic possibility in contrast to the sovereign 'state.' To do so, however, the city must be equipped with new rights and a new ethos. Indeed, the City of Refuge is not a *fait accompli*, but a call: a call for a city that associates juridical power (the new rights) with a renovated spirit (ethos) of hospitality pervading the city's population.

2014). Another source of inspiration has been urban initiatives to offer sanctuary to artists and writers fleeing persecution (i.e., the International Parliament of Writers' 'cities of refuge' network, which offers hospitality and refuge to persecuted writers, which Derrida discussed in his work; see Derrida [1997/2001]).

However, different terms are used in different countries, and policies and practices are also highly contextual (Bauder and Gonzalez, 2018). CoR initiatives focus on several populations and react to different legal and administrative circumstances in various national contexts. For example, the term 'sanctuary city' is popular in Canada and the US where it designates actions that specifically seek to protect illegalised migrants (Hintjens and Pouri, 2014). In the UK, the network of Cities of Sanctuary is mainly committed to welcoming asylum-seekers and refugees (Darling, 2010).

It is precisely the variegated makeup of this concept that attracted some critiques. For example, Chishti and Hipsman (2015) accused the notions tied to 'city of refuge' as being catch-all phrases, a potpourri of different policies, practices and theorisations. Consequently, I seek to bring order to the tangled mess of practices concerning this concept by illustrating some ways in which the concept of CoR has been practically translated in recent decades. Below, I review CoR practices in five contexts: the US, Canada and the UK, where CoR practices have long been a reality, and Germany and Italy, where this notion has only recently caught traction. This effort allowed me to gather information that will later be sorted into relevant aspects, the *lowest common denominators* of the different practices, discourses and policies linked to the notion of CoR.

#### *USA*

The origin of sanctuary dates back to several centuries and can be associated with various religions and cultures (e.g. Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Ancient Greece) (Pedley, 2005; Lippert & Rehaag, 2013). Therefore, it is no surprise that sanctuary's modern history is tightly connected with faith and church-based initiatives. Indeed, the first contemporary initiative that explicitly referred to the notion of CoR was the sanctuary cities movement in the US (Bauder, 2016). Sanctuary city initiatives here date back to the 1980s. The movement started as a group of faith-based organisations in Arizona and California that provided housing, transportation and legal assistance to refugees from Central America who were trying to escape deportation. This group eventually expanded by including legal, human rights and civil liberties groups across the country, although church congregations and faith-based groups formed its heart (Ridgley, 2008). Since the late 1970s, however, sanctuary has not limited itself to religious spaces. During that time, the Sanctuary Movement organised protests and became increasingly entrepreneurial in the public debate, so much so that in the 1980s, it was able to pass the first municipal sanctuary policies, namely local laws to protect the rights of Central American refugees and place limitations on the use of local police or resources in the enforcement of immigration law (Ridgley, 2008).

Since then, the US Sanctuary Cities Movement has been characterised by a strong association between civil society mobilisation and local administration intervention and policy-making. What began as a group of faith-based organisations evolved into a national network with significant influence at the national level (Hintjens and Pouri, 2014). Through municipal sanctuary policies, local governments expressed support for the congregations and organisations involved in sanctuary initiatives.

From 1984–1987, more than 20 cities and two states adopted CoR policies in the US (Ridgely, 2008). Through these, the cities challenged deportation and extended legal protections to undocumented migrants. In the years that followed, dozens of cities in the US have passed municipal sanctuary policies. These policies include ‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell’ (DADT) policies, namely the prohibition of requesting, recording or disseminating status information to municipal police forces and city service agencies, policies that involve the distribution of municipal identification cards that grant the holder access to local services or the acceptance of *matriculas consulares* (identification card issued by the Government of Mexico through its consulate offices) as valid identification cards (Varsanyi, 2006).

However, after the election of Donald Trump as US president, the Sanctuary City movement has suffered setbacks. Due to threats of budget cuts by the president to mayors of sanctuary cities, sanctuary policies in many municipalities are only guaranteed on an informal basis (Verzeletti, 2018). On the other hand, some cities, especially the most financially prosperous, have strongly reacted to this situation by allocating appropriate funding and pursuing a legal battle.

### *Canada*

Possibly favoured by geographical proximity, Canada was the first country to establish the ‘refuge city’ movement outside the US. The Canadian Sanctuary City movement has followed in the footsteps of the US movement with regard to its temporal progressions and ‘interventional’ rationale. The urban sanctuary initiatives also began in the 1980s through the mobilisation of Chilean refugees (Bauder and Gonzalez, 2018). In 2004, Toronto adopted DADT policies, followed by similar initiatives in Vancouver and Montreal (Bauder and Gonzalez, 2018).

As in the US, these initiatives entail ‘scaling up’ demands from civil society to the local authorities and the active involvement of local administrations. The Sanctuary City movement in Canada follows two directions. Similar to what happened in the US, this movement has been active in lobbying municipalities to adopt some version of DADT policies with regard to immigration status. Moreover, these actions have been complemented by campaigns for guaranteeing services based on one’s presence within the city, as with the cases of municipal identification cards in the US.

### *UK*

In the UK, the City of Sanctuary movement was established in Sheffield in 2005 before rapidly spreading to other cities throughout the territory, developing a network of 25 cities by early 2014 (Hintjens and Pouri, 2014). Inspired by the US sanctuary city movement, the UK movement is based on a network of religious and secular grassroots movements. The British movement, however, presents some unique aspects not found in North American experiences of the sanctuary city. UK cities of sanctuary do not focus as much on cooperating with local administration on policy-making, nor do they explicitly promote actions of non-cooperation with national authorities. Moreover, they do not direct their activities toward undocumented migrants (Bauder and Gonzalez, 2018).

Instead, the UK movement seeks to promote a culture of welcome toward asylum-seekers and refugees through a grassroots movement ‘involving different sectors such as education, local government, health, sports and arts, as well as refugee organisations’ (City of Sanctuary, 2017). It works toward making UK cities more inclusive mainly via prosaic spaces (e.g., drop-ins and community centres) in which ideals of responsibility and hospitality are practised (Darling, 2010). In other words, UK cities of sanctuary are engaged in both providing practical help to refugees (e.g., legal advice, socialisation, service orientation) and shifting hostile attitudes

toward refugees and asylum-seekers by ‘promot[ing] the welcome and contribution of people seeking sanctuary’ (City of Sanctuary, 2017).

The initiatives of City of Sanctuary, which have gained attention in the UK, therefore represent an alternative approach to North American cities of refuge. The City of Sanctuary approach is centred around building a coalition horizontally (through networking between different organisations in a city and across the country) rather than vertically (as in North America) and takes a less antagonistic position vis-a-vis the national government.

### *Germany*

Recently, CoR-inspired initiatives have begun to emerge in Germany. Facilitated by the mass arrival of migrants and refugees since 2015, a network of solidarity cities has formed in German and Swiss cities<sup>5</sup>, mainly through the efforts of civil society. This movement has developed through the activity of citizens who coordinate their efforts and pool their resources and expertise together with local administrations to provide better and safer communal living accommodations to all residents, regardless of their status (Solidarity City Network [n.d.]). In some cases, the municipal administration has used its resources to collaborate with these groups to offer services dedicated to illegalised migrants, while some cities have partaken in international CoR networks (e.g., ICORN and EU’s ‘solidarity cities’) (Verzeletti, 2018).

However, the most distinctive initiative is *Bürgerasyl*. *Bürgerasyl* defines the actions of civil disobedience thanks to German residents who commit themselves to hosting and hiding migrants who are subjected to expulsion by German authorities (Verzeletti, 2018). Indeed, estimates suggest that the number of ‘irregular’ migrants in Germany is as high as one million (Bauder and Gonzalez, 2018). Thanks to *Bürgerasyl* (and similar initiatives linked to religious institutions), the themes of Dublin deportation and expulsion toward undocumented migrants lay at the heart of the German solidarity city network.

### *Italy*

Unlike the other countries presented here, no movement explicitly inspired by CoR principles exists in Italy. However, CoR ideals have increasingly emerged following the ‘migration/refugee crisis’.

Italian cities have always been important settings of migration (Caponio, 2006), especially after the mass arrival of forced migrants on Italian coasts (Fontanari, 2016b). Mayors have often maintained a welcoming stance on migration, even after the crackdown on migration implemented by the national government (see contextual Appendix) and at the cost of opposing the nation-state. From Milan to Palermo (and the well-known example of the city of Riace), Italian mayors have openly expressed their intention to open their cities to forced migrants (both symbolically and practically), in some cases by participating in international networks of solidarity toward migrants (e.g., Milan is part of the Solidarity City network)<sup>6</sup>.

In this sense, the most telling action undertaken by Italian mayors is the Palermo Charter launched by Leoluca Orlando, the mayor of Palermo. This document requests radical changes to

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<sup>5</sup> This network comprises initiatives in 17 cities across Germany and Switzerland (Augsburg, Berlin, Bern, Bremen, Darmstadt, Frankfurt, Freiburg, Göttingen, Hamburg, Hanau, Hanover, Cologne, Leipzig, Marburg, Münster, Osnabrück and Zürich). Created during/following the ‘migration/refugee crisis’, delegates of these groups met from 11–13 May 2018 for the first time in Göttingen (see more at [www.solidarity-city.eu](http://www.solidarity-city.eu)).

<sup>6</sup> In this regard, we can recall the decision of de Magistris, mayor of Naples, to welcome migrants in defiance of Matteo Salvini’s closure of Italian ports (see <https://diem25.org/diem25-supports-de-magistris-and-other-brave-italian-mayors-decision-to-let-them-in-aquarius/>)

the national approach toward migration, particularly concerning the freedom of movement of people:

‘We need to change approach: from migration as suffering to mobility as a right. No human being has chosen or chooses where to be born; everyone must have recognised the right to choose where to live, live better and without dying’<sup>7</sup>.

Similar to the US Sanctuary Cities movement, the Palermo Charter expresses its support of abolishing the residence permit for migrants and affirms the right to work, healthcare, social assistance and housing for all residents, regardless of their status. Similar positions have been stated by civil society members. Since 2013, ordinary citizens have expressed their solidarity with incoming forced migrants in several cities from Catania to Milan (Denaro, 2016; see paper 1 and Appendix). This mobilisation was organised through various groups and complemented traditional activism in expressing a ‘welcome culture’ resembling movements across Europe and North America (see paper 1). In this regard, we can conclude by noting that pro-migrant activism on the part of religious-inspired and secular associations is a long-standing tradition in Italy. Secular organisations have recently reoriented their actions by drawing inspiration explicitly from No Person is Illegal, the pro-migrant international movement that arose in Germany against the deportation of illegalised migrants (e.g., see Nail, 2010; Nyers, 2010)<sup>8</sup>.

## **CITY OF REFUGE, RELEVANT ASPECTS**

The preceding section showed the diverse range of CoR policies and practices that vary according to national context. I will next discuss some prominent aspects and guiding principles that represent the ‘common ground’ of CoR internationally. Despite the influence that historical, legislative and socio-cultural factors have had on how the ideal of ‘city of refuge’ is expressed locally, we can detect shared trends across different contexts. In particular, we will see three common aspects: influence from the grassroots, the scale-up of this grassroots mobilisation to the institutional level and the resulting decoupling between local and national approaches to forced migration.

CoR initiatives seem to follow a specific course. Usually, the initial input comes from civil society (e.g., grassroots mobilisation in neighbourhoods and community-based organisations), which forms groups to express claims and ideals (e.g., hospitality and welcoming) in favour of migrant residents. Subsequently, some of these claims make their way into the policy arena, generally through the involvement of the local administration. It is a ‘scale-up’ dynamic by which the municipal legislative body supports selected sanctuary initiatives (see Bauder [2016]). Finally, through the formation of a coalition of actors horizontally and vertically, cities respond to dissimilarities between exclusionary national migration and the need to be inclusive at the local scale to the extent that the city becomes a site of immigration policy-making, challenging the state through transformative politics (Nyers, 2010). Next, I will discuss these three aspects in depth.

### *Grassroots’ mobilisation: Hospitality and welcome culture*

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<sup>7</sup> [https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/our\\_work/ICP/IDM/2015\\_CMC/Session-IIIb/Orlando/PDF-CARTA-DI-PALERMO-Statement.pdf](https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/our_work/ICP/IDM/2015_CMC/Session-IIIb/Orlando/PDF-CARTA-DI-PALERMO-Statement.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> An example of their demands, directed at the European Union, Italy and Milan can be found at: [http://www.naga.it/tl\\_files/naga/NePILL%20def.pdf](http://www.naga.it/tl_files/naga/NePILL%20def.pdf)

In the discussed contexts, civil society groups (especially religious-driven) consisting of citizens who express their solidarity with forced migrants in vulnerable positions have played a fundamental role. A clear example of the role of civil society comes from the origin of the movement in North America, where a group of faith-based organisations in Arizona and California campaigned against the deportation of Central American refugees (Ridgley, 2008). Civil society groups have a central role in CoR initiatives from North America to Europe. Over time, these groups have been inspired by an ideal of hospitality. Their aim is to 'offer a positive vision of culture welcome and hospitality' (City of Sanctuary, 2017:3), which is expressed through spaces of welcome offered as a refuge for asylum-seekers (Darling, 2008). In particular, grassroots groups in neighbourhoods and communities have tended to create horizontal coalitions. Their aim has often been to institute a 'welcoming apparatus' through a network composed of different spaces within cities with the goal of extending help to forced migrants (Darling, 2008).

In the midst of anti-immigrant approaches in Europe and the US, this network may serve as an important apparatus of integration and welcome for recent immigrants, as demonstrated by the recent upsurge of civil society in favour of migrants across European cities. There, they have been able to develop a 'welcome culture' (Mayer, 2017) whose aim is to call for a change of attitude toward migration at city, national and international levels. Often, the growing consensus that characterises these movements allows them to advocate on behalf of migrants by calling for reforms, developing a migrant justice perspective and extending their support base to the local political elite.

#### *Municipal sanctuary policies and cosmopolitan responsibility*

Civil society initiatives have often built consensus to achieve institutional endorsement from local administrations. Prime examples are the Sanctuary Cities movement in the US that was able to pass the first municipal sanctuary policies (Ridgley, 2008) and the *Bürgerasyl* initiative in Freiburg, Germany that was able to earn the support of the city council (Verzeletti, 2018). Through these measures, cities try to respond to the mismatch between exclusionary national migration and the need to be inclusive at the local scale (Bauder and Gonzalez, 2018). However, these initiatives in municipal policy were not simply granted by municipalities; it was the networking and advocacy actions from the grassroots upward that secured the support of local administrations. For example, the network focused on the City of Sanctuary made possible the acceptance of a manifesto, attempting to inculcate a *welcoming spirit* by the city of Sheffield (Darling, 2010). In San Francisco, initiatives of civil society organisations pushed for inclusive local policy (Marrow, 2012).

Municipal policies scale up ideas of immigrant incorporation from civil society symbolically and instrumentally. In the UK, this activity has been mainly symbolic and conducted through the endorsement of City of Sanctuary's basic principles by municipal governments (Darling, 2010). However, this support can also take more concrete forms. Local authorities in Freiburg actively collaborated with the grassroots organisation of the Solidarity City in fields like education and housing, but such measures have also occurred in other contexts (e.g., in Milan for transit migrants; see the Appendix). In the US, local governments have often expressed support for the organisations involved in sanctuary initiatives through DADT policy (more than 50 municipalities have adopted this kind of policy) and by limiting the use of local resources for the enforcement of activities implicated in the deportation of undocumented migrants (Nyers, 2010).

Regardless of the form taken, however, these municipal measures generally express similar ideals; they seem to favour a relational and cosmopolitan reading of the city, namely an image of the city as a relational entity whose responsibility stretches outward to distant territories and people (see Amin [2004], Massey [2004]; Darling [2010]). In this regard, we must observe that this effort of imagination, i.e., ‘thinking of space relationally’ (Darling, 2010), is often in conflict with the perspectives of national authorities on themes linked to refuge and forced migration.

### *Networking and decoupling*

Several recent accounts within social sciences have suggested that cities are becoming increasingly active agents, drawing their own agendas to answer to the ‘big’ challenges that characterise our epoch (see Zapata-Barrero, Caponio and Scholten [2017]). CoR partakes in this ‘local turn’. In concert with Derrida’s call for refuge cities’ rights and ethos (see Derrida [1997/2001]), its initiatives try to turn the city into a setting of migration policy-making. In this process, it is striking how local authorities have hardly ever developed their activities in isolation; rather, they are constantly in contact with a broader network of actors (Oomen and Baumgärtel, 2014). First, local authorities forge new alliances horizontally with stakeholders like civil society and churches (see previous sections). However, vertical development in which cities join different networks that bypass nation-states’ authorities is equally important; these networks, composed of other cities and international organisations, aim to manage migration trans-nationally by sharing information and best-practices.

In Europe, these networks have been used to react to the ‘migration/refugee crisis’. For example, within the Eurocities network, the Solidarity Cities group has emerged (which must not be confused with Germany’s Solidarity City). This coalition has gathered major European cities (e.g., Amsterdam, Berlin, Barcelona and Milan) with the goal of favouring the prominent role that cities have had in the reception of forced migrants, building cooperation and working for the redistribution of asylum-seekers within member-cities<sup>9</sup>. In parallel, in 2016, the city of Osnabrück (Germany) launched a programme, *50 Aus Idomeni*, whose goal was to host 50 asylum-seekers stuck in the Greek village of Idomeni<sup>10</sup>. Finally, Ada Colau, mayor of Barcelona, Anne Hidalgo, mayor of Paris, and Spyros Galinos, mayor of Lesbos, wrote an open letter to European leaders in which they called the European national leaders to make a radical change in their approaches to migration:

‘For years, European governments have spent most asylum and migration funds on reinforcing our borders and turning Europe into a fortress. This mistaken policy is the reason why the Mediterranean has become the graveyard for thousands of refugees attempting to come and share our freedom. It is time to change our priorities: to allocate funds to ensure refugees in transit are welcomed, to provide resources for cities that have offered themselves as places of refuge. This is not the time for hollow words or empty speeches, it’s time for action’<sup>11</sup>.

On either side of the Atlantic, an aspect common to all these initiatives is the cities’ rejection of national approaches toward migration and refugees. Indeed, cities appear to respond to exclusionary national policies by devising their own strategies. CoR initiatives, therefore, can be interpreted as an attempt to rescale migration and refugee policies and practices from national to urban scales on the part of cities that have acquired enough authority and autonomy through

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<sup>9</sup> <https://solidaritycities.eu/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://50ausidomeni.de/>

<sup>11</sup> <http://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/alcaldesa/en/blog/we-cities-europe>

horizontal and vertical networking (Bauder, 2016). America's sanctuary cities represent a prime example of the power that cities have to oppose nation-states. US cities have openly resisted the federal government through local tactics of sabotage, e.g., by preventing local agencies from participating in certain enforcement programs implemented at the national level (Chauvin and Garcés-Mascreñas, 2012). But while American cities have openly shown their autonomy, by analysing the European context, we can highlight how European cities have been mostly committed to bottom-up activities whose focus is to reorient national approaches and policies on migration (Mayer, 2017; Verzeletti, 2018).

We can argue that local level governments have responded to the tightening on migration coming from the nation-states by opening up. In this sense, deploying and inverting Giorgio Agamben's notion of 'State of Exception', we can arguably say that cities of refuge represent 'Local States of Exception' (GLIMER, 2018) whose policies on migration sometimes diverge significantly from national-level policy and rhetoric. They indicate a decoupling process (Scholten, 2015; Pope and Meyer, 2016) based on ground-level politics, welcome culture and horizontal and vertical networking.

## **THE FIELDWORK AND METHODOLOGICAL PATHWAY**

This work originates from the theoretical desire to identify dimensions of 'refuge' in the city, but in doing so, this research is developed by embracing the tension that exists between the city of refuge and its opposing drives to refuse and close off. In this case, the city emerges as a site of opposing forces—an arena of migration policy as described by recent accounts (e.g., Ambrosini, 2015; 2018; Meyer, 2017). Therefore, coherently with the notion of migration regime, the city represents a space of negotiating practices that includes a multitude of actors, influences and drives (Tsianos, Hess and Karakayali, 2009).

This research focuses on Milan, a city historically relevant for the migration phenomena (both domestic and international) within the Italian context where recently, following the European 'refugee/migration crisis', a question of asylum has been raised. Milan has seen the arrival and visible presence of hundreds of thousands of forced migrants into its territory. The city saw the erection of internal borders against this presence as well as important openings. Its local administration (a newly established centre-left coalition that emerged victorious after nearly two decades), despite difficulties addressing this challenge, showed an innovative approach. The civil society gave a strong, welcoming response, while a plethora of charitable institutions, especially Catholic-related groups, made Milan one of the most relevant settings for studying the impact of these organisations on the migration governance of a city (see Appendix).

To grasp these different drivers, I committed to a qualitative case study. As claimed by Flyvbjerg (2006), the case study approach implies a first-hand exploration of phenomena, an approach particularly powerful for understanding complex social phenomena. Case studies produce narratives that allow the researcher to tell a story in its complexity by 'develop[ing] descriptions and interpretations of the phenomenon from the perspective of participants, researchers and others' (Flyvbjerg, 2006:25).

The empirical data presented in this thesis, therefore, are derived from qualitative research developed through ethnographic-oriented fieldwork (conducted between January 2017 and February 2018) through which I analysed the reception of forced migrants in Milan. The material was collected through participant observations, informal talks and formalised interviews as well as through an analysis of memoranda, policy papers, press releases and flyers.

Therefore, I dedicate a section to discussing the selection of the case study and the research field. Subsequently, I will explain the methodology and methodological tools employed in my research.

### **THE SINGLE CASE STUDY AND THE FIELDWORK: MILAN AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE**

A significant portion of social sciences is linked to *idiographic knowledge*, meaning that it is based on the description of a few cases that can contribute to advancing our knowledge of context-dependent phenomena by providing a nuanced view of reality (Gobo, 2008). Case study research is considered particularly suitable for this purpose. It is a research strategy that, through first-hand exploration, allows the researcher to deal with a wide variety of evidence in order to understand complex social and contemporary phenomena within their real-life contexts (Yin, 2008).

Despite critiques of this method, a case study's ultimate goal is scientific generalisation. However, compared to other approaches, cases are not chosen to obtain *statistical generalisation*, namely a generalisation of outcomes to a population. As advanced by Yin (2008), in case study research, 'case studies [...] are generalizable to theoretical propositions' (Yin, 2008:11). It is the *analytical generalisation* in which individual cases are selected to discuss and/or enrich a previously developed theory or debate. From this perspective, instead of choosing a representative sample, the researcher carefully chooses cases that can be generalised and contribute to a debate (Flyvbjerg, 2006). In other words, cases are chosen for their *strategic significance*, i.e., because they are the most suitable for clarifying deeper causes and consequences, given their *extreme, critical* or *paradigmatic character* (for a more detailed definition of extreme, critical and paradigmatic cases, as well as discussion on this topic, see Flyvbjerg [2006] and Yin [2008]).

I conducted a case study by means of fieldwork in the city of Milan. According to the literature on case studies (see Flyvbjerg [2006] and Yin [2008]), my decision to set the research field there was primarily due to its *significance*. According to several recent accounts, urban sites are considered central places where asylum-seekers, refugees and forced migrants try to rebuild their lives (e.g., Landau, 2004; Rossi and Vanolo, 2011) as well as crucial *battlefields* of migration governance (e.g., Nyers, 2010; Isin, 2012; Sassen, 2013). In this respect, this city arguably stands out as a strategic choice for a case study. Milan has emerged as a site of both passage and settlement during the recent 'migration/refugee crisis' (see Fontanari, 2016b; also Appendix). In addition, it represents a *local zone of negotiation* (Hinger, Schäfer and Pott, 2016), namely a setting where a diverse set of actors (i.e., local administration, civil society and third-sector organisations) have proven to be extremely active in cooperating for a common good (see context Appendix). Moreover, in Milan, we have witnessed the implementation of innovative policies for the reception of forced migrants and the commitment of its administration and civil society to 'refugee-oriented' actions to the extent that we can arguably see Milan as a city that comes close to an ideal city of refuge in Italy (see Costa [2017]; Appendix).

Moreover, one final element that made me chose Milan is linked to my personal biography. Extra-scientific reasons should not be dismissed, as they represent a fundamental drive for many researchers (Semi, 2010). My interest in themes of migration and asylum and the choice of Milan are based on various elements linked to my history. As a person born and raised in Milan, I was provided with intimate knowledge of the city that allowed me to partially skip the phase of *familiarisation* with the setting (Semi, 2010). Having spent the majority of my life there and having previously witnessed the events and known people who, to different extents,

participated in what I was trying to study stimulated my research. For the same reason, in the last few years, I witnessed some of the events summarised in the Appendix: the unexpected arrival of masses of migrants in the central railway station, the hectic work of volunteers and the growth of a population composed of migrant women and men sleeping rough among the indifference of many people and institutions. I think that when a person sees this with their own eyes, they should not be indifferent. Personally, I could not help but think about the stories that marked their lives and wonder what we could do and what we are doing to make their lives better.

Based on the above, I started my research in January 2017. It was an extensive fieldwork, ending in February 2018. I placed myself within the context under study to get close to the complexities of what I was researching. My aim was ‘to tell the story in its diversity, allowing the story to unfold from the many-sided, complex and sometimes conflicting stories that the actors in the case have told me’ (Flyvbjerg, 2006:22). Thus, the field emerged within the urban place through the act of *staying* and attending events and activities as they happened. However, an important part of my research was conducted in restricted research fields. In particular, I conducted part of my observation in a reception centre and in a drop-in centre. This was possible thanks to volunteer work and the generous support of two associations that tolerated my presence, SOS Emergenza Rifugiati Milano (henceforth ‘SOS ERM’) and Naga.

Having embraced ethnographic-oriented research throughout my fieldwork, I cooperated and worked side-by-side with volunteers of these two groups. From May to September 2017, I applied participant observation by volunteering at a reception centre with volunteers of SOS ERM by offering support for learning Italian to its guests. Moreover, Naga allowed me to conduct my research in its drop-in and help-desk centre, Naga-har, from June to October 2017. Although my status as a researcher was overt (see Semi, 2010), my role within this centre was always to be negotiated, especially with the guests. Therefore, I ended up acting partly as a volunteer: I focused on assisting with the preparation of tea and biscuits and the general orientation of people who attended the centre. Both experiences were extremely important—at times difficult but always rewarding—and at the risk of sounding rhetorical, I must say that they benefited me (chiefly as a person) more than I could have ever benefited them through my work.

Finally, I supplemented my fieldwork in Milan with a broader understanding of what is occurring at an international level. Thanks to the hospitality of the department of Urban Studies and Planning at the University of Sheffield, I spent one month in Sheffield, the hometown of the City of Sanctuary movement in the UK, where I was able to gain insight into this movement. With this same spirit, I attended the first meeting of the German network of Solidarity City, which gave me the opportunity to better understand the German *Willkommenskultur*. Finally, at the University College Roosevelt in the Netherlands, I also had the opportunity to visit and participate in the group Cities of Refuge, which, led by Professor Barbara Oomen, is conducting an interesting project aimed at exploring how local governments in Europe welcome and integrate refugees. Although not part of the fieldwork for my three papers, these experiences made a valuable contribution to the overall writing and development of my work.

## **THE METHODOLOGICAL EQUIPMENT**

To shed light on the responses that the city of Milan has given to the recent upsurge in passage and settlement of forced migrants and the tension between various local actors, this study applied a few methodological tools. First of all, my research owes much to the so-called Grounded Theory (GT). Grounded Theory is an approach, a logical procedure, a way to analyse

which leads to discovery of a theory inductively – that is, by using solely empirical (grounded) observations (for a more detailed definition see Glaser and Strauss [1967] and Strauss and Corbin [1990]). GT privileges the direct understanding of a phenomenon and implies the formulation of concepts after the research has begun. Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Strauss and Corbin (1990) argue that hypotheses and the operational definition of the concept be developed, formulated and verified only after the ethnographic notes have been collected (inductive hypotheses) so that the researcher goes into the field without preconceived ideas (Gobo, 2008).

Accordingly, I began my empirical research by engaging in informal chats with subjects involved in the reception and support of migrants in Milan. In parallel with the fieldwork, I started examining documents, particularly academic articles and grey literature (about the European migration governance, the misnamed ‘migration/refugee crisis’ and the so-called ‘transit migration’ within and outside Europe). At that point, my interest was mainly oriented toward the passage of prospective asylum-seekers and refugees through Milan and the policies that a plethora of actors had put in place to deal with this phenomenon (see Appendix). However, as measures to immobilise this movement became successful and the approach of the Italian government to migration became more marked by a securitarian attitude (that shortly after ushered in what I call the *summer of rejection* and the end of the ‘sistema profughi’; see paper two and Appendix), I witnessed the ‘disappearance’ of my field.

Following the reorganisation of the municipal reception system (see Appendix), therefore, access to the registration desk and related reception centres for migrants in transit, which I had obtained with difficulty in the previous months, became pointless. What happened to my research afterward displays one of the strengths of qualitative research: its flexibility (Semi, 2010). Indeed, I was without a ‘field’ but nonetheless rich in information. Thanks to the information collected during the first part of my empirical research, I reoriented my research to study this new phase.

In this new scenario, I began using ethnographic-oriented methods. Ethnography is a form of knowledge associated with specific methods, notably participant observation and ethnographic interviews. Ethnographers have the task of getting as close to people under study as possible without becoming completely identical to them (Semi, 2010). To do so, ethnography requires observing and partaking in the studied environment, and participant observation is probably its most characteristic technique (Gobo, 2008). Therefore, the researcher needs to spend much time within the research field with the research subjects and obtain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study (Semi, 2010).

I employed overt participant observation during my time with SOS ERM and Naga. In May 2017, I started volunteering in SOS ERM for two to four mornings a week. The work in this association allowed me to access a reception centre and gain awareness of the day-to-day interactions, stories, events and moments that characterise the activity of pro-migrant volunteers, a useful basis for the development of the first paper. Shortly after, in June, I was active in Naga-har. During the five months of research there for four or five days a week, I was allowed to observe the work of its volunteers and their interactions while partaking in the activities first-hand. In addition, the time spent in the Naga-har association allowed me to build trusting relationships with the volunteers and guests that were fundamental to the development of the third paper. In both associations, the people who interacted with me were aware of my role as a researcher: this allowed me to consider the informal talks as empirical material for my research and take observation notes.

During the fieldwork in those two settings, I also employed ethnographic interviews. An 'ethnographic interview' is a specific type of interview carried out by an ethnographer *following* participant observation (Gobo, 2008; Semi, 2010). Here, 'following' does not have a temporal meaning. Ethnographic interviews are usually conducted when a) the direction of the ongoing research has been partly clarified by observations and b) the researcher has already developed meaningful relationships with the participants to the extent that the researcher relies on a different emotional climate to investigate and clarify aspects that are still unclear even though they have been subjected to close observation (Semi, 2010).

During my fieldwork, I conducted ethnographic interviews with 15 people. These interviews were conducted with migrant persons mainly during my fieldwork for paper two and three at Naga-har and other settings, e.g., help-desks and near public offices and popular meeting points for the Milanese population of forced migrants. Such interviews, conducted in Italian, French and English and subsequently translated into English, represent a fundamental 'source', especially for articles two and three. Thanks to the ability to benefit from deeper relationships, I was able to focus more closely on specific aspects of migrants' everyday-lives vis-à-vis bureaucratic praxes that prevent the enjoyment of asylum rights in Milan and the attendance of services provided by Naga-har.

Discursive interviews that were in-depth, semi-structured and recorded were the other methodological tools applied during my fieldwork. Despite obvious commonalities, discursive interviews differ from ethnographic interviews (see Gobo, 2008) as they are typically scheduled and have longer durations. The main goal is to enable the researcher to hear what social actors have to say. For this reason, the interviewee is given room to use words and develop a discourse according to his/her personal schemas, metaphors and articulations. Discursive interviews are particularly fit for understanding the motives and opinions of participants. Therefore, I mobilised this tool for recognising the motives that push people to volunteer on migrants' behalf (in article 1), the opinions of legal advisors on the implementation of bureaucratic praxes (in article 2) and the general understanding of their roles and contributions by different actors involved in migrants' reception in Milan (article 1 and Appendix).

During this endeavour, I have taken utmost account of the ethical aspects, given also the *vulnerability* of some participants. The current scholarship prescribes that the participants must be given complete information about the aims of the research, so that they can decide whether or not to give their consent to it, while safekeeping the anonymity of participants. During my fieldwork, I made sure that participants have understood the information and that their participation is voluntary; in addition, I guaranteed the anonymity of the participants by means of using pseudonyms.

In terms of ethics, I have also endorsed an understanding of qualitative research based on its participatory dimension – that is to say that the people being studied are subjects of research, not objects of observation (see Gobo [2008]; Semi [2010]). Indeed, it is not enough to inform research participants, we must also offer something. This entails a deal where participants are able to know and dissent from the work of the researcher. In this sense, as researchers may learn personal details about participants, a wide variety of procedures can be offered to guarantee that participants' points of view and will are respected. In my case, whenever possible I used to either send a copy of the research report/summary and invite the organization's representatives to express their opinions, or discuss personally the outcome of my fieldwork with the participants (especially migrant participants).

## **SAMPLING AND ANALYSIS: SOME PRACTICAL ASPECTS**

During the fieldwork, I conducted 46 in-depth discursive interviews with activists and volunteers, legal advisors, professional workers in NGOs and public officials focused on the reception of refugees and migrants, which added to the 15 ethnographic interviews with migrant persons, amounting to 61 interviews in total (see Tab. 1).

*Table 1 Number of interviews conducted during the fieldwork*

<b>Activists and Volunteers</b>	<b>Legal Advisors</b>	<b>NGO workers</b>	<b>Public Officials</b>	<b>Migrant Persons</b>
28	9	4	5	15

The interviewed participants were selected according to different criteria. In the first paper, to conduct my interviews with members of pro-migrants voluntary groups, I employed a *snowball sampling*. Snowball sampling produces a sample through referrals from people among the study population: during the research, I, first, contacted the coordinators of the voluntary groups for an interview and, subsequently, asked them to indicate up to five members that (for seniority and commitment) represent a useful source of information, in turn asking them to redirect me to other members.

As for the second article, I adopted two main samplings. Whereas the migrant participants, recipients of implicit and informal obstructions, were selected through snowball sampling, the legal advisor who took part in the research were selected through *expert sampling* (Frey, 2018). This means that I drew my sample from people with a high degree of knowledge about legal issues that affect forced migrants' everyday life in Milan. In particular, I identified as key informants those legal advisors who were working or volunteering in six help-desks, selected as the main help providers for refugees and asylum-seekers' legal support in Milan.

Finally, the third paper is mostly an ethnographic *small group research* (Harrington and Fine, 2006). During my research, indeed, I decided to focus on a small-scale phenomenon, the *microcosm* constituted by a group of forced migrants in Naga-har, a drop-in centre. To this end, I collected observational notes and ethnographic interviews which were the result of interactions with the totality of frequent Naga-har's guests. In particular, I conducted ethnographic interviews with 15 regular guests (out of approximately 20 people who were regular guests) who proved willing to partake in the research as interviewees.

Based on this information, I conducted my analysis, influenced by GT. During my research, I advanced through an inductive approach that started from the collection of information and progressed by means of abstraction toward the elaboration of an argument (see Cresswell and Poth, 2018). In this context, the analytical phase represents the moment when information, ideas and interpretations become refined, i.e., the moment when notes and excerpts of interviews are *funnelled* through a coding procedure. For my coding procedure, I was inspired by Strauss and Corbin (1990). In their approach, sampling, collection and analysis are repeated with a progressively narrower focus throughout the research with the goal of deconstructing the data, conceptualising it and then reshaping it. Indeed, in this take, an analysis is not applied to *objectively* reproduce a phenomenon but represents a highly *subjective* endeavour, 'a selective process of representation of a given phenomenon with the aim of highlighting some of its properties' (Gobo, 2008:237).

In summary, it is from this backdrop that this article originates. The writing process, namely the translation from concepts into text, was an integral part of my research. Through it, I refined my point of view and my ideas, and I became more conscious of my research (see Semi, 2010). However, by writing, I also transformed my personal experience in the field and my understanding of the phenomena into a product that has an autonomous form. The personal

words of the author, therefore, become a foreign body that will speak for him/her and therefore will become a product that can be read, interpreted and transformed by the reader. Before letting the rest of my work speak, I wish to dedicate a final short summary of this thesis to accompany the reader through my research.

## **THE COLLECTION OF PAPERS, A BRIEF PRESENTATION**

This thesis is articulated through a collection of three papers concerning the unravelling of the asylum situation in Milan in recent years. Although they were conceived to be understood independently, these papers are part of the same research project and are developed under a unitary vision. This unity is due to a variety of elements. First, it is due to a temporal and spatial *fil rouge* that unites these three papers: they emerge from phenomena that share the same *urban space*, Milan, and the same *temporal unit*, a single fieldwork that extended through the aftermath of the climax of the ‘migration crisis’. They can arguably be considered subsets of a single case study. According to Yin (2008), single case studies can involve more than one unit of analysis by giving attention to subunits. This form, called *embedded case study* (see Yin [2008:43]), is particularly apt for understanding a single case in-depth, since it allows the researcher to examine specific phenomena and address multiple research questions.

In this work, the case study focused on reconstructing Milan’s response to incoming forced migrants but was developed by analysing specific subsets to address various research questions.

In the first paper, therefore, I focus on the engagement of individuals from the socio-political centre of society in pro-migrant initiatives. Based on participant observations and 28 interviews with volunteers from four different volunteer groups, I shed light on the reasons for their commitment and the results of this engagement. In particular, I argue that, on a more personal level, such organisations offer individual volunteers a space to encounter migrants through which volunteers develop a strong sense of outrage and critical awareness of deficiencies in the asylum system while at the same time, these organisations play a significant role within Milan’s urban policy arena. These organisations appear to have an important role in shaping the ways in which Milan has addressed the challenges related to the reception of forced migrants locally, constituting a ‘welcome culture’ that counteracts forces and actors opposing their settlement.

The second paper highlights one of these oppositional forces. It deals with the influence that actors from national authorities can exert at the urban level. It focuses on the *implicit* and *informal* obstructions deployed by the police immigration office (*Questura*), a local manifestation of the Italian Ministry of Interior, to hinder the attribution of legal status to prospective asylum-seekers or to hinder the renewal of documents to refugees. Drawing on ethnographic and semi-structured interviews and information gathered through the time spent at Naga-har’s help-desk, it is argued that the urban space represents not only a space of refuge but rather a setting of *bordering* for refugees, selecting and containing their mobility. By examining the relation between statutory laws and everyday bureaucratic practices, this article highlights how since 2016, restrictive asylum policies have been deployed in Milan in line with the national and European political orientation toward migration. After presenting the perspectives of legal advisors on the reason and magnitude of these praxes, the paper investigates the effects on recipients’ everyday lives. Refugees are directly affected by the obfuscation of legal status produced by those obstructive praxes, which push recipients into the shadow of the law and bear feelings of dependency and uncertainty.

The third paper explores the ways in which drop-in centres may function as enablers of the mobility of forced migrants in cities. Based on the ethnographic study of Naga-har and its regular guests (and on ethnographic interviews), this paper examines the role that these settings play in increasing the mobility of their regular guests. Through its consideration of the stories of individual forced migrants who found resources of mobility in Naga-har, the paper aims to add a new dimension to the debate on urban drop-in centres and the resources that forced migrants can find in urban settings. While drop-in centres are usually perceived as welcoming sites of hospitality that focus on mutual relations and care in enclosed spaces, the paper concludes by suggesting that drop-in centres can serve as spaces of refuge that open access to mobility and where regular guests can find resources to *break free* from their condition as forced migrants. Finally, I give space to the discussion of the three papers in a conclusive chapter where I return to the literature on CoR, highlighting some of its deficiencies and the contributions of my work to the future development of this line of research. In the Appendix, I provide context about the field my work has advanced. Expressly, I add some postscripts aimed at proving the reader with a basic tool for orienting his/herself among the papers by focusing on fundamental dynamics that run before and in parallel with my fieldwork at the European, Italian and especially the city levels. In this section, moreover, I particularly stress the Milanese context and discuss the policies that the local administration has implemented to address the recent migration phenomenon.



## **ARTICLE 1**

### **Motivations and effects of volunteering for refugees: spaces of encounter and political influence of the 'new civic engagement' in Milan**

#### **ABSTRACT**

The article focuses on the new civic engagement often referred to as volunteer welcome initiatives. Indeed, during the misnamed 'migration/refugee crisis', a consistent number of citizens in Europe engaged in practices of helping toward refugees and migrants. Based on participant observations and 28 interviews with volunteers from four different voluntary groups running their activities in Milan, Italy, I argue that such organizations offer a space of encounter and confrontation with migrants throughout which volunteers develop a strong sense of outrage and critical awareness of asylum system deficiencies. Moreover, it is argued that these organizations have had an important role within Milan's urban policy arena, to the extent that they contributed in shaping the ways in which the challenges of receiving the many newcomers were addressed locally.

## INTRODUCTION

Today, Europe in dealing with the aftermath of a period (roughly between 2013 and 2017) of unprecedented inflow of forced migrants during what has wrongly been named a migration/refugee crisis (Castelli Gattinara 2017). While the EU and its member-states have chosen to focus on preventing new arrivals rather than providing for successful policies of inclusion, some cities in Europe have been at the forefront of organising refuge these forced migrants (Youkhana and Sutter 2017). In partnership with more established civil society actors like NGOs, they have claimed their role in facilitating migrants' arrival, passage and settlement (Mayer 2017). However, this event has also seen the emergence of a new actor: 'ordinary' middle-class residents, traditionally placed in the socio-political 'centre', who spontaneously joined the 'welcome movement' and established new voluntary organisations (Karakayali and Kleist 2016). Across European cities, at train stations, along roads, in temporary shelters and through demonstrations, these residents have welcomed the newcomers, demonstrating their refusal to accept the dominant anti-migration discourse and policies of their political leaders (Youkhana and Sutter 2017).

The newly-obtained centrality of this population in pro-migrant activism has come hand-in-hand with the necessity to study their rationale, a previously understudied question that intertwines with other aspects. The reason for this civil society engagement is related to the question of hospitality in cities and Derrida's (2001) quest for *cities of refuge*. This entails an inquiry into the motivations at the foundation of a volunteer activity that is not directed toward individuals with whom volunteers have national or personal bonds (see also Glick Schiller [2016]). It involves underexplored aspects: the wide variety of motivations and drivers, the ways in which it affects the volunteers and its impact on public perception at the city level.

In this paper, I will try to reflect on the possibility of defining this engagement within a process that starts from emotive and deliberate motivations that would encourage the formation of a critical consciousness that spreads at the city level.

In particular, this article explores the emergence of a spontaneous movement of pro-migrant volunteers constituted of residents who come from a middle-class background in Milan, Italy. During the migration/refugee crisis, Milan served as one of the main European hubs of passage and (unstable) settlement for these migrants (Costa 2017). Although little to nothing has been written about it, beginning in summer 2013 in Milan (like in other European cities), thousands of residents joined voluntary associations or formed spontaneous initiatives in an effort to support the large numbers of migrants arriving in the city. Among these helpers have been many longstanding activists as well as many newly-engaged volunteers from the socio-political centre. This movement has contributed to bringing 100,000 people to the streets for a large pro-migrant demonstration in 2017 and orient the public narrative of the city toward a more cosmopolitan and open image (see Section 5).

This exploration is part of a 13-month ethnographic-oriented study based on both participant observation and in-depth interviews with volunteers of four different newly-established volunteer groups. After placing my study in the context of the current literature in the next section, these insights will allow me to discuss the 'detachment in proximity' that characterises the relationship between migrants and native residents in Milan, often marked by indifference. Subsequently, I will focus on the motivation to volunteer and the individual transformations that this activity implies for the 'helpers'. Finally, I will address the significance of the 'welcome movement' for the city of Milan, particularly in terms of public discourse and policy orientation.

## **THE CONTEMPORARY CITY AND THE 'WELCOME MOVEMENT'**

One way to conceptualise the 'welcome movement' that has recently arisen in Europe is to frame it within its urban dimension. From Germany to Spain, many European cities with already well-developed networks of pro-migrant activists have been the setting for the emergence of such mobilisation (Mayer 2017). After all, social scientists have increasingly emphasised the role of the city in supporting migrants' struggle for rights (e.g., Sassen 2013). Isin (2012), for example, has shown how the city can become a battlefield for 'acts of citizenship', while Nail (2015) has sustained the idea that the city has the potential for constituting a 'kosmopolis'. A prime example in this line of thought is the literature on the 'city of refuge' (e.g., Darling 2008; 2010; 2011; Oomen and Baumgärtel 2014), a body of work that has recently emerged in an attempt to answer Derrida's (2001) quest for the development of new urban rights and ethics in favour of refugees. The theory of a city of refuge has generally based its assumptions on the idea that the city is particularly favourable to the growth of pro-migrant initiatives, partially due to its urban 'configuration' (i.e., the type of relationship that can arise between migrants and native residents).

In effect, contemporary accounts view the city as a node of multiple belongings and relations, constantly developing through connections that both stretch beyond the city and collapse into the urban sphere (e.g., Dürschmidt 2000; Amin 2004; Massey 2004). These cities are 'not just nodal points of flows of capital, finance and information, but also central to the flows of people and their social practices and beliefs' (Dürschmidt 2000, 13)—spaces constantly being made through the arrival and accommodation of global flows of diversity into a locality. As emphasised by Massey (2004), cities are not bound territorial units; they are not defined by their circular shape but by the linearity of connections and influences (routes, investments, political influences and cultural identities) that depart from them and spread around the globe.

After all, we can identify a certain cosmopolitan consciousness, an openness to the world, as an element of urban culture (Beck 2006). The same origins of the word 'cosmopolitanism', meaning 'world city', come from the 'opening' of the city (Nail 2015). In resonance with Allport's 'contact hypothesis', therefore, many scholars have suggested that high concentrations of foreigners in cities and the high probability of encounters in everyday life between local inhabitants and non-local residents has an emancipatory potential, by representing a strategic location for the claims of those who lack power (e.g., Sassen 2013). In this regard, therefore, the city acts to orient moments of engagement and encounters: it is a space of encounters and intercultural contacts that can bring out positive developments (see the discussions in Valentine [2008] and Darling [2010]).

This reading, however, struggles to stand comparison with what is happening on the ground in cities. It risks romanticising urban encounters, assuming that mere contact translates into a 'cosmopolitan outlook' and the relational politics of place (Valentine 2008). While the city offers many chances for encountering strangers, this does not mean that everybody will necessarily have these encounters nor that these encounters will be positive (Valentine 2008). Instead, a sort of 'approved detachment' regulates the inter-subjectivity relationship among the inhabitants of the contemporary city (Dürschmidt 2000). On the other hand, the city may emerge as a set of bordering, the scene for a politics of place and othering processes (e.g., Witterborn 2011). It can become the setting in which close proximity generates comparisons

between different social groups in terms of special treatment, thus aggravating the dynamics of rejection and reciprocal mistrust (Valentine 2008).

Therefore, I argue that we fare better if we consider these pro-migrant initiatives in light of a different understanding of pro-migrant volunteering vis-à-vis the city. In particular, I wish to refer to two lines of research, one that concerns the individual transformation of pro-migrant volunteer activities and the other referring to a more public and political transformation.

On one hand, the literature on volunteering has pointed to the need to engineer contacts that might be termed 'meaningful', namely encounters that 'actually change values and translate beyond the specifics of the individual moment into a more general positive respect for—rather than merely tolerance of—others' (Valentine 2008, 325). Indeed, if proximity is not enough to bring about a reciprocal appreciation, let alone solidarity, this can be at least achieved by spaces that foster an urban politics of negotiating propinquity and the 'geographical juxtaposition between physical spaces, overlapping communities, contrasting cultural practices' (Amin 2004, 39). These spaces have been called 'spaces of encounter' (De Jong and Ataç 2017) or 'spaces of care' (Conradson 2003) and encompass spaces, such as drop-in centres or day-centres, where asylum-seekers, refugees, other migrants and non-migrants can meet. In particular, the reciprocity and proximity to the 'stranger' allows volunteers to alter their manner of responding to these encounters and enhance their self-knowledge and evolution of the self (Darling 2011b). In addition, as emphasised by Williams (2016), bringing the ideal of care into view can contribute to cultivating a 'cosmopolitan and relational sensibility' that is fundamental for responding to the call for equipping the city with an ethos of hospitality, as prefigured by Derrida (2001).

On the other hand, Darling (2008; 2010), following Amin (2004), discussed micro-politics, which seek to address how the city, not just individuals, respond to migrants' presence. In particular, Darling (2010) tried to demonstrate through the activities of the UK-based network of the City of Sanctuary's initiatives how the notion of a 'city of refuge' focuses primarily upon building a micropolitical affective culture of hospitality within the city by circulating ideas of responsibility, empathy and cosmopolitan 'global ethics' that help in developing a coalition of supporting actors. In particular, he showed how building support (by enlarging the base of supporters) is crucial to influence the ways in which asylum is both viewed in the city by an individual and on a more macropolitical level. On an individual level, these micro-politics have been associated with an ethic of care, namely 'the proactive interest of one person in the well-being of another' (Conradson 2003, 451). On a wider scale, these micropolitics are part of a project not simply attempting to welcome the newcomers but rather reimagining and contesting the current migrant governance (Darling 2010). In this way, the local political arena is conceived 'as an arena of claims and counter-claims, agreements and coalitions' (Darling 2008, 60) throughout which micropolitical actions aspire to create resonance across several political levels.

On the basis of this understanding, I argue that the pro-migrant initiatives following the misnamed 'European refugee crisis' can be seen as both a means by which a (personal) transformative engagement is possible and an instrument that orients this involvement into potentially political actions. When native citizens, even those who have long been considered 'apolitical', experience face-to-face relations through pro-migrant volunteering, bonds of solidarity can be formed (de Jong and Ataç 2017). As seen with respect to the transformative dimension of 'space of care', it can be noted that social relations turn into cosmopolitan aspirations of justice (Glick Schiller 2016; for an account on cosmopolitan justice, see Beck [2006]). I assert that in this urban movement, we can find a strong demand for solidarity that

stretches outward and plays a significant role in a cultural battle between a culture of rejection and a welcoming culture.

This article captures the significance of pro-migrant mobilisation during the migration/refugee crisis in Europe. According to Darling (2008; 2010), for example, the core of pro-migrant mobilisation in the UK (in Sheffield in particular) is a work that implies the inaction of a process. This process starts with the engagement of volunteers who extend a welcome to asylum-seekers and refugees in micro-settings and peaks with the development of an ethos of hospitality that affects the entire city. Similarly, many initiatives carried out by volunteers during the migration/refugee crisis combine face-to-face activity with a cultural and political orientation at the city level.

### **FIELDWORK AND METHODOLOGY**

The paper is developed from fieldwork conducted in Milan, Italy. Following the 'European refugee/migration crisis' (that had begun in Italy in 2011; see Campesi [2011]; Fontanari [2016a]; Castelli Gattinara [2017]), Milan has seen the arrival of hundreds of thousands of 'forced migrants' into its territory. While some of these refugees were motivated to settle and others were just passing through, usually via train or bus, Milan has witnessed the arrival and 'visible presence' of incoming migrants in specific parts of the city, notably its central railway station, especially between 2013 and 2014. Beginning in the summer of 2013, this situation determined a strong response from citizens: a 'wave of generosity' hit the central railway station, the setting where migrants became acquainted with Milan for the first time. Many locals who had witnessed the dire needs of the newcomers spontaneously provided help and solidarity by joining volunteer associations or forming spontaneous initiatives. This led to a novel form of activism and non-traditional civic engagement, a ferment from the civil society similar to ones arising in other European cities (e.g., Cabot 2016; de Jong and Ataç 2017; Mayer 2017). This mobilisation mobilised the organizations of the civil society, an infrastructure of welcoming that spread throughout the city and took over many care and first aid tasks from private actors and public authorities: paediatricians and doctors voluntarily assisted underage and adult migrants, private citizens brought food and clothes and members of Muslim faith-based organisations offered linguistic mediation. In what appeared to be a spontaneous process, these initiatives have endured beyond the 'emergency' phase during 2013–2014 and have evolved to offer 'integration-oriented' services.

In order to investigate these initiatives, this qualitative research was developed in two steps. In a first phase (from May to September 2017), I applied participant observation by volunteering in one newly-established voluntary group<sup>12</sup>. By volunteering over an extended period, observing became an important research practice through which I developed an awareness of the day-to-day interactions, stories, events and moments that represented a useful basis for reflection.

In a second period (roughly between September and November 2017), these reflections were enriched by semi-structured face-to-face interviews. The interviews' sample was drawn from volunteers from four different Milanese voluntary groups: SOS Emergenza Rifugiati Milano

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<sup>12</sup> In particular, during this time, I volunteered for SOS Emergenza Rifugiati Milano offering support for learning Italian to the guests of a reception centre.

(henceforth SOSERM)<sup>13</sup>, No Walls Corelli<sup>14</sup>, Progetto Arca<sup>15</sup> and Memoriale dello Shoah<sup>16</sup>. These four groups either started anew or significantly redirected their action toward forced migrants following the ‘refugee/migration crisis’. They occupy a middle space between established NGOs and social movements, and while their political profiles may lie somewhere to the left of the spectrum, they appear ideologically diverse, including a variety of religious and secular groups. To conduct my interviews, I employed a snowball sampling. Snowball sampling produces a sample through referrals from people among the study population. It is particularly suitable for researching a population whose characteristics and magnitude are *a priori* unknown (as in our case). Thus, during the research, I, first, contacted the coordinators of the voluntary groups for an interview and, subsequently, asked them to indicate up to five members that (for seniority and commitment) represent a useful source of information, in turn asking them to redirect me to other members. Through snowball sampling, I collected 28 in-depth interviews with volunteers. In addition, I had 9 complementary interviews with public officials or NGO workers. These interviews gave greater insight into the practice, rationalities and outcomes that characterise this Milanese infrastructure of welcoming. However, the initial part of the interviews with the volunteers was devoted to assess the socio-demographic profile of the interviewees. This part of the interviews allowed me to appreciate the wide range of age characterizing the demographic of the interviewed volunteers (from 18 to 80 years in age, with a peak from 60 years old on). Moreover, the information obtained by interviewing showed that there was a predominance of female volunteers (21 over 7) and confirmed the prevalence of volunteers with a middleclass background (24 people worked or used to work in *white-collar* professions).

Lastly, I must point out that this investigation is part of a 13-month ethnographic study (between January 2017 and February 2018) during which I also conducted 61 in-depth interviews with volunteers, civil servants, legal advisors and forced migrants in Milan. Such endeavours allowed me to more closely examine the ‘asylum question’ in this city, an aspect that has proved crucial for understanding the overall significance of pro-migrant volunteerism in the Milanese context.

## **OTHERING AT THE LOCAL-LEVEL: ‘CULTURE OF REJECTION’ AND INDIFFERENCE**

As advanced in a well-known essay by Gupta and Ferguson (1992), the field of immigration is one of the areas in which the *politics of space* (that is, the process through which states and national elites make a space ‘meaningful’ by assigning reified and naturalised cultural identities to territories) and the *politics of otherness* (the production of difference for political, economic and ideological aims) associate very directly. At the centre of this association are forced migrants who have fled violence and/or hardship to find themselves stuck in a context of temporal displacement, violations of human rights and economic difficulty (e.g., Vacchiano

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<sup>13</sup> Established in 2014 spontaneously by a group of residents who provided first aid to migrants in Milan’s Central railway station, SOSERM was subsequently recognised by the municipality and evolved to offer support for learning Italian in reception centres.

<sup>14</sup> Coeval with SOSERM, it provides activities and Italian classes to migrants in reception centres.

<sup>15</sup> In particular, this is the voluntary group linked to Progetto Arca, a relevant Third Sector organisation that provides assistance to homeless and migrant people in Milan. Its volunteers (more than 1,000 in total) are involved in a range of activities for the benefit of Italian as well foreign people, from food and clothing distribution to Italian classes.

<sup>16</sup> This term includes individual citizens and members of faith-driven groups (mainly Community of Sant’Egidio and parishioners) who voluntarily run an informal reception centre. This first-aid activity was conducted every summer between 2015 and 2017 in Milan’s Holocaust Memorial (i.e., Memoriale della Shoah).

2011; Witteborn 2011; Kersch and Mishtal 2016): a world of connections (Amin 2004; Massey 2004) in which power relations produce cultural differences, and borders between 'them' and 'us' are continuously reproduced through the restriction of immigration, where excluding discourse and a politics of space allocate migrants to heterotopias such as reception centres.

We can have a good approximation of this dynamic from the ways in which, in recent years, the European Union and its member-states have reacted to the misnamed 'refugee/migration crisis', a reaction that relied on a politics of otherness and the securitisation of forced migration (Kersch and Mishtal 2016). The issue of immigration has quickly become a major public concern and measures like the ones included in the 2015 European Agenda on Migration (e.g. the quick sorting of migrants in the so-called hotspot centres) have arguably represented the building blocks of a 'European politics of fear' (Castelli Gattinara 2017, 11). Italy has been no exception: it introduced a controversial law called the 'Minniti-Orlando', which limited the legal safeguards for asylum-seekers, and has tolerated xenophobic viewpoints on migration (Panzerà 2017). Mass media have extensively reported on the (supposedly) criminal behaviour of migrants and aggravated public anxiety (Campesi 2014; Castelli Gattinara 2017).

This reaction has been fraught with consequences in both the public and private dimensions. On one hand, forced migrants have occupied a specific 'discursive location' (Witteborn 2011). Migrants have often been described in media discourse as outsiders that need to be quarantined and as threats to national socioeconomic, cultural and physical security (Castelli Gattinara 2018). A negative public discourse has barged into a big chunk of the public opinion in Italy, as demonstrated in opinion polls (e.g., see Pew Research Centre [2016]). This has cemented what we can arguably call a 'culture of rejection'. Anti-migrant campaigns have prospered in Italian cities and towns (Marengo 2015; Castelli Gattinara 2018), even in Milan where this 'culture of rejection' has taken on a variety of different expressions, ranging from residents on anti-migrant patrol in specific neighbourhoods<sup>17</sup> to vocal opposition of residents and far-right parties and the opening of reception centres<sup>18</sup>.

In the private dimension, however, this 'culture of rejection' has intertwined with other difficulties that affect migrants' lives. The insertion, in Milan and elsewhere, in locations (such as reception centres and squatted buildings) physically at the margins of the city and limited access to language classes have restricted social relations with other residents (see Kersch and Mishtal [2016]). The consequences are often loneliness and mental stress; as one migrant participant summarised:

*"I've been in Milan so long. For me, Milan è la città dei frettolosi [is the city of precipitous people] because nobody talks to you, everybody's busy with the phones [...] Try to know me, who's me, what kind of experience I have in my life [...] Talk to them, talk to these people [...] That's the problem here, Milan is so silent they're killing us. They don't talk to us. We don't know whether they hate us, whether they love us, what they're thinking"*

However, this 'incarceration' of 'others' in a separate frame is also linked to the 'incarceration of the natives', namely the distance that many long-term residents feel towards the newcomer residents. The feeling of unfamiliarity with migrants ran through my conversations with native residents. The problem is one of contact and communication across separated socio-spheres. In

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<sup>17</sup> [http://www.z3xmi.it/pagina.phtml?\\_id\\_articolo=6889-No-alle-ronde-private-a-Porta-Venezia.html](http://www.z3xmi.it/pagina.phtml?_id_articolo=6889-No-alle-ronde-private-a-Porta-Venezia.html)

<sup>18</sup> [https://milano.corriere.it/notizie/cronaca/16\\_ottobre\\_31/caserma-montello-arrivati-primi-profughi-60-donne-bambini-dfece2fa-9f54-11e6-9daf-5530d930d472.shtml?refresh\\_ce-cp](https://milano.corriere.it/notizie/cronaca/16_ottobre_31/caserma-montello-arrivati-primi-profughi-60-donne-bambini-dfece2fa-9f54-11e6-9daf-5530d930d472.shtml?refresh_ce-cp)

this sense, the process of othering at work exacerbated the 'detachment in proximity' by juxtaposing different socio-spheres as 'ourselves' and 'others', a shared experience for inhabitants of contemporary cities, as suggested by Dürrschmidt (2000). This intensified what many participants identified with a sentiment of indifference, if not open irritation, toward newcomer migrants and made the city into a setting of opposition, disconnection and disinterest between its different populations.

## **VOLUNTEERING: MOTIVATIONS AND INDIVIDUAL IMPLICATIONS**

By drawing mainly on the literature regarding volunteerism, this section explores the dynamics driving individuals to volunteer in pro-migrant initiatives and their effects on the engaged individuals. Questions about what drives people in Europe to help refugees and the impact volunteering has on these individuals are of particular interest, especially in light of negative discourse about the arrival of refugees in Europe.

As shown by the authors who investigated the *Willkommenskultur* in Germany (e.g., Fleischmann and Steinhilper 2017; Karakayali 2017; Mayer 2017), the image of the 'migration crisis' activated a particular group of citizens. Although pro-migrant volunteers were a minority in society and originated in faith-based circles or left-wing groups prior to the recent upsurge in refugee solidarity, this emergency has strongly mobilised ordinary middle-class citizens who have traditionally been placed in the socio-political 'centre'. These newly engaged volunteers are often considered apolitical, meaning that many of them had never been politically active (Hamann and Karakayali 2016). For the bulk of these new volunteers, who constituted the backbone of the voluntary infrastructure of welcome in many cities, neither religious nor political parameters played a major factor (see Hamann and Karakayali 2016). Instead, their commitment appears to have brought new motivations to the pro-migrant initiatives and developed vis-à-vis the 'refugee/migration crisis'. Similarly, in her work on international humanitarianism, Malkki (2015) claimed that the volunteers' 'need to help' does not originate primarily from altruistic (religious or humanitarian-driven) motives but from drives associated with 'self-escape, self-loss, dehumanisation, self-humanisation, self-transformation, the care of the self, the relation of self to others and the relation of self to the world' (Malkki 2015, 10; see also Wuthnow, 1991).

Next, volunteers' motivations will be scrutinised. We will see, in particular, that along with 'emotive' motivations (moral emotions), there also exist more 'deliberate' motives such as acquisition of knowledge and social contacts.

### **MORAL EMOTIONS**

In the study of solidarity movements that arose during the 'migration/refugee crisis', emotions have emerged as particularly significant, especially the so-called 'moral emotions' (Karakayali 2017; Milan 2018). These are considered 'feelings of approval and disapproval based on moral intuitions and principles' (Milan 2017, 186) and include sentiments such as guilt, pride, shame, outrage and compassion. Moral emotions in particular are linked to shared cultural meanings and cognitive understandings and orient individuals toward what is right or wrong (Jasper 2011). In this case, these emotions emerged as particularly relevant during the first stage of mobilisation. Based on an understanding of the situation as 'outrageous', the informants felt compelled to volunteer. This situation is well-represented by the next vignette narrated by Laura, a volunteer for No-Walls:

*"There is an episode in particular. While I was in the station, in front of me I saw a group of*

*Syrian women with kids. Then, a little girl run toward me and by gestures she asked if I could have handed [the fruit in my hand] to her...I don't know why but at that point I felt a need to help."*

Episodes like Laura's represent 'moral shocks' initiated by a proximate encounter with migrants in need. Beyond direct episodes, however, moral emotions were generally considered a prominent trigger (more than other elements like political or religious beliefs) generated by the diffusion of information concerning the arrival of migrants in Milan (on emotions and movements see also Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta [2001]). This is also the case for those few volunteers who were previously politically active like Luciano (a volunteer for Arca), who stated that the decision to get involved in pro-migrant volunteerism represented a sort of moral necessity related to information he read in newspaper articles.

*"I had the need to do something, we cannot sit back [...] It should spring a decision from there, in everyone [...] It should be normal. If you hear of someone's hardship, someone who is sick, helpless ... you must act."*

In conclusion, whether through indirect or direct episodes, moral emotions constituted the first step in the decision to volunteer, raising moral feelings that incline people to take action.

#### **CURIOSITY AND OPENNESS**

A second source of motivation (which often intertwines with moral emotions) is an imaginative/intellectual curiosity. This attracted many of the participants to volunteer, as Luciano describes in the following excerpt.

*"I wished I could know the world, this is sort of a way. Here, you see people from around the world."*

The desire to 'know the world' is a common reason for volunteering. For example, Renato, a volunteer with Arca, spoke at length about his deep love of travel and the nexus between that and his decision to volunteer.

*"I noted that who doesn't like to travel doesn't like volunteering either."*

He added:

*"The fear of being cut off from what happens in the rest of the society is a drive. The fact of being curious about it is crucial."*

Renato's words suggest another interesting aspect concerning curiosity: for many of the informants, this meant a curiosity toward a new societal dynamic like the arrival of migrants from afar. As will be seen, volunteering allowed for the establishment of new kinds of social connections—with migrants (as we will see) and other volunteers—that 'enriched' participants. When volunteers manage to create inter-personal connections, helping others becomes more stimulating and provides a reason to continue volunteering. Furthermore, it casts a different light on volunteering, which becomes less a matter of selflessness and more of self-serving, as we can see from the next interview with Carla, a volunteer for Memoriale:

*"[Volunteering for me is] to go out of my cocoon. Since I stopped working quite young, because of my children, volunteering was a means for connecting with other people. It enriches you because you learn much, it gives you meaning beyond your family life."*

In light of these testimonies, we can argue that volunteering originates from complex motives that include both 'deliberate' and 'emotive' drives. In line with accounts on 'post-modern volunteering' (Ambrosini, 2016), this phenomenon can be read within an 'individual expression' perspective: a way to express one's individuality (e.g., in terms of moral choices), which in turn is beneficial to both the helper and the helped.

### **CARING AND TRANSFORMATIONS**

As demonstrated in this study through activities such as teaching Italian and local services orientation, volunteering entails engaging with people, so personal relationships are unavoidable. In this sense, volunteering might be viewed as an activity of engagement not with anonymous masses but with particular persons (Malkki 2015). During my time at SOSERM and through in-depth interviews, it became clear that strong personal bonds developed through regular contacts between volunteers and migrants. According to Smets (2011), social contact between members of minorities and majorities can develop from a first encounter to relations of mutual help through positive and regular contact. It is not surprising, therefore, that regular encounters between volunteers and migrants can lead to the development of emotional bonds. In this sense, it was common to hear from the volunteers that they established significant relationships with particular migrants, even relationships of friendship. These findings shed light on how volunteering is grounded not just in vertical relations (e.g., 'host versus guest'; see Conradson [2003]) but also in horizontally-oriented, bi-lateral and inter-subjective reciprocal exchanges resembling friendship. In this regard, whether conducted in drop-ins or reception centres, volunteering seems to open the space for caring relationships: it offers proximity and mutuality in terms of giving and receiving care, attentiveness and consideration. This theme is illustrated in the following quote from Giovanni (a volunteer for Memoriale), who spoke at length about the difficulties that volunteering implies.

*"The difficulties come when you face the suffering and you don't know what to say, what to do [...] Behind this feeling, there's the inability to softly enter into others' lives because it means to bear their problems. It means that once you entered into somebody's life, you take and bring his/her suffering at home [...] In this sense, for me, volunteering is to say, 'I care about you'. This means a movement of the self: I go out from myself."*

Giovanni's words show how the ability to care about others involves a 'movement of the self', a transformative process. This transformative process was a common topic during my time at SOSERM and during my interviews with other volunteers. Through them, I was able to understand how the effects of such transformation reach the individuals' most personal traits, as Maria's (long-term volunteer for SOSERM) next quote illustrates.

*"The transformation is really personal. Working in fashion, I was truly a 'fashion victim' ... well, now I don't care anymore! You see these people, their problems, and you feel silly."*

As highlighted by Hamington (2007), encounters become an opportunity for transforming individually. Through the opportunity to 'encounter eye-to-eye' and care, volunteers receive something in return. Francesca (volunteer for Arca) describes how volunteering transformed

her attitude about life:

*"I gain more than I gave. It's a big deal for my view of life, my priority, cultural enrichment."*

The opportunity to volunteer (by which an individual meets and cares for another individual) can therefore be seen as a device through which a transformative process emerges. To what extent and in which direction will be evaluated in the following section.

### **INJUSTICES AND AWARENESS**

In this section, I will focus on the implication of volunteering as the bearer of a sensibility that encourages the formation of a critical consciousness. Volunteering often offers the opportunity to become acquainted with the individuals being helped, but this comes with other implications. In the previous section, we saw how the relationship between the helper and the helped through volunteering implies a process of caring. I argue that this characteristic in turn favours an identification with the needs of others that can be captured by the notion of 'becoming-minor', a philosophical concept that describes an intense identification with the conditions of dominated groups of society (e.g., women) and a prerequisite for resisting oppressive forms of power (Deleuze and Guattari 1986).

The movement from 'getting to know' to 'identifying with' is, likewise, a common dynamic for these volunteers. Anna, for example, was among the young volunteers for Memoriale. Like others, she pondered on how multiple encounters with migrants led her to discover shared identities and similarities with them:

*"I cannot understand this rage toward the 'stranger'... I don't see them stranger. I mean, when you talk, you discover they're your age, they go to school..."*

Anna's words remind us of how identification is connected to another aspect: an increased awareness of migrants' situations. Indeed, by connecting a population like forced migrants with members of 'mainstream society' (like middle-class volunteers), volunteering exposes the latter to injustices that characterise migrants' daily life that would otherwise have been unheard-of to volunteers. As illustrated by the next excerpt from SOSERM volunteer Natalia, for many participants, volunteering is a means of transcending common knowledge about migration.

*"I've often questioned my involvement during this time because it's hard when you hear this news about migrants...that they steal, do drugs...for me, it's impossible not to question [...] But even if you're doubtful then, somehow by volunteering you realize [the truth] that they're not evil."*

Moreover, Natalia shed light on how much the 'grip on the reality' that develops through volunteering can contribute in dispelling doubts and myths about migrants. Volunteers often developed very detailed and deep knowledge of the 'migration crisis'. As many participants explained to me, getting to know the migrants and their struggles through volunteering is not self-contained but a first step for cultivating a deeper knowledge that advances, for example, through attending conferences or reading specialised books. This increased awareness of the realities of forced migration often generates a critique of the inadequate state of the asylum system, as in the following quote from Laura.

*“Fifteen years ago, during some migrants’ demonstrations, I wondered why they protest if they have the status. I thought: what do they want? Now, I changed my perspective. I realised that getting the asylum, it’s not the end, it doesn’t give you all the instruments and protections.”*

Volunteering has the potential to urge individuals to question the logic, discourse and myths that surround the ‘migration crisis’ and its governance. In conclusion, it allows volunteers to be outraged by structural injustices, sympathise with migrants and even rise to their defence.

## **THE ROLES OF WELCOMING INITIATIVES WITHIN THE ‘URBAN ARENA’**

Volunteering is not an individual activity: the individual ‘need to help’ (Malkki, 2015) is associated with other people’s need to help through the collective work in a group. This has occurred, in this case, in a rather spontaneous way, as in the case of SOSERM, which arose ‘through the grapevine’—a call for volunteers was made on social media, which soon summoned hundreds of people<sup>19</sup>—as well as of No-Walls and Memoriale.

In this case, however, the existence of voluntary groups is crucial to allowing individuals to translate their own need to volunteer into the opportunity to act and see what happens with their own eyes. By merging motivated individuals, volunteer groups link up single people into an organisation that in turn federates with other groups, constituting an infrastructure of welcome that plays an important role at the local level. With regard to the European context, it has been noted that cities that have been at the forefront of the ‘migration/refugee crisis’ increasingly constitute ‘arenas’ where players from the public, private and civil society sectors compete to orient the response of the city (Mayer, 2017). The city, therefore, represents a strategic site for migrants’ claims, and just as new bordering dynamics are mounting thanks to novel forms of political participation, ‘the city can bring together multiple very diverse struggles and at the same time engender a larger, more encompassing push for a new normative order’ (Sassen, 2013, 70). It is no surprise then that the process of re-bordering currently taking place across Europe has spurred passionate opposition by civil society constituted of groups offering concrete help to migrants (Stivens, 2017).

Next, we will evaluate the impact that newly-established volunteer groups have had on both public opinion and local governance on migration in Milan as part of the ‘welcome movement’. First, I will discuss how these groups expressed a ‘welcome culture’ that opposed and even counter-acted the effect of the ‘culture of rejection’. Then, I will use the example of a local policy in order to explain how the Milanese ‘welcome movement’ shaped (and was shaped by) the decisions of the local administration.

### **WELCOME CULTURE: AWARENESS-RAISING WORK**

At first informally, but increasingly evolving their own organisational structures, civil society groups not only collected donations and provided food, clothes, hospitality and orientation to migrants. These organisations (including the participants’ volunteer groups) have also played a salient role in what we can argue is a cultural battle with the goal to make public opinion aware of the importance of values like solidarity and welcoming. Indeed, for the leaders of the groups, including Carlo (the author of the next excerpt and important member of Milan’s Holocaust Memorial as well as a volunteer in Memoriale), groups’ activities are motivated also by the desire to give a strong signal:

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<sup>19</sup> From the interview conducted with Susy, volunteer and founder of SOSERM.

*“The decision [to host refugees in the Holocaust Memorial], from the philosophical point of view is due to the fact that here we live under a sign: ‘indifference’. This is our symbol, it lies at the entrance and Liliana Segre [the president and founder of the Holocaust Memorial] wanted this sign in order for us to remember the consequences of the indifference. To fight against indifference is part of our philosophy.”*

To this end, over the years, the Milanese ‘welcome movement’ has developed some common practices to oppose anti-migrant rhetoric and turn the city into a welcoming setting. Indeed, members of newly established ‘welcome initiatives’ often carry out awareness-raising work with neighbours, local politicians and the media by organising and running events. The next quote is from Simone, coordinator of the volunteers at Memoriale, and well explains the prominence that this awareness-raising work has had for the groups:

*“To involve many people was strategic for us. [...] We tried to appeal to the residents. [For this purpose] we tried to explain the migration phenomenon to our volunteers and the Milanese people by asking journalist to come or by communicating directly. [...] That was fundamental: dragged many people to us and generate a culture of welcome”*

This ‘involvement’ work was realized, in particular, through events (neighbourhood festivals as well as other activities such as writing articles for local newspapers) that configured micro-political ‘tactical interventions’ (Darling, 2008), practices that work to modify both the individual sensibility and the ‘macro-political disposition’. Indeed, these kinds of activities are designed to reduce anti-migrant sentiments through personal encounters and potential connections. Moreover, they aim to demonstrate publicly that in Milan, ‘if the indifference is contagious, the solidarity is equally transmittable’, as said by Simone. This dimension is acknowledged also by Tina who works and holds a managing position in Arca:

*“Thanks to the volunteers we made an important work with the community. [...] There will always be critics, people who say that migrants ‘steal’ jobs, [...] but we noted that activities like meeting at school between the students and the guests of our centres, accompanied by our volunteers, are an effective way to mitigate the opposition”*

In this regard, there is convincing evidence that the existence of this ‘welcome culture’ has reduced the momentum of the specular ‘culture of rejection’. In the last years, indeed, Milan has arguably worked the hardest to sustain its self-image as an ‘open city’. In May 2017, the municipality launched a pro-migrant demonstration to reiterate the necessity to extend solidarity toward asylum-seekers and refugees vis-à-vis the national securitarian approach that was mounting. This demonstration gathered approximately 100,000 people in the streets,<sup>20</sup> and among them politicians, Third Sector workers and voluntary groups.

We can argue that part of the success goes to the work of the civic society organizations. In particular, their activities had contributed significantly to the mediation of residents’ initial opposition to the arrival and settlement of asylum-seekers in specific neighbourhoods. For example, these civil society initiatives were able to reduce the breeding grounds of far-right propaganda concerning the opening of a reception centre in via Montello<sup>21</sup>. Moreover, they were

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<sup>20</sup> <http://www.lastampa.it/2017/05/20/milano/in-marcia-contro-i-muri-a-milano-il-corteo-a-sostegno-dei-migranti-REgS0YUzZiz74yPAIDpzFJ/pagina.html>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.meltingpot.org/Milano-Perche-la-due-giorni-alla-Montello-del-18-e-19-Marzo.html#.W4adq-gzY2w>

able to dampen the hostile attitudes of many residents toward Eritrean and Ethiopian migrants in the Porta Venezia neighbourhood<sup>22</sup>.

In this last neighbourhood has operated Paola's parochial group, a pensioner who has volunteered in different groups (mainly SOS ERM and Memoriale). Together with her group-mates, Paola carried out an awareness-raising work with neighbours, by organising and running a series of events:

*"In spring 2015, we threw a 'charity day' [...] We brought together different groups in order to raise the idea that we should solidarize with the migrants. [That day], we organized a football game and other games; this for stirring up feelings and in this context some hundred people were present."*

In conclusion, it appears that through the presence of support groups for migrants, a network of churches, anti-racist activists and newly-established volunteer groups, anti-migrant mobilisation can be counteracted.

### **WELCOME INITIATIVES VIS-A-VIS THE LOCAL ADMINISTRATION**

Perhaps, the most telling example of the impact that these groups have had on the *local arena* concerns the policy and the measures for the assistance of the 'transit migrants'. From 2013 to (at least) 2016, Milan has seen the passage of more than one hundred of thousands of prospective asylum seekers and refugees in transit from Southern Italy to Central Europe (Denaro, 2016). In October 2013, the local administration inaugurated an innovative policy aiming to assist those migrants in transit (Costa, 2017). Through 'sistema profughi' (the name chosen for this policy), Milan's municipality agreed to give board and lodging, medical care, clothes and accommodation to migrants that (by law) the local administration was not bound to assist. From the beginning, civil society organisations (which in many cases were born out of the desire to aid the migrants in transit) were fundamental. In particular, civil society groups were the first to bring food, clothes and linguistically support these people, while signalling the situation to the municipality. As illustrated by the next excerpt from the assistant of the Councillor for the Social Policies of Milan, Valentina, the local administration was moved to respond by these groups, because initially oblivious to the situation:

*"The press stopped talking about the migration in that period [...] thus we were really surprised when the first groups contacted us to point out this phenomenon of stop-and-go. [...] This policy started like this, with civil society groups telling us of these arrivals in the last weeks. These watchmen were really important."*

Civil society groups played a strong role even after the establishment of the policy by the municipality. Indeed, they kept on bringing food and clothes and assist people. The sudden surge of pro-migrant civic engagement drove the municipal administration in Milan to take a step to incorporate and steer this spontaneous ferment. Over time, the municipality has therefore co-opted and 'regimented' the spontaneous activity of the volunteers by producing guidelines and creating an official volunteer group called SOSERM out of the various volunteers who rendered their services at Central station<sup>23</sup>. It also gave honours and prizes to acclaim and recognise the work of the volunteers, and a new programme was launched to incentivise people to 'adopt' individual refugees or families (see Costa [2017]).

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<sup>22</sup> <http://www.thetwigmagazine.com/2016/04/08/cambio-passo/>

<sup>23</sup> This occurrence was exposed to me by both Susy, founder of the group of volunteers that after constituted the core of SOSERM, and the public official responsible for the voluntary sector in Milan's municipality

Obviously, these actions can be interpreted as a strategy to use volunteers to compensate for structural deficits of local welfare (Milligan 2007). It can even be understood as a way to foster an apolitical type of engagement, one that does not challenge the local governance (Mayer 2017). Although these perspectives are legitimate, the fieldwork suggests that the civil society groups continued to maintain a critical distance and influence the approach of the municipality<sup>24</sup>. One statement by Simone, the coordinator of Memoriale, explains the dynamic that evolved between the municipal administration and these voluntary groups:

*“Along with other groups, we tried to influence the municipal decisions. [...] In this respect, Milan is peculiar. The decisions from the local administration orientated us, but we also orientated the local administration. Indeed, there’s a network, a capability to activate a huge number of volunteers and supporters.”*

This reconstruction is substantiated also by Valentina, the assistant of the Councillor for the Social Policies. In the next quote, indeed, Valentina observes how the work and the presence of the civil society organisations helped in mitigating the hostility, popularising this policy and, thus, easing the way for municipality to sustain the policy over time:

*“The civic ferment created a real empathy with the migration phenomenon for many people, because we used to ‘live’ that phenomenon in our daily lives. [...] Perhaps, the visibility and the fact that everyone could have come to see what was happening brought to an identification and a climate...through which just once a small anti-migrant demonstration led by Northern League leaders occurred”*

Ultimately, the observations presented in the last two paragraphs seem to underline a key element. They appear to challenge the assertions on the apolitical dimension of the engagement of such groups. As Simone stresses in his next quote, the ‘welcome movement’ has proven to be able to orient public debate and local policies in a city like Milan:

*“These are important aspects: cultural, concrete helping, political aspects like the communication with the municipality. We must consider these element altogether, since asking to the municipality to take a position like they did with the transit migrants means you need to build a consensus, neighbourhood by neighbourhood.”*

## CONCLUSION

Throughout this article, I have attempted to show how the experiences of pro-migrant volunteers may represent a means for opposing the wave of anti-migrant discourse and policies Europeans are facing in the aftermath of the misnamed ‘migration/refugee crisis’, an antidote primarily directed against a xenophobic public discourse and individual indifference. In particular, by offering a conceptual reading of middle-class citizens’ engagement in pro-migrant volunteer activities in the context of Milan, this article shed light on volunteering as an enabler of transformation for both individuals and the public. This study has demonstrated how moral emotions and curiosity drive individuals to volunteer, as volunteering offers these individuals the possibility to enrich their knowledge and their connections with others. Moreover, volunteering favours a ‘relationship of care’ between the helper and the helped, and this can prelude to developing a greater awareness of the structural injustices marking migrants’ daily

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<sup>24</sup> For example, they convinced the municipality to extend the period of assistance in their center well beyond the initial 8 days (see the Appendix)

lives. This dynamic connects with a broader process; by catalysing the efforts of multiple individuals in different volunteer organisations, volunteering has a remarkable public impact, especially on the public discourse of the city. In other words, through this paper, we have shown how volunteering can serve as an act of contestation of a migration governance that has increasingly been based on 'othering' logics.

These findings stand in opposition to accounts that advance an apolitical understanding of such initiatives. In resonance with critics of contemporary humanitarian care, as described by Ticktin (2011), this take on the phenomenon dismisses the new 'welcome culture' as 'not political enough', namely based on a compassion that ultimately reproduces structural inequalities and a neutral notion of humanity (e.g., Karkayali 2017). Instead, this paper is in line with works that stress the political potential of this urban phenomenon. Indeed, research by de Jong and Ataç (2017) and Fleischmann and Steinhilper (2017), based on the analyses of emerging refugee support organisations in Austria and Germany, unmasked the myth of apolitical volunteering for refugees by ordinary citizens, while Buckel (2016) and Glick Schiller (2016) sustained the political subversive character of pro-refugee solidarity, which has the courage to repudiate the dominant anti-migrant discourse and policies. However, while these works mainly focus on intervention in the public discourse, this paper aimed to illustrate its impact on both the private and public dimensions, as well as the nexus between the two. This positioning originates from the belief that these two 'sides' need to be read together as part of a process based on a renovated connectivity in proximity between volunteers and migrants and between people (i.e., volunteers) who share a similar need to help.

In conclusion, I wish to discuss both the empirical limits and the future prospects of this study. As seen, the study is based on a qualitative endeavour developed through a single case, the city of Milan. It is my belief that the city of Milan offers a privileged vantage point. This because Milan has had both a rich history of volunteerism (Ambrosini 2016) and a particular relevance in the recently-called migration/refugee crisis. However, a comparison of multiple case studies could offer a more comprehensive understanding of the role and significance that pro-migrant volunteer groups, especially newly-established groups, have played in the past and can play in the future. In this respect, an interesting future prospect may come from monitoring how this welcome movement develops in response to more recent dynamics. In particular, the fading of the 'crisis' from the public eye and the increasingly aggressive stance against forced migrants' arrival in many countries and on the part of their national political leaders (notably in Italy) raises questions about the future of this movement. In this respect, I believe that two concerns stand out as particularly relevant: in which directions can the 'welcome movement' develop, and to what extent can this movement condition the positioning of local political leaders vis-à-vis the national governments?

## ARTICLE 2

### **Obstructing lives: Local borders and their structural violence in the asylum field of post-2015 Europe<sup>25</sup>**

#### ABSTRACT

This article contributes to the literature debate on local-level as a crucial arena of migration government. After the so called “refugees crisis” in 2015, EU institutions and member states entailed a process of border enforcement in order to limit migration movements towards Europe by restricting asylum rights. Drawing on 13 months of ethnographic research in Milan (Italy) between the years 2017 and 2018, we argue that the urban space can be turned into a setting of enforcing internal borders for selecting refugees and containing their mobility. The study focuses on implicit and informal “obstructions” deployed by police immigration office (Questura) to hinder the attribution of legal status to prospect asylum-seekers or to hinder the renewal of documents to refugees. Looking at the relation between statutory laws and everyday bureaucratic practices, the article highlights how since 2016 restrictive asylum policies have been deployed in Milan in line with the national and European political orientation towards migration. Despite following the political authorities, such “obstructive praxes” based on additional rules are more restrictive than those designed by law and even sometimes against the national and international asylum law. Thus, instead of placing the migrants in a “state of exception”, we argue that these praxes represent additional layers of control mechanisms. Refugees’ lives are directly affected by the obfuscation of the legal status produced by those obstructive praxes, which push recipients into the shadow of the law and are bearers of feelings of dependency and uncertainty. We ultimately argue that such indirect and informal bureaucratic obstructive practices can be interpreted as forms of structural violence.

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<sup>25</sup> By Maurizio Artero and Elena Fontanari

## INTRODUCTION

The centrality of the asylum issue in the European public debate has strongly increased in recent years following the so-called “refugee/migrant crisis” of 2015. Migration towards Europe is a complex social process that European societies are endeavouring to govern at the international, European, national and local levels. We aim here to focus on the local level as a field in which we can grasp the power dynamics between those supranational, national and sub-national levels through which migration is governed. Migration studies have already shown widespread interest in the local level, especially in the European context (Caponio and Borkert 2010). Decentralisation and grass-roots initiatives brought to the fore the centrality of local actors, mostly highlighting their role in improving the integration of migrants, more than the national, state-level authorities (Alexander 2007; Balbo 2005). Furthermore, recent works focusing on the “city of refuge” (Darling 2008), “sanctuary cities” (Nyers 2010) and “human right cities” (Oomen et al. 2016) have focused on the local level and how a more direct contact between local authorities and residents (migrants included) favours better responsiveness to issues. However, other studies have pointed out how the local level can be a ground for intolerant policies towards migrants, bringing new mechanisms of control into everyday spaces (Gilbert 2009). The notion of *local policies of exclusion* (Ambrosini and Caneva 2012) emerged in the Italian academic debate, pointing to those “institutional obstacles to the rights of several minorities (civil, social) and to their freedom of expressing their cultural and religious identity” (ibid, 4). Moreover, studies on migration policies implementation at the local level have shed light on the restrictive administrative praxes enforced by local authorities (Bolzoni, Gargiulo and Manocchi 2013; Gjergi 2016b). Finally, some border studies pointed to the city as the space in which several actors negotiate the borders (Lebuhn 2013), highlighting how borders extend their influence inside the national territory (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013).

This article’s aim is to contribute to the debate regarding the local level as a crucial arena of migration governance in Europe. Unlike the current literature focusing on the notion of the city of refuge, we argue that after the “long summer of migration” (Hess et al. 2017) in 2015, the cities emerged again as a setting of marginalization practices. Indeed, at the local level, the city becomes a place where legitimate authorities can apply opaque rules, rather than being an arena wherein migrants’ rights are extended beyond national limits. Moreover, we move a step further from Gilbert (2009) and Ambrosini and Caneva (2012), who focused on explicit and formal actions deployed by mayors through ordinances. This article instead gives insights into those *implicit* and *informal obstructions* deployed to hinder the attribution of legal status to prospective asylum-seekers and beneficiaries of protection. These informal obstructions are produced by everyday praxes in the local bureaucracies that apply more restrictive rules than those designed by the statutory law. Finally, this article also discusses the effects of such administrative praxes upon the everyday and inner lives of migrants, contributing to the literature of production of migrant subjectivities by bureaucracy (Sorgoni 2011; Darling 2014; Fontanari 2015). In line with constructivist approaches to the study of borders (Novak 2011), the fieldwork suggested a detailed analysis of both the actual administration of asylum rights and the effects of borders upon migrants’ everyday lives. Our discussion is empirically based on an extensive ethnographic fieldwork in the city of Milan, Italy, which has emerged as a crucial setting in the recent dynamics of migration in Europe. Indeed, during the so-called “refugee crisis” between 2013 and 2016, more than 130,000 prospect asylum-seekers have passed through Milan on their way to Central and Northern Europe, whereas, at the end of 2017, the city gave assistance to around 6,000 forced migrants in its reception centres, a figure that would have been unprecedented prior to 2015 (Municipality of Milan, personal communication, 28

November 2017). We here aim to shed light on Milan as a crucial junction of migrant movement across Europe as well as a place of border enforcement, being a stop-over for those people crossing the central Mediterranean route towards Europe. Based on these empirical observations, this article argues that the city may become the site for the enforcement of *internal borders*, in form of “*obstructive praxes*” implemented through the administration of asylum rights (section 4). These actions, moreover, represent examples of a *structural violence* deeply affecting migrants’ lives and their subjectivities (section 5). This article underlines how these *obstructions* take place through the actions of public officials in a specific setting, Milan’s *Questura*<sup>26</sup>, that should guarantee the correct translation from the national legislation into the practical application at the local-level.

## THE *INDIRECT* VIOLENCE OF BORDERS: TWO THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

The theoretical purpose of this article is to shed light on the dynamic power relations between the social structures – notably the border control policies at the local level – and the agency of the subjects, namely, how prospective refugees’ lives are affected by the administrative praxes. Thus, we intertwine the literature of border studies (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013) with the theory of structural violence (Galtung 1969), focusing on the role of the local level in enforcing the borders *within* national territories. Border studies allow us to underline the mechanisms of selection deployed by the asylum administrative praxes, and the theory of structural violence instead lets us focus on the subjective experiences of refugees obstructed by the bureaucratic praxes.

### THE BORDERS WITHIN: BUREAUCRATIC SELECTIVENESS AND THE HIERARCHIES OF LEGAL STATUS

The perspective of border studies allow us to go beyond the understanding of migration towards *EU-ropes*<sup>27</sup> as a “migrant/refugees crisis” (New Keywords Collective 2016). Indeed, the concept of “border” let us shift the focus on how power relations interact and produce the social phenomena we are studying. A “border” is understood as a social construction: a dynamic process of power relations rather than a fixed and material entity (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013; Cuttitta 2014; Casas-Cortes, Cobarrubias and Pickles 2015). Accordingly, borders function as mechanisms for regulating people on the move by selecting and organizing them into categories and consequently enforcing hierarchies among people according to their legal status (Green 2013; De Genova 2013). They act as a filter, being *porous* (Kolossoff and Scott 2013) and functioning, thus, beyond the mere establishment of an inside and an outside of nation-states. These mechanisms of selection and stratification are applied to the mobility of particular categories of people who are considered undesirable or a social threat, such as non-EUropean citizens and migrants (Glick-Schiller and Salazar 2013).

Such selective mechanisms are based on the production of precarious legal statuses that reduce and limit access to several rights and social benefits within EUropean societies (De Genova 2007; Faist 2013; Zorzetto 2016), hence hindering migrants from building a “normal” life. Scholars have highlighted how these judicial and physical borders that control and govern migration are issued by a multiplicity of actors in a manner that is not always linear and

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<sup>26</sup> *Questura* is a police office given immigration-related duties.

<sup>27</sup> We here use the term “EUrope” following the argument of Maurice Stierl (2017) in problematising the equation of the EU with Europe and Europe with the EU, pointing to the fact that EUrope is not reducible to the institutions of the EU.

coherent. Speaking about a “European border regime” (Hess and Kasperek 2010) allows us to highlight a complex set of different governmental and non-governmental actors, laws, policies, devices and discourses that contribute to the government of migration towards Europe. They point to a fragmented sovereignty with multiple sources of powers at several levels: international, European, national and local. “Regime” is here understood as a reflection of the notion of governmentality and hegemony in which there are constant struggles to understand, embody and transform categories of similarity, differences, belonging and strangeness (Barak 2013). Starting from this understanding of governmental power, we distance ourselves from those works that argue, drawing on Agamben’s theory, how the governance of migration and the enforcement of borders are directly related to the suspension of the law (J. Morris 2003; Minca 2005; Dines, Montagna and Ruggiero 2014). Instead, we highlight how migration control and the connected legislative violations are embedded in ordinary legal frameworks and are created by means of ordinary politics of borders (Basaran 2008; Tuastad 2017). Although ordinary law has been sometimes suspended, migrants are usually regulated by an excess of administrative rules that became progressively institutionalised, being embedded within a trend of slow erosion of existing legal standards by bureaucracies (Campesi 2014).

Other empirical research in the Italian context has acknowledged how these administrative routines that produce restrictions come from the expansion of bureaucratic practices already present in the national legal system, which then become ordinary when transposed to migration governance at the local level (Gargiulo 2015; 2016; Gjergji 2016a; 2016b). Indeed, despite the fact that refugees are entitled to a series of rights and benefits from the host states, in the local implementation of these rights, we often find the main gap between the legal provisions and the effective exercise of migrant rights. Thus, administrative strategies in the asylum field work as mechanisms of migration control producing *civic stratification* (L. Morris 2003). Drawing on this literature, we present, in section four, the main features, rationales and magnitude of the “obstructions” produced by *implicit* and *informal* administrative praxes that implement the national laws in a restrictive and narrow way. Since the obstructions are positioned below the formality of the law (Gjergji 2016b), recipients are unable to discover the reasons and the authority responsible. This problem of “pointing the finger against whom” (Ho 2007) for the global inequalities bring us to the second theory we used.

#### **STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE: THE INVISIBILITY OF AN INDIRECT POWER**

The theory of structural violence is useful to highlight such indirect and informal praxes and how they have powerful effects on the lives of migrants in terms of marginalisation and destitution. Outlined by Galtung (1969) and opposed to personal or direct violence, structural violence is *indirect* because “there may not be any person who directly harms another person in the structure. The violence is built into the structure and shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances” (ibid, 171). The theoretical assumption is that individuals are embedded in relational structures that shape their interaction, identities and interests. The main question tackled by this theory is how structures constrain agency to the extent that fundamental human needs are unattainable. In relation to the human rights issue, structural violence consists of a gap between actuality of *de facto* rights and potential and *de jure rights*: when economic, social and judicial structures limit an individual’s agency to the extent that fundamental human needs cannot be met (Ho 2007).

Graeber’s (2012) work shows how bureaucratic structural violence possesses the capacity to allow schematization and arbitrary decisions in bureaucratic actions, “ignoring all the subtleties

of real social existence and reducing everything to preconceived mechanical or statistical formulae” (ibid, 119). Thus, bureaucracy is able to impose its own rules onto the individuals that it governs as an *indirect* power where the authority is hidden or diffuse. Furthermore, since social structures have institutionalized structural violence, they render that violence *invisible*, becoming part of “the routine grounds of everyday life” (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004). Finally, we apply this analytical lens in order to shed light on the effects produced by the *administrative obstructions* on migrants and refugees. Because structural violence originated in unequal distribution of power among actors, “*suffering*” is therefore structured by historical processes and forces that conspire – through routine or ritual – to constrain agency (Farmer 1996). Thus, we grasp administrative obstructions in the field of asylum-seekers’ rights through qualitative methodology, positioning ourselves on the side of the migrant subjects. As Anjaria argues, in providing an account of the ways authorities govern, what matters “is not only the strategies of governance but also how people inhabit them” (2011, 64).

### **FIELDWORK AND METHODS**

The research has been conducted in Milan, Italy, for thirteen months (between January 2017 and February 2018). Ethnography was applied mostly within Naga-har, a drop-in centre in Milan for asylum seekers, refugees and victims of torture that offers free consultations and support throughout the process of asylum. Sixty-one in-depth interviews were conducted with volunteers of several groups supporting migrants, legal advisors of six different Milanese help-desks and prospective asylum-seekers and refugees, who are recipients of such administrative procedures.

The ethnography in the help-desk centres facilitated establishing contact with the everyday bureaucratic procedures migrants have to face during their asylum request process. Moreover, to grasp the knowledge from experts, face-to-face interviews were conducted with legal advisors active in the asylum field in Milan for a long time. The participant observation allowed us to grasp in detail the most recurring asylum-attribution and renewal issues, analysing migrants’ stories and utilising ethnography to observe how intangible internal borders emerge through contextual and cumulative actions (Tsianos, Hess, and Karakyali 2009). Moreover, in-depth interviews were a useful methodological tool in order to investigate the effects of bureaucratic practices upon migrants’ lives.

In this paper, we focus on selected empirical data based on nine interviews with legal advisors collected in six help-desks, nine interviews with volunteers active in the asylum field and six migrants – namely, prospective asylum-seekers and beneficiaries of humanitarian and subsidiary protection. During this endeavour, I have taken utmost account of the ethical aspects, given also the *vulnerability* of some participants. During my fieldwork, therefore, I made sure that participants have understood the information and that their participation is voluntary; in addition, I guaranteed the anonymity of the participants by means of using pseudonyms. The combination of participant observation and in-depth interviews allowed us to gain both an exhaustive collection of the most frequently recurring administrative procedures and an in-depth understanding of the impact of these processes and related procedures on migrants’ livelihoods.

### **LAW AND ORDER: THE SECURITISATION TURN IN POST-2015 EUROPE**

The “long summer of migration” in 2015 represented a turning point in the European migration policies. During that year, several thousand migrants were crossing the sea or trekking across

the “Balkan route” towards Northern and Western European countries (Kasperek 2016), in spite of the fact that the European laws and agreements would not allow such border crossings. This partial breakdown of the European border regime (New Keywords Collective 2016), notably involving the Schengen agreement and Dublin Regulation, was obscured by the simplistic understanding of such complex social processes under the concept of a “refugee crisis”.

An image of an uncontrolled invasion of Europe dispersed in the public debate, accompanied by the increasing fear of Islamic terrorism after several terrorist attacks occurred in some European cities between 2015 and 2017. This brought the European Union and its member states to enact a process of re-bordering Europe, which is still ongoing. The main aim in post-2015 Europe has been to establish a new and efficient system of border control, with a particular attention paid to limiting and reducing the “secondary movements” within Europe – as the European Commission stated in April 2016 (Vianelli 2017). In order to govern the unruly and multi-directional mobility of migrants, several bilateral agreements and laws have been issued at European and national levels in the direction of a new securitisation of the asylum issue. Some examples include the New Agenda on Migration, which stated the directive lines of the hotspots approach (Dimitriadi 2017), resettlement and Europeanisation of borders (Garelli and Tazzioli 2016). Other examples include the EU-Turkey readmission agreement, signed in March 2016, as well as the bilateral agreement between Italy and Libya, developed in 2017.

Moreover, borders within the European territory have been enforced, intermittently suspending the Schengen agreement among member states: between 2015 and 2017, nine out of twenty-six countries in Schengen temporarily closed their national borders (Premarini 2017). These clear signs of fractures within the EU highlight how member states are raising conflicts among each other in order to regain control of their own borders.

Italian migration policies were influenced by such dynamics, being directly inscribed within the trend, whereby Northern member states and EU institutions tried to pressure Southern and Eastern partners to enforce the inner rim of control inside their territories – i.e. through the hotspots. Migrants crossing the Mediterranean were received in recent years in a context increasingly marked by securitisation processes (Castelli Gattinara 2017). Scholars have underlined a renewed process of “administrative criminalization” of migrants that turns the preventive logic of risk into the new government paradigm (Campesi 2014), leading to a normalisation of police powers over foreigners’ personal freedom. The mobility of migrants across Europe has been made visible by the increasing controls deployed by local authorities within the national territories. Indeed, border enforcement also takes shape in the securitisation of areas close to national borders, such as Ventimiglia, Como-Chiasso and the Brenner: there, practices of control, containment and forced mobility – back towards the hotspots (Tazzioli 2017) – have been deployed. Furthermore, the (former) ruling centre-left government framed migration governance as an issue of security through the Minniti-Orlando Decree. This combined a simplification of asylum procedures and a restriction to irregular immigration by bilateral agreements and expanding administrative detention, with the establishment of a “new power-geometry on urban security” which empowers local security authorities for public order’s sake (Gonnella 2017). In conclusion, in the post-2015 period, the nexus between migration and security has been strengthened by both EU and Italian institutions, allowing, hence, an increase of discretionary power at the local level.

## **MILAN: BETWEEN RECEPTION AND REJECTION**

Milan has assumed a crucial position in migration processes, becoming a transit hub for migrant mobility since 2013 (Fontanari 2016b). Between 2013 and 2016, more than 130,000 prospective asylum-seekers have passed through Milan while rerouting to Northern Europe. However, the city maintained its dual nature of city of refuge and transit as the Municipality of Milan communicated to us during an interview conducted in November 2017: around 6,000 forced migrants received shelter by the end of 2017. At this time, Milan has a centre-left government that declared its intention to devise an “open city” for refugees, hence distancing themselves from national authorities’ approach to migration. The Mayor of Milan, Giuliano Pisapia, publicly contested the previous national migration policies in 2014, refusing to re-open the deportation prison of Milan (CIE Corelli), which eventually turned into a welcome centre for “transit” migrants and asylum-seekers<sup>28</sup>.

Between 2013 and 2014, the main dispute was precisely related to the reception of migrants that wanted to move towards Northern Europe. Milan Central train station became a central junction for migrant trajectories across Europe (Denaro 2016), together with the Milanese neighbourhood of Porta Venezia (Grimaldi 2016). These were the two years before the breakdown of the EU border regime, when Italy was maligned for its informal national “policies of laissez-passer” (Ciabbarri 2015), in contradiction to the Dublin Regulation. As emerged through the fieldwork, during the year 2014, the local administration instituted several reception centres for “transit migrants”, outsourcing the implementation to third sector organizations and supporting the infrastructure of welcoming built by the Milanese active civil society. However, this initiative did not translate into a permissive policy reform. Instead, as Milan’s municipal public officials have reported to me, in the post-2015 period we experienced a “crackdown on migration” that crammed a rising number of prospective transit migrants into the city’s reception centres. The crucial turning point occurred in 2016 with a turnover of the key positions in the Milanese local governance: a new mayor was elected, together with a new prefect and a new head of Questura. Subsequently, while polls were showing Italians’ deterioration of attitudes towards migrants and refugees (Pew Research Centre, 2016), an increasingly harsh attitude towards migration was deployed by the local authorities responsible for migration governance.

The year 2017 signals the establishment of enforced policies of control and restrictive measures against migrants at the national and European levels, and Milan, in line with that trend, experienced what we arguably call the “long summer of rejection”. The municipal reception system for transit migrants was definitively closed in the first half of 2017. From May to August 2017, several heavy-handed police interventions to identify migrants occurred in the city (Zona 8 Solidale, public speech, 1 December 2017), especially around the Central railway station. The consequences of such demonstrative praxes deployed at the local level are well expressed by Mansour, a beneficiary of humanitarian protection from Senegal, who has been living in Italy since 2014: “We always feel rejected, in the sense that they would show it to you physically”. These initiatives have aggravated the migrants’ feelings of being isolated, exposed to injustices and considered “less-than-normal” subjects (Vacchiano 2005). In the next paragraph, we give insights on peculiar praxes through which internal borders hit prospective asylum-seekers and refugees: the bureaucratic obstructions operated by Milan’s Questura.

## WHO GOVERNS? THE STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE OF BUREAUCRATIC

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<sup>28</sup> <http://www.meltingpot.org/Milano-Il-CIE-di-via-Corelli-diventa-un-centro-di.html#.WvlqiiFM2w>

## OBSTRUCTIONS

Literature on forced migration has underlined how behind every experience of border crossing there are hidden stories that speak about violence, as violence is an element that usually defines migrants' experiences (Vacchiano 2005; Pinelli 2011). Drawing on the theory of structural violence, we shed light on a violence which is not limited to the physical, but rather, one that is more indirect yet equally able to leave marks. The actors of such violence are invisible and mundane (Galtung 1969; Ho 2007), and above all, we focus on bureaucracy as a form of social power that regulates everyday existence and acts as a gatekeeper for structural inequalities and manifestations of structural violence. From our fieldwork, how the proliferation of bureaucratic praxes obstructing migrants to asylum rights emerges, which can be understood as a manifestation of structural violence. Therefore, these praxes are characterised by the ability to establish regulations that "complicates things" (Graeber 2015) and guarantee that certain individuals will be incapacitated to perform their tasks as expected. With the term "bureaucratic praxes", we here mean all these actions based on the non-written rules originating from informal and implicit guidelines – such as, for example, internal memorandums and instructions – which are personally given to a single bureaucratic officer. These are actualising the governance of migration at the local level, being effective instruments which establish an additional layer – a membrane – to the "documentation regime" that governs migrants in Italy (Tuckett 2015). Roberto, a long-term legal advisor in Naga's SOS-expulsions project, give insights into the characteristic of these bureaucratic praxes and the consequences of their proliferation:

"I have witnessed to an increment of people who come from Questura with complex cases because of obstructive actions [...].These [actions] are praxes and therefore aren't established by law nor in any other formal way. They are not made explicit, sometimes not even by internal memos. [...] We try to counteract by suggesting collecting every piece of evidence, from announcing their presence by email to Questura to the queue ticket. Otherwise, it's your word against theirs, and in my experience you risk drawing a blank in court."

Roberto's words point at a fracture between the national law and the bureaucratic praxes, which nevertheless should not be understood as sign of disconnection from the national-state authority. This poses the question: who governs? Indeed, these bureaucratic praxes are occurring in a specific place which is directly related to the national statutory power: Questura, the police office representing the peripheral projection of the Italian Ministry of the Interior on a given territory. Questura is charged with immigration-related administrative duties, such as the verbalisation of the asylum claims and the collection of important documents. Albeit representing a decentralized police force (from the national government), Questura has also a significant impact on the life of refugees and their enjoyment of services and rights at the local-level, by acting as an immigration office (see Caponio [2007]; Gargiulo [2014]; [2015]). Thus, bureaucratic authority is part of the national statutory system and it enforces the link between these administrative praxes and the nation-state authorities.

The deployment of such administrative praxes has been deeply tied to a more general trend of migration governance since the beginning of 2017. During the thirteen months of ethnographic research, we observed a high frequency of praxes in Questura aiming systematically at hindering access to the legal statuses to asylum-seekers and beneficiaries of protection. This securitisation turn within the administrative praxes in Milan has also been observed by Paolo, the most experienced legal advisor of Casa della Carità:

“I see changes that attempt to complicate their life in a systematic way; I increasingly see the desire to find the way to reject people. [...] All these decisions are often adverse to migrants, in a restrictive and detrimental way, because they want to show that they reject many people, statistically”.

The long-term experience of Paolo in the field of asylum work in Milan and his long-lasting relation with the related bureaucratic offices give us insights into the changing behaviour of administrative praxes that suddenly and systematically aimed to reject migrants, in line with the new national and European guidelines. We observe actions that are situated between explicit laws, regulations and policies and personal discretionary power by individual bureaucrats. Despite being “non-codified”, these bureaucratic decisions express the approaches of national and EU authorities, as Anna – an experienced legal advisor for Caritas-SAI – expresses:

“It’s evident that given the rise of the asylum-seekers, and also given a negative attitude of Europe because of the terrorism...I would say that yes, because of that also the everyday difficulties for migrants have been increased”.

The words of Anna point to exactly this nexus: “difficulties for migrants” vis-à-vis Questura are linked to a restrictive European approach towards migration developed in the post-2015 period.

#### **WITHIN THE SYSTEM OF GOVERNANCE: IDENTIFICATION AND DETERRENCE**

Some research has demonstrated that despite the fact that Italian statutory laws should regulate the path that a migrant must take to ask asylum, in practice, administrative apparatuses deploy praxes under the strategies to complicate the trajectories of migrants, due to a crackdown on migration governance in recent years (Tazzioli 2017; Biffi 2018). From our fieldwork, an increment of migrants’ difficulties to access their asylum rights in conjunction with the current migration governance emerges. Irene, a legal advisor at the Waldensian church, points to a link between the recent EU and national approaches to migrants’ mobility and what she has observed in Milan:

“Here I see many people a day with problems caused by new requests or actions that Questura did not implement before...like asking for the passport or expulsion orders. [These are] new obstructions, and I think that what we see is part of a bigger trend [...] All this, indeed, seems to be included in a European logic of restriction and identification”.

According to Irene, we observed how since the second half of 2016, the obstruction praxes enforced by Questura have intensified, following the three pillars of the EU migration control policies: the quick sorting of migrants in hotspot centres, the identification of the incoming migrants and the deterrence of the arrivals<sup>29</sup>. The three pillars have been grasped in the

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<sup>29</sup> Such account is not only backed up by our fieldwork research but also by two missives that AGSI (the well-known association focusing on all legal aspects of immigration) forwarded to Milan’s Questura. The first of May 2016 denounces the new unlawful praxis whereby the Milanese Questura started to issue expulsion orders to prospect asylum-seekers when they were requesting asylum in the administrative offices. The second, which dates back to June 2017, decries the incremental trend of such praxis. See: <https://www.asgi.it/notizie/asgi-naga-e-avvocati-per-niente-contro-le-prassi-illegittime-della-questura-di-milano/>; <https://www.asgi.it/asilo-e-protezione-internazionale/protezione-internazionale-la-questura-deve-permettere-la-richiesta-asilo-non-valutarla/>

hotspots structures in Southern Italy and Greece, but we have observed how such selective mechanisms typical of the hotspot have been translated also into the national territory through the Questura's bureaucratic praxes. In particular, we distinguish two main features characterising the bureaucratic praxes embedded in the "crackdown on migration" within the Italian national territory: the expulsion order and the use of new arbitrary criteria for renewing the refugees' residence permits.

First, Questura started to issue expulsion orders to prospect asylum-seekers when they were requesting asylum in the administrative offices in contradiction of Italian law and international asylum law. This praxis obstructs the acquisition of the status of asylum-seekers and further pushes the recipients into a condition of irregularity, preventing them from being assisted by the ordinary reception system. In the hotspots, a very similar praxis occurs, where these structures are a sort of "screening centre" for incoming migrants at the door of Europe. Indeed, the hotspot approach introduces a new temporality in the governance of migration, due to its principal aim of quickly sorting the mobile population to identify "real" and "bogus" asylum-seekers. These selections have been made mostly on the basis of the nationality of incoming migrants, and hence against international asylum law which is based on the analysis of the subjective experience rather than on the situation of the national country of origin.

The consequent production of "illegalised" migrants in the Italian and Greek territories has been noticed by researchers on the hotspots (Tazzioli 2017; Sciarba 2017). This has also emerged in our fieldwork. Indeed, during the summer of 2017 the Milanese Questura issued an increasing number of expulsion orders – five or more cases a day counted only by Nag-har activity – with criteria similar to hotspot centres that testify to the introjection of the hotspot rationality and temporality within the national territory, as stated by Roberto:

"This is the hotspot approach: a place where quickly and with simplified criteria they decide whether a person meets the requirements for asking asylum or not, which is at least controversial from a juridical point of view since a Commission is responsible for this decision, not a police official".

While the expulsion orders are embedded in the selective logic of the European hotspot approach and affect the migrants who have landed, the second form of administrative obstructive praxes relies more on an identification and expulsion logic embedded in national institutions. Moreover, they affect refugees with humanitarian and subsidiary protections who are obstructed from practically enjoying their status as beneficiaries of protection. There are two different ways of obstructions taking shape in informal criteria issued by the Questura for the renewal of the humanitarian and subsidiary residence permits.

Indeed, humanitarian and subsidiary protections are temporary legal statuses that need to be renewed every one or two years and every three or five years, respectively. The new informal criteria for the renewal applied by the Questura's officers are based on a decision taken by an invisible authority behind the office desks; indeed, for the legal advisors it has been impossible to check the official memoranda or papers that stated such new criteria. The two criteria not solicited by the statutory laws are: to possess a passport and to possess a certificate of residency<sup>30</sup>. Thus, refugees that are not able immediately to produce such documents are hindered in renewing their permit of stay. These obstructions respond to aim of a very precise

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<sup>30</sup> Praxes that are both deemed as unlawful by the Italian jurisprudence. See: <https://www.meltingpot.org/Parere-del-Ministero-dell-Interno-del-4-luglio-2006.html#.XEBmsVxKg2x>; <https://www.abuondiritto.it/it/materiali/112-ordinanza-residenza-mancato-rinnovo/file.html>

identification of the migrant people and also to keep track of their mobility. Irene explains to us how the request for the passport responds to a strategy of identification and expulsion.

“I think it’s part of a policy of security. For example, if a person has a passport it’s easier to return him/her to his/her original country [according to the Italian law]”.

While Irene points out the identification logic, a wider deterrence strategy emerges as the main characteristic of all the various forms of obstruction to status attributions. Deterrence discourages migrants from settling into a territory in order to lower their presence. Silvia, a Naga-har’s advisor, sheds light on how the deterrence strategy works on the ground:

“[This is] deterrence, a strategy that is based on the circulation of information within the community of your co-nationals and friends. It is based on the idea that if I come to know how is working in Italy, I will leave out of fear”.

In the post-2015 period, governing migrants has meant controlling and channelling their unruly mobility within the European space; namely, keeping them constantly on the move, hence avoiding their settlement (Tazzioli 2017). These are examples of indirect implementation of bordering mechanisms that affect the lives of migrants within the EU member states – and not only at their external borders. A bordering process is developed at the local level through administrative obstacles produced by an invisible authority behind the Questura office desks. Expulsion orders deny the access to asylum under the Geneva Convention; the request for a valid passport and a valid certificate of residency arbitrarily became the *conditio sine qua non* for the renewing of residence permits. Questura has emerged as the space through which the structural violence of bureaucracy came into being.

## **LIVING IN THE SHADOWS: BORDERS OF EVERYDAY LIFE AND MIGRANTS’ SUBJECTIVITIES**

The obstructive praxes of Questura are an expression of structural violence being “built into the structure and shows up as unequal power and consequently an unequal life chances” (Galtung 1969, 171). As obstacles for migrants in obtaining or renewing their legal status, obstructive praxes are experienced by migrants as endangering to their future lives. Works on structural violence highlight how subjects experience the resulting constraints and limits on their agency in their everyday life (Ho 2007). Some research has shown how bureaucratic power exposes the individual recipients to a systematic process of subjection (Pinelli 2011; Fontanari 2015). Structural violence, hence, is not exclusively the result of a system, but also exercises a productive and structuring effect on the individuals who are targeted: it entails the production of a subject within particular power dynamics (Farmer 2006). This section will illustrate how the Questura’s praxes that emerged from our fieldwork create subjects that are dependent, uncertain about their future and placed in a legal grey zone antecedent to “illegalization”.

### **DEPENDENCY**

The first subjective element that emerged from the ethnographic research relates to a strong feeling of the agency’s limitation. This feeling was produced by the relation between migrants and the Questura’s officers, whose unclear discretionary praxes let migrants feel vulnerable and dependent. The story of Abdou, a Senegalese 18-year-old man, gives us insights into how the inner life of migrants can be affected by these indirect praxes. Abdou was one of the prospective asylum-seekers that received an expulsion order when applying for asylum during the “long

summer of rejection” in 2017. Being excluded from any accommodation and from the assistance provided by the national reception system, Abdou had to rely on the ensemble of charity organisations. This has meant for him – as well as for many other research subjects in the same condition – that he must depend on help-desk advisors and lawyers in order to overrule the Questura’s decision and the effects of the expulsion. Although help-desks are essential in supporting migrants like Abdou in challenging the Questura’s decisions in court, Abdou strongly express his feeling of dependency on external help due to the lack of social networks and resources:

*“My thoughts go to the search of a camp [i.e. reception centre], I always ask for it. I want to stay in Italy. Friends of mine are in Spain or elsewhere because they have a family there. I want to stay in Italy, but I don’t have a family or friends who help me. Sure, I wait, I’m not discouraged, I don’t want to leave. I wait for help, from the lawyer and from Naga. I need this help because I’m alone in this”*

Experiencing a very isolated and vulnerable condition allowed them to see their life as out of their control and as governed by fate. Indeed, a progressive feeling of powerlessness (Gardner 1995) was expressed by most of the migrants we interviewed, as the following words of Assan – a Gambian prospective asylum-seeker – demonstrate:

*“I think myself as an Italian, but an Italian baby. If I had this paper now I could say I’m a ‘real Italian”.*

Assan’s words highlight the “process of infantilisation” to which refugees and asylumseekers are subjected in the Italian reception system (Van Aken et al. 2008; Pinelli 2013), which is more generally a typical feature of the humanitarian government (Fassin 2011). Assan tells us how the process of infantilisation is an example of subjective power relations that transform the subjectivity of the people involved. Migrants like Assan, as recipients of obstructive praxes, undergo a powerlessness process that they internalise, causing them to feel reduced from an adult to a baby.

## **UNCERTAINTY**

Individuals under this condition are at risk of mental and physical distress, due to the intense uncertainty about their future. When we use the term “uncertainty”, we mean an individual situation marked by imperfect knowledge of the present and unpredictability of the future (Williams and Baláz 2012). Numerous studies have highlighted how forced migrants’ everyday lives are affected by chaotic information, unpredictability of the event and more generally feelings of powerlessness over future circumstances (Griffiths 2014; Horst and Grabska 2015). Uncertainty should not be considered an unwanted result of structural violence; instead, it can be explored as a deliberate governance strategy, whose effect is to position migrants “at the border” (Bihel 2015). The subjects of our research have experienced a diffuse sense of uncertainty in relation to their encounters with the Questura’s officials. Namely, the informal criteria for the attribution of status or for renewal of status make the outcome unpredictable. This leads to the experience of additional “structural and protracted uncertainties” (Bihel 2015), characterised by insecurity for the future. Our informants usually express anxiety, namely, fear of unemployment for long-term migrants, fear of loss of basic benefits and fear of the need to resort to “illegality” for the newcomers. Thus, a progressive deprivation of a fundamental subjective resource occurs: the loss of the hope for the future, the capacity of “future-figuration”

that particularly enlivens individuals who are displaced (Kabachnik, Regulska and Mitchneck 2010).

Banna, a prospective asylum-seeker expelled by the Questura, expresses his feeling of such loss. After voluntarily dropping out of Italian classes, his words tell us how the absence of hope can lead to passivity:

*“I want to go [to classes], but I want to know my future before [...] when you live without hope...you think too much, too much, and forget about everything else”.*

The obsessive thinking about their present situation, which generates mental distress, is a shared condition among our migrant participants. The following words are from Mousa, who experienced a period of homelessness due to an expulsion order from the Questura. His words underline the psychological suffering produced by the expulsion order related, in particular, to the homelessness he experienced before his lawyer succeeded in finding accommodation for him:

*“If I don’t have a place to sleep I can come crazy because...Even to eat, when they gave me food to eat, I didn’t eat because of the stress. You are in that kind of situation. I cannot forget that stress”.*

Although Mousa is a prospective asylum-seeker from Gambia who recently arrived (in June 2017), research gives us insights about the fact that such suffering related to an unpredictable future does not only involve newcomer migrants facing homelessness. Konan, who arrived in Italy almost 9 years ago from Ivory Coast, lives in Milan with a job and a partner. He holds a subsidiary protection that expired at the end of 2016. Konan is followed by the help-desk in Casa della Carità, because the Questura requires his passport in order to renew his permit. Unfortunately, Konan does not have a passport, and his embassy has denied it. The consequences of such praxes strongly affect his life, involving his job position and contract:

*“Everyday my office manager asks about my permit. It’s expired in 2016 and they need it. He even called me before. [...] [If you don’t have this document] you risk losing your job, your future! I am really trying, really trying to solve this problem but I don’t know what to do”.*

The non-attribution of the permit endangers Konan’s “capacity to build his future” (Kabachnik, Regulska and Mitchneck 2010) as an active subject, by risking the stability of his working condition. Moreover, he is aware of the violence done to him: it is almost impossible to obtain the passport from his embassy since, according to Italian law, if he has contact with his origin county embassy he could lose his subsidiary status<sup>31</sup>. Finally, Konan’s experience shows how obstructive praxes indirectly pushed him into a “grey zone” at the margin of the law, becoming half-irregular.

### **IN THE SHADOW OF THE LAW: GREY ZONE, INTERSTICES AND ILLEGALISATION**

Scholars have recently underlined how policies of border control are in conflict with the autonomous movement of migrants: a consequence of these two opposite forces is the production of legal interstices, i.e. spaces in-between produced by power relations (Fontanari 2018). Refugees and migrants usually live in the “shadow of the law” (Malkki 1996, 378) and at

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<sup>31</sup> Indeed, as a refugee with subsidiary protection, Konan is declined any document from his country of origin. Under international law, he is not supposed to have any relationship with his original nation-state.

the “margins of the state” (Das and Pole 2004), namely, under an intermediate judicial condition between regularity and irregularity, visibility and invisibility. From our fieldwork, it emerged that the migrant recipients of the Questura’s praxes are subjected to a “process of obfuscation” of their legal status, finding themselves stuck in the threshold of being fully recognised as asylum-seekers or refugees. The process of obfuscation of legal status is internalised by the subjects in those feeling of uncertainty and precariousness previously discussed.

Mansour, a prospective beneficiary of humanitarian protection who is incapable of obtaining his document since he does not have a regular residency in Milan, underlines how the regular legal status is an essential prerequisite for his life: it represents the key to his future.

*“[The status] is everything. Here, without a permit, I cannot get a work, without the permit I cannot study, without the permit I cannot get the place to sleep. [...] In Europe for us, foreigners, is very important when we get the documents because that’s your law. It’s the key to open the doors of your life”.*

Living within the law’s shadow does not mean being ungoverned: we have shown how the production of uncertainty represents an active governance strategy. People can remain entrapped at the margin of the state: being in the shadow of the law means experiencing a condition of waiting and insecurity that makes people more exposed to exploitation. Thus, a sort of “underclass of migrants” is produced, who do not have the same rights as the regular ones. Anna, legal advisor at Caritas-SAI, points to a “grey-zone” of people who are not fully regular nor expellable, but who are, however, vulnerable:

*“This create a sort of grey zone, a limbo: these people are regular in a way, unexpellable but the employer is delegated with the decision whether keep them, and legally, or not”.*

Furthermore, we argue that this system of deterrence, which is pushing some migrants to the margins of the law, can work as a mechanism of illegalization. Indeed, uncertainty and life in destitution can render a person more passive and consequently entail a quick slide towards a condition of “illegality”. Domenico, a GLOBUS’ legal advisor, emphasises how migrants can lose their determination in pursuing legal battles, with detrimental effects:

*“In these cases, especially expulsion cases, migrants who forcibly leave their accommodation and sleep rough [...], they have bigger problems than legal battle, they ask where they’re gonna sleep! They get tired of pursuing a legal battle and they end up ‘illegal’. Unconsciously, because of life conditions”.*

The illegalisation process described by Domenico is embedded in the wider hotspots approach (Biffi 2018) that has produced “the creation of thousands of irregularized migrants within the Italian territory, and a massive violation of the principles grounding the right to asylum” (Scurba 2017, 97). Thus, the Questura’s praxes emerged as invisible and indirect tentacles of the hotspots approach spread towards the inside of national territories.

A perverse consequence emerged that contrasts the security purpose of such control mechanisms. Mansour’s words show us how such praxes can cause, rather than security, danger (real or perceived) for the hosting society:

*“You are putting people in danger and you’re putting the society in the same danger because not everyone you see in the street is a criminal. But if I don’t have a place to eat, I don’t have a place*

*to sleep, I don't have money in my pocket, and wherever I go everybody goes away from me...I will find a way to survive [...]. It's like when you take a dog, a wild dog, and set him/her free in the street: you know it's a danger. It's the same when you put somebody in a condition in which they cannot put themselves out".*

Ultimately, the illegalisation process exposes migrants to the influences of the criminal activities embedded in the law's shadow of Western societies, like the informal economies diffuse in Italy (Brekke and Brochmann 2014) as well as across Europe (Ahmad 2008). Thus, while the purpose of formal security is the control of the migrant population, such praxes instead relegate migrants at the edge of the law, hence entailing the nexus between migration and criminality.

## CONCLUSION

This article has sought to highlight how indirect bureaucratic praxes obstructing the access to asylum rights and benefits should be interpreted as a form of structural violence. The Questura has emerged as a place through which bordering practices occur by the implementation of obstructions to the regularisation of migrants' and refugees' legal statuses. These obstructive praxes are based on additional rules, of which the source of authority remains though invisible. Indeed, the new administrative criteria introduced by the Questura are more restrictive than those designed by the law, even sometimes acting against national and international asylum law. However, such new restrictive criteria emerged to be in line with the wider political orientation in migration management at the European level in the post-2015 period. This gives us insights into a new tendency in the government of migration at the European level: an increasing detachment between the political authority and the legal system, namely, the fact that the political decisions are carried out beyond the legislative frame.

The local level has emerged as a crucial field which witnesses the intersection of international, European, national and local policies in the field of asylum. We observed how the bordering process acts within the national territories, namely, through those mechanisms of selection, categorisation and marginalisation that affect the lives of prospective and actual asylum-seekers and beneficiaries of protection. This paper argues that this power dynamic is an instance of bureaucratic structural violence with deep consequences for the recipients' lives and their subjectivities. The obstructive praxes through the obfuscation of legal status pushed our research subjects into the shadow of the law, into a threshold between regularity and "illegality". Consequently, their lives, opportunities and chances have been hampered, and their agency has been limited. Moreover, we argue that these obstacles are bearers of feelings of dependency and uncertainty towards the future, thus affecting the subjectivity of migrants and their everyday life in European societies. Indeed, "illegal" people have been produced, being driven to the lowest places of the hierarchy of legal status. This paper shows, hence, how global inequalities are produced at the local level by actors designed to govern migration and to provide access to asylum rights.

Instead of fostering asylum rights, the case of the Questura in Milan has given insights into how the local state apparatus – in line with the national ones, like that of the hotspot – add another layer of control and screening to new incoming migrants. This sheds light on the other (dark) side of the situation, highlighted by the literature on street-level bureaucracy (Lipsky 2000) that instead has underlined how personal decisions in the administrative offices can work in favour of migrants against national laws and authorities. In our case study, bureaucracies follow the securitisation turn promoted by the political authorities of Europe and some member states,

which are, however, obfuscate political decisions whose implementation is within and beyond the legislative framework. The obstructive praxes, despite not being backed up by statutory law, are still powerful instruments producing what Galtung (1969) would call an “avoidable impairment of fundamental human needs”, which lowers the actual degree to which asylum-seekers are able to meet their basic human needs. The resulting “social suffering” (Kleinmann, Das and Lock. 1997) was extensively expressed by the narrative of our research subjects, giving us insights into what the bureaucratic structural violence is currently producing within the post-2015 EUropean societies.

## ARTICLE 3

### **The Mobility of the Drop-in Centre: Forced Migrants' Projects of Mobility and the Role of Urban Drop-in Centres**

#### ABSTRACT

This paper explores the ways in which drop-in centres may function as enablers of the mobility of forced migrants in cities. Based on the extensive ethnographical study of a drop-in centre in Milan, Northern Italy, the paper examines the role that these settings can play in increasing the mobility of their regular guests. Although drop-in centres are usually perceived as welcoming sites of hospitality that focus on mutual relations and care in bounded spaces, through its consideration of the stories of individual forced migrants who found resources of mobility in these centres, the paper aims to add a new dimension to the debate. The paper considers the literature on mobility, particularly Vincent Kaufmann's notion of *motility*, to explicate how drop-in centres may increase forced migrants' capital of mobility. Nevertheless, the findings showed that for some individuals the drop-in centre is not always a resource of mobility. In such cases, the drop-in centre represents only one of the many spaces of charity. The paper concludes by suggesting that drop-in centres can serve as sites where regular guests can be released from the condition of forced migrants.

## INTRODUCTION

Drop-in centres (service agencies where people can go on an informal basis to get information or help) have become important instruments in the functioning of sanctuary city and similar movements. In cities, they represent a fundamental element of refuge for forced migrants<sup>32</sup>. These places have been often thought out and practiced as settings the main feature of which is to accommodate migrant 'guests' in a bounded space of comfort in order to satisfy their desire for permanence and security while they are being integrated into a new community (Bagelman, 2013). In particular, in resonance with certain interpretations of drop-ins (Conradson, 2003a; 2003b; 2003c; Cloke, Johnsen & May, 2007), the body of work on the city of refuge has focused upon drop-in's relational environment and social relations and showed the positive therapeutic experiences linked to these sites (Darling, 2008; 2011; City of Sanctuary, 2017). Drop-in centres are considered providers of services that meet the needs of migrants to feel secure and protected in a community: settings where the volunteer 'host' should adhere to an ethics of care that 'embraces the guests'.

While these characteristics are relevant, and often necessary in the life of their users, this paper differs from such interpretation and, instead, focuses on how drop-in centres can affect mobility. Indeed, I argue that drop-in centres can provide a space for meetings and activities. Urban drop-ins represent settings where migrants can share their knowledge about where and how to migrate elsewhere, to participate in vocational training and language classes in order to foster their social mobility, and generally, to find activities that divert them from the *constraining conditions* of their everyday lives (see paragraph 3).

Here, I propose to contribute a different understanding of the role of the drop-in centre by expanding the reference literature and relying on extensive fieldwork in the city of Milan. Indeed, this research is based on empirical observations and qualitative interviews at Naga-har, a drop-in centre for forced migrants, where I carried out an ethnographic study over a four-month period. Naga-har is a drop-in centre in Milan, Italy. Milan has not been included in the literature on the city of refuge although it has been crucial in the recent dynamics of forced migration in Europe. Milan historically one of the top destinations of migrants to Italy (Van Aken et al., 2008), during the so-called 'refugee crisis' has seen its position in the migration process significantly increased. Indeed, between 2013 and 2016, more than 130,000 prospective asylum seekers passed through Milan before seeking refuge in Central and Northern Europe (Comune di Milano, internal memorandum, 2017). At the end of 2017, moreover, the city gave assistance to around 6,000 forced migrants in its reception centres, which is probably the highest number in its recent history (Comune di Milano, personal communication, 28 November 2017). The system of reception and assistance was developed through a network of support services that were provided by the municipality and by both Catholic and non-Catholic private organisations, such as Naga-har.

In the next section, I will discuss these points in detail and place my study in the context of the current literature. I will then describe the materials selected from the fieldwork. In section 3, after a brief description of the methodology used in this study, I will describe and discuss the everyday lives of forced migrants in Milan as affected by a process of non-inclusive constraint.

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<sup>32</sup> In this paper, I use the notion of *forced migrant*, which was developed by Castels (2003), according to whom the concept encompasses the dichotomy between economic migrants and refugees. It includes asylum-seekers, beneficiaries of international protection, internally displaced persons and generally everyone who is 'forced' to escape, even if it is 'irregular' in the country of arrival. This term suits our case-study because it surmounts the bureaucratic power of governments over the categorization of 'authentic' refugees.

Subsequently, in section 4, I will focus on the desire for mobility as expressed by the interviewed migrant guests. Finally, before concluding the paper, in section 5, based on the data collected in interviews with migrant guests and staff, I will discuss the role played by Naga-har in increasing motility, which is affected by individual positions and characteristics such as legal status, livelihood issues and personality characteristics.

## **URBAN DROP-IN AND MIGRATION BETWEEN OLD AND NEW READINGS**

Traditionally, drop-ins embody settings wherein an ethics of care can be practised in the context of a home-space (Conradson, 2003b; Cloke, Johnsen & May, 2007): a place that is invested with shared feelings and attachments in which it is possible to negotiate boundaries of privacy and intimacy (Conradson, 2003b). Recently, then, the literature on drop-ins has been enriched by works investigating the nexus between these settings and forced migration (Darling, 2008; 2011). Drop-in centres, indeed, represent a crucial space in current welcoming initiatives toward migrants thanks to the work of movements related to city of refuge. Initiatives such as the European Cities of Refuge, the City of Sanctuary in the UK and the US' Sanctuary Cities (Derrida, 2001; Darling, 2008, 2013; Ridgley, 2008) give a prominent role to drop-in centres. Such practices (and related theorisations) often perpetuate the traditional take on drop-in centres, based on an idea of drop-in as sites of territorialised care and support. Shared by all these initiatives is, indeed, the notion of hospitality as a spatial expression that enables the city to become a 'welcoming infrastructure' that "seek[s] to be inclusive in generating a culture of welcome, involving different sectors such as education, local government, health, sports and arts, as well as refugee organisations" (City of Sanctuary, 2017:3).

This traditional take is, after all, in consonance with Jacques Derrida's appeal for the 'open city'. The well-known French philosopher, one of the sources of inspiration for these movements, indeed, expressed an idea of the relationship between foreigners and native residents based on the relationship of hospitality that should exist between the master of the house and the guest, where the latter "is not only someone to whom you say "come", but "enter,"", enter without waiting, make a pause in our home without waiting, hurry up and come in, "come inside," "come within me,"", not only toward me, but within me" (Derrida, 2000:123).

Contrary to this common reading, which focuses on drop-ins' territorialised care, the theoretical purpose of this paper is to illustrate how drop-ins can be critical in shaping the resources and capacity for mobility and movement. Indeed, in the traditional reading, spaces such as drop-in centres risk representing *fixing devices* for mobility, that is a means to ensure some level of comfort for people and thus to discourage them from onward socio-economical and physical mobility. As highlighted by Bagelman (2013), such politics of hospitality in sanctuary initiatives can end up representing *politics of ease*, meaning that, by offering welcoming practices within cities, they renders intractable serious problems regarding urban refuge. They construct a hospitality that involves what Malkki (1992) defined 'sedentary metaphysics', namely a way of viewing the world through which movement is seen as a by-product of a world that is otherwise arranged through place and spatial order, a pathology the carriers (i.e., mobile people) of which need care.

In order to introduce a novel dimension to the debate, in the next paragraph I bring in and detail the notion of *motility* (Kaufmann, 2002) that, I argue, would contribute to develop this field of study. Indeed, this notion foregrounds different readings of mobility and helps in accounting for the forms of resources developed in these supportive contexts, which may help to shape and develop the capacity for mobility.

### **Motility and drop-ins as enablers of mobility**

In the last decades, scholars have thoroughly reflected on how mobility represents a central dimension in our society and in people's subjectivity (e.g. Cresswell, 2006; Kellerman, 2006; Urry, 2007; Musselwhite, 2017). In particular, the so-called 'mobility turn' has put mobility on the forefront of social sciences agenda and enriched the concept of mobility of unprecedented meanings. Previously mostly spatial, currently mobility represents a multifaceted social phenomenon that is compromised of various types of movements. In addition to spatiality, mobility is, indeed, progress, freedom, opportunity, deviance and resistance (Kaufmann, Bergman & Joye, 2004; Cresswell, 2006).

One of the aspects that has been affected by this 'turn' are the dimensions of belonging and the feeling of 'home'. Traditional notions of 'home' and 'belonging' take for granted the emotional connections that people establish within their daily environments. However, in recent works, belonging is considered a process that concerns a relational attachment to place, which is fluid, mobile and always in 'becoming'. In this view, 'home' is a symbolic space of comfort and emotional attachment that spans different geographical scales, comprising a complex form of belonging that implies being in multiple places and moving among them (Antonsich, 2010; Savage, Bagnall & Longhurst, 2005) (for a similar account, see Fernandez & Olson, 2011). Indeed, according to Mallett (2004) and Kabachnik, Regulska & Mitchneck's (2010), 'home is a journey', that is, a continuous process in which the individual is permanently in a process of looking for an ideal future home and belonging. This understanding has consequences for the hospitality in drop-ins. Contrary to the idea, popular in drop-in practices and theorisations, of home as a bounded space of comfort, home is experienced mostly as a 'dream of belonging' (May, 2000) (see section 4). It is a journey that often requires a physical or social mobility (Savage, Bagnall & Longhurst, 2005). It is a trajectory that is "performed in the knowledge of the impossibility of ever really and truly belonging, along with the fear that the stability of belonging and the sanctity of belonging are forever past" (Probyn, 1996:8).

Within this context, the concept of *motility* appears crucial. Developed by Kaufmann and colleagues throughout different works (Kaufmann, 2002; Flamm and Kaufmann, 2004; Kaufmann, Bergman and Joye, 2004; Kaufmann, 2014), motility, a reference to biology, defines both a set of factors and resources and their appropriation for the sake of one's mobility project. Starting from the realisation that mobility is one phenomenon that incorporates social and spatial qualities (Kaufmann, 2014), motility refers to "all of the characteristics of a given actor that allow him/her/it to be mobile (i.e. physical skills, income, aspirations (to move or be sedentary), the social conditions of access to existing transportation and telecommunication systems, and acquired skills (job training, a driver's license, international English for travel, etc.)" (Kaufmann, 2014:7).

In other words, motility refers to all the aspects (social conditions, knowledge and skills, and inclinations) that define the potentiality to be mobile: a potentiality that is, on the one side, inherently situated in and connected to space, and, on the other, relate to an individual ability to appropriate such factors (Flamm and Kaufmann, 2004; Kaufmann, 2014). In motility, indeed, all action takes place in a context that offers a specific *receptiveness* for mobility. It is the so-called *field of possibilities*, a dimension comprising networks, territorial configurations, employment market, and institutions and laws that, in different ways, govern human activity in a territory (Kaufmann, 2014). On the other side, motility is defined also by the *aptitude for movement*. This indicates the individual ability to appropriate these possibilities, or in other words "the way in

which an individual or group takes possession of the realm of possibilities for mobility and builds on it to develop personal projects” (Flamm and Kaufmann, 2004:3).

In discussing physical mobility, Kaufmann, Bergman and Joye (2004), compare motility to a form of capital. They suggest that motility is independent of traditional forms of capital (e.g. income and education). Despite these forms of capital, and the positions of individuals in the social structure, may influence mobility capital, motility is linked to other individual abilities and resources, mostly to aptitudes for movement. Individuals can have little or much of these capitals, and, most importantly, motility seems to be a particularly indispensable resource for compensating for the lack of those. For this reason, mobility may represent a great resource for social inclusion (Kaufmann, 2014)<sup>33</sup>.

In considering motility, the notion of drop-in can be seen in a new light. Although it is clearly possible to represent drop-in centres as spaces of permanence, security and control (Conradson, 2003b; Darling, 2011), I propose to consider those spaces in the context of the struggle for mobility. In a drop-in centre, hospitality concerns more than providing a bounded place of comfort (which is an important and positive element). For example, a centre may offer courses that increase the chances of finding a job and enhancing social mobility. It may represent a space for gathering information on how and where to migrate, or it may provide an environment that encourages aspirations for future projects of mobility or a hiatus for thinking about personal constraining circumstances (see section 5).

Of course, the realisation of motion through motility also depends on the positioning and the characteristics of the individual. In the constrained situation in which they find themselves, forced migrants may find their possibilities to *appropriate mobility* (Kauffman, 2002) are limited and depend on several conditions, such as their status (e.g. asylum seeker, undocumented migrant or beneficiary of protection) and their material and immaterial resources. However, we can also reflect on the fluid dimension that characterises drop-in centres. Similar to a house, which has doors and windows as well as walls and roofs, the drop-in centre may be seen as a place, a fixed setting with walls, a physical boundary and a flexible space that people enter and leave. I argue that this dimension is critical for the migrant guests of drop-in centres. Indeed, theoretically, drop-in centres can facilitate a ‘condition of possibility’ (Butler, 1997) of mobility. In other words, drop-in centres can represent settings where guests can develop the instruments necessary to realise their mobility.

## **THE CONSTRAINTS ON FORCED MIGRANTS’ DAILY LIVES IN MILAN**

Opened in 2001, Naga-har is a drop-in centre for asylum seekers, refugees and victims of torture. The centre is a part of Naga, which is a secular, left-wing association that originated in Milan at the end of the 1980s. Its original purpose was providing health assistance to foreigners and Romani. Since then, the number of services provided by the association has expanded to focus on migrants. In particular, Naga-har was set up to provide an environment where forced migrants could meet and interact with volunteers in a safe and pleasing environment based on the idea of offering a ‘second home’ and ‘de-medicalised’ aid. For this reason, several activities take place in Naga-har, ranging from résumé editing to music classes. These services are provided mainly by a significant number of volunteers, who undergo training in order to learn how to relate to the migrant guests, cooperating with a small staff of professionals. Aesthetic

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<sup>33</sup> Maksim (2011) showed how low-income individuals develop highly specialized forms of motility to compensate for their economic handicap.

considerations have been important in designing Naga-har: from the colour chosen to the furniture and decoration, the drop-in centre was conceived as providing a sense of hospitality. Naga-har consists of an open-access area and a series of offices for staff. The open-access area comprises a 'tea and biscuit' sector with a microwave oven, a toilet with showers, a living room with a TV set, two classrooms supplied with computers that are connected to the internet, a games area and a small storeroom. The offices are used as 'help-desks' by the staff to give advice related to administrative problems.

From June to October 2017, I conducted four months of participant observation in Naga-har, where I was allowed to interact with the guests and the staff. My involvement was focused on assisting with the preparation of tea and biscuits and the general orientation of the people who attended the centre, particularly regular guests. Comprised of approximately 20 people, this group included asylum seekers, refugees (i.e., beneficiaries of protection) and 'irregular' migrants, all of whom were men mainly from Western Africa. These guests attended Naga-har more or less daily because of the 'socialising' services provided and the support offered by the help-desk. During my fieldwork, I was particularly interested in three elements: the organisational spaces that emerged through the interactions by the guests with each other and with the environment and the staff, the everyday lives of the guests within and beyond the space of Naga-har, and the role that Naga-har plays for its guests. For this reason, face-to-face ethnographic interviews were conducted with 15 regular guests and six volunteers. The interviews were undertaken mainly in the drop-in centre during its opening hours; three interviews were conducted outside the drop-in centre. The interviewed guests were between 18 and 45 years, and they were all African men as were the majority of the guests. All the interviews were audio-recorded except one interview, which was recorded in writing at the request of the interviewee. The interviews were conducted in Italian, French and English and subsequently translated and transcribed in English when it was necessary. Moreover, the names of the interviewees were modified in order to safeguard their privacy. In addition to the information generated by the interviews, field-notes were taken with reference to both the interviewees' experiences of Naga-har and the activities that I witnessed outside the drop-in centre (i.e., accompanying guests to social services and around the city).

Hence, I had the opportunity to witness the constraining conditions that affected the lives of the forced migrants in Milan. I argue that in living in similarly precarious conditions, being a forced migrant represents a process that involves material and normative states as well as stigmatising discourses (for a similar account concerning homeless people, see Lancione, 2017). This process results in psychological stress that may lead to physiological decline<sup>34</sup>, and it is deeply shaped by governmental politics and power. Forced migrants interact with a set of practices and power structures that constrain and restrict the possibilities in their lives. In particular, these practices and power structures concern two intertwining dimensions: bureaucracy and housing conditions.

#### **THE POLITICS OF DISCOMFORT AND THE REFUGEE CITY**

As emphasised in the literature on border studies, forced migrants experience a daily life that is shaped by aspects concerning bureaucracy and housing conditions (e.g. Lebuhn, 2013; Fontanari, 2015; 2016). Bureaucracy is double-sided: through the provision of documents, it provides access to services and benefits. However, it also represents the power of the nation-state power to bestow a status in which forced migrants are 'less-than-normal' subjects (e.g.,

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<sup>34</sup> I can't tell how many times drop-in guests addressed to me to say how tired they were for 'thinking too much' about their life situation and how this often brought to the feeling of suffering from an illness.

Vacchiano, 2005; Darling, 2013). Moreover, the spatial experience of forced migrants is structured by the lack of accommodation and basic conditions of housing. In this respect, guests' experiences closely relate to the concept of *home unmaking* (Baxter & Brickell, 2014), the process through which material and imaginary components of home are damaged. For asylum seekers, home unmaking means that their reception includes only accommodation, often in substandard living conditions. For those outside the reception system (i.e., irregular migrants or refugees who do not have the right to remain in reception centres), who generally live in dorms, overcrowded flats or squat derelict buildings, the conditions are so poor that any sense of home is disrupted. These conditions represent a politics of discomfort that impedes individuals in feeling welcomed (Darling, 2011). Indeed, one of my informants, Babacar, a 24-year-old man who had in Italy since 2014 from Senegal, where he worked in a quarry, emphasized this aspect. According to him, the conditions in which he lives have stripped him of his personhood.

*Milan doesn't want us to be comfortable, both the Municipality and the police [...] What wears me out [me fatigue] is the lack of documents, jobs, a good place to live [...]. People think s/he's crazy, but s/he's not crazy [...]. [You're yourself] if you live well, you have your private room, eat healthy, otherwise you're another person.*

(Babacar, rejected asylum seeker, arrived in Italy in 2014)

The lack of integration because of the unsatisfying condition of accommodation and their uncertain status are only some of the spheres affected by these politics although they are perhaps the most relevant. For forced migrants, the hope of overcoming this condition is represented by employment. In a capitalist economy, economic factors matter because they contribute to the material condition of independence from the welfare benefits. For example, migrants who have regular employment can obtain permanent resident status (Avola, 2013). However, Milan represents a *field of possibilities* with limited receptiveness concerning mobility, in particular in terms of employment market and legal statuses. The current Italian economic situation, including the relatively rich city of Milan, often frustrates mobility efforts (Avola, 2013). Forced migrants are often pushed into taking irregular and precarious jobs that do not guarantee stability or independence from welfare. The result is the dichotomous condition of (dis)placement in which migrants are caught between the need to find resources elsewhere and the constraints of their existing situation. Legal documents provided by the bureaucracy binds them to a specific territory by requiring them to reside in an area where they can access services at the local level, such as accommodation and right to work. At the same time, because of their 'home unmaking' conditions and the job market they aspire to seek better opportunities elsewhere. Therefore, forced migrants feel neither 'accomplished' in their migration nor 'free to journey' (see section 4). Instead, daily lives of the guests and their experience of Milan resembles a loop (see Fontanari [2016]). Indeed, their lives are repetitive in a *refugee city* of precarious accommodation, soup kitchens, help centres and charity organisations. They *get stuck* in it and are unable to escape these conditions both physically and psychologically (May, 2000; Jocoy & Del Casino, 2010; Lancione, 2017). In the interviews, they often expressed a narrative of being entrapped, which was emphasised by two of the participants in Naga-har. This feeling of entrapment was also expressed as being stuck in 'circuits of thoughts' that make people 'sick', which was expressed by both Babacar, the Senegalese man I introduced earlier, and Abdou, an 18 year-old regular guest of Naga-har, who was also from Senegal:

*When you have 'pain' in your head [...] you think: how can I do this, how can I do that...you get tired, you have many thoughts in your head, you become sick, you can even get crazy*  
(Babacar, rejected asylum seeker, arrived in Italy in 2014)

*My problem is that I sleep rough now and it's too cold, your head moves around, it's not calm. My thoughts go in seeking an accommodation only.*  
(Abdou, asylum seeker, arrived in Italy in 2017)

## **ASPIRATIONS OF MOBILITY**

Forced migrants are characterised by the loss of their familiar worlds and by the concurrent physical movement toward a new location (Alcalà, 2008; Kabachnik, Regulska & Mitchneck, 2010). As suggested by the notion of 'home as a journey' (Mallett, 2004), indeed, forced migrants experience home as a process of transition from a primary home to an ideal future home. At the core of the experience of forced migration, therefore, there is, according to Bauman (1995), the 'urge to feel at home', namely the need to be familiar with a place (meaning a combination of materiality and relationality) and be comfortable in belonging there. For these individuals, mobility is perceived positively because it represents the opportunity to achieve their aspirations for the ideal future home (Alcalà, 2008).

During my research, aspirations and expectations were common topics of discussion between Naga-har's guests and me and among the guest themselves. Many interviewees expressed the feeling of being prisoners in space, especially within the refugee city, Milan and Italy's national boundaries, to the extent that one interviewee said to me that staying in Milan "is like you are dying, like you don't have feet to walk"<sup>35</sup>.

Given this experience of being forced migrants in Milan (the experience of a threatening life in limbo, occurring in both time and space, see also section 3), aspirations play a strong role for the migrant participants and are linked to the notion of 'home as a journey'. They represented an inner drive that animated the migrants to search for better opportunities and sometimes motivated them to act, such to move on to other places (see section 5).

In many cases, in particular, aspirations are aspirations of mobility. Indeed, they concern a transition to an ideal future of both social and physical mobility. The following excerpts are from the responses of two interviewees who visited Naga-har regularly. In particular, in the first, Cheick expressed the desire for physical mobility. His example elucidated how an attitude to mobility, in the form of curiosity, characterized some guests.

*I decided to go to Naples to see if I can do something because here I'm only 'circling' and I don't like: I want to do something! I'm always curious, because I want to do in order to change my life.*  
(Cheick, refugee, arrived in Italy in 2014)

The second excerpt, selected from an interview with Bamba, shows the desire to exit the disadvantaged condition through social mobility. Indeed, he expressed how his present condition deprived him of the capacity to abide by the law, even in the most trivial situations, such as the use of public transportation.

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<sup>35</sup> This excerpt is from an audio-recorded interview with Babacar, a rejected asylum seeker who arrived in Italy in 2014.

*I want more. I want an apartment, I want to pay the taxes, to have a good job, even the [public transportation] ticket...because...I am always without ticket here, you know...well, we are always without it in Milan.*

(Bamba, rejected asylum seeker, arrived in Italy in 2014)

Both responses highlight not only how migrants' aspirations entailed mobility, both physical and social. Their responses demonstrate also how aspirations are linked to mobility and are fundamental motivators in their migration projects.

However, aspirations are an 'urge' as well as 'beneficial'. In particular, for some of Naga-har's guests, aspirations represented a compass throughout which they were able to detach from the problem of the present situation and find motivations for being active. Saydou offered a prime example of this aspect. Saydou had been in Italy since the beginning of 2016. Although he had obtained international protection, he was living in a dormitory for homeless people. A student in his country of origin, he was trying to gain access to as many vocational courses as possible to obtain a job. Saydou offers an example of how aspiration are fundamental to resist the difficult everyday conditions and represent significant drives for the individuals.

*Saydou: I need many things. I need to go to school, for learning how to cook. If I finish this training, I want to find a job that let me be independent.*

[...]

*Interviewer: But don't you think of your life? Are you homesick in this situation?*

*Saydou: This...I never think this. I've always thought: ok, I have to take the status, then the permit of stay, then the training and finally a job that allows me to have my life. That's all.*

(Saydou, refugee, arrived in Italy in 2016)

Saydou's words illustrate this important aspect of aspiration of mobility. As advanced by Lombard, aspirations are important for disadvantaged groups because they provide a compass that helps to develop a vision for the future (Lombard, 2013). An inner drive that animated the migrants to search for better opportunities and sometimes motivated them to act, aspirations appear essential to resist the processes they were subjected to as forced migrants (see section 3). In the next section, we will see how Naga-har locates within this context. In particular, we will see how the migrant participant utilize the material and immaterial resources of Naga-har in order to have a 'compass', build skills and then appropriate opportunities of mobility.

## **NAGA-HAR: OPENING OR CLOSING MOBILITY?**

Sociology and the social sciences have long recognised the resources that disadvantaged groups can draw from particular settings, which is emphasised in the literature on 'free spaces' and analogues (Polletta, 1999). In particular, in migration studies, an emerging central theme has been the conflation of spaces, both virtual and 'material' and migrants' agency in the creation of a so-called *mobile commons* (Papadopoulos & Tsianos, 2013). Mobile commons are 'infrastructures of connectivity' that help migrants move through the myriad of information about possibilities, routes, skills, and migrants themselves (Papadopoulos & Tsianos, 2013). These spaces are rarely conceived of as infrastructures of a mobile commons but are appropriated and 'opened' by the migrants. Indeed, differently from other groups, forced migrants normally do not possess relevant economic resources and a working position that favours mobility. On the contrary, their mobility is always hindered (e.g., Alcalà, 2008). As advanced by Fernandez and Olson (2011), therefore, migrants have to fight 'for the right to *come and go*, [...] fighting for the right of locomotion' (Fernandez and Olson, 2011:415). In this section,

I will illustrate how the drop-in centre can provide a space of resources to compensate the lack of some resources of mobility and thereby 'open' a future of mobility. This role of the drop-in centre is clarified by considering the possibility that being mobile is a kind of capital, specifically motility that can be appropriated by individuals. As a form of capital, motility is different from traditional forms of capital (Kaufmann, Bergman & Joye, 2004). Instead, according to Flamm and Kaufmann (2004), people may compensate deficient financial, social or cultural capital by acquiring knowledge and organisational capacity, such as the ability to obtain information and adapt to short-term change. Similarly to what happens with mobile commons, therefore, migrants utilize the drop-in center to build skills and then appropriate their mobility.

This is possible because Naga-har provides several opportunities of appropriation to its guests. During my fieldwork at this drop-in centre, indeed, I witnessed several such opportunities: vocational training and Italian classes, which are necessary for employment, activities that diverted the guests from the constraints of their daily conditions in order to plan future projects of mobility, and material support for the mobile commons (while being shaped, i.e. 'opened', by these same mobile commons). Of course, these offerings do not mean that Naga-har is a decisive resource in all cases. The processes that governs the migrants' condition strongly affects them. Some migrants, indeed, do not manage to appropriate their mobility, neither physically nor socially. In these cases, the 'infrastructure of connectivity' offered by the drop-in centre is ineffective. Indeed, the realisation of mobility depends on dynamics and attributes that go beyond the drop-in centre and take into account the positioning, skills and characteristics of individual migrants and the processes that affect them. In this case, the drop-in centre can represent only one of the many spaces of charity in the refugee city.

In the following sub-sections, three guests of Naga-har and their stories will be discussed in order to illustrate the role that a drop-in centre can play in the (im)mobility of forced migrants. Their stories were gathered through conversations, audio-recorded interviews and field-notes. These stories were selected because they are paradigmatic of the different roles that a drop-in centre, such as Naga-har, can play according to differing personal positions, skills and attitudes (i.e., *aptitude for motility*). The first two stories are stories of 'successful' mobility. In the case of Egas, Naga-har helped him find a job and obtain a driving licence. In the case of Babacar, the time he spent in Naga-har enabled his mobility; he was able to realise his desire to cross the border into France. Finally, the third story is about inability to appropriate Naga-har's opportunity for mobility. It concerns about Omar, an asylum seeker whom, after several years in Italy, experienced the loss of hope in his future. In his case, while his psychological condition deteriorated, Naga-har became the reference point in his daily life but mainly as a place to express his frustration.

### *Egas*

Egas was in his mid-twenties when I met him. He arrived in 2011 in Italy as a minor and lived in Foggia, Apulia until 2012. When he became a legal adult, he decided to move to Milan where a close cousin lived. In Milan, he obtained a residence and work permit. However, when a short-term work contract ended, he decided to leave Italy and look for a job elsewhere in Europe. He travelled to France, Belgium and Germany but, eventually, in 2016, he returned to Milan because of the regulation concerning the movement of non-EU citizens. Since then, he has lived with his cousin in public housing. Egas' relationship with Naga-har changed over time. When I began my fieldwork, he was regularly visiting the drop-in centre. Indeed, he had two main goals: finding a job and obtaining a driving licence. When he visited Naga-har, which happened at least four

times a week, he watched TV, chatted with the other guests and the staff, asked questions about minor administrative problems with his permit of stay, browsed the internet, studied for his driving licence and took vocational training. In particular, he had taken a course in bread-making a few months before I began my fieldwork. He liked to spend time in Naga-har because of his friends and the possibility of receiving help from other guests and the staff. For example, he came to Naga-har and asked me and the volunteers for help with his driving licence test, which we were glad to offer. In October, Egas obtained a job in the bakery of a supermarket, which was linked to the vocational training he took months through Naga-har. Although it was another short-time work contract, this job enabled him to contribute to his house expenses and to renew his permit of stay. Because of the job, his visits to Naga-har decreased to one or two days a week, and then, as I was told, he stopped going to Naga-har. In the meantime, he obtained his driving licence, which pleased him tremendously because of the increased mobility and social position it symbolised<sup>36</sup>. Finally, Egas also expressed happiness because both the job as a baker and the newly achieved driving licence were skills and assets that were transferrable in other contexts and other countries. Indeed, although he was temporarily satisfied with his situation, Egas still had a strong feeling of precariousness and insecurity regarding his life. Therefore, he did not consider himself as having 'arrived'; instead, he was always ready to leave, which he articulated in the following excerpt:

*Interviewer: And where do you think you will be in the future? In Milan?*

*Egas: I cannot say. That depends on the job first, because...you can never say [...] I think that if I find a job in Foggia...and let's say I'm in Milan...I must go for it.*

In summary, Egas' story is one of successful social mobility. Naga-har played an important role in obtaining this social mobility, such as by providing vocational training. Nonetheless, the findings do not indicate that he felt that he had achieved his aspirations for the future because of the attitude toward mobility expressed in his interview responses.

### *Babacar*

Babacar was regular visitor Naga-har during most of my fieldwork there. However, in October, he left Milan to go to France. In 2014, Babacar reached Sicily by boat, where he asked for asylum. He then sought jobs in Europe, travelling to Spain, Switzerland and Germany. However, his favourite country was France. Nonetheless, he was forced to return to Italy under the Dublin Regulation. He chose Milan because, as he explained, 'Milan is closer to Europe [...]. Here, you have information. It's like a frontier'. Babacar's life in Milan was tough. Sometimes he slept in a friends' apartment and sometimes on the street or the bus. Because he was a rejected asylum seeker, he was trying to obtain protection. In the meantime, because he was 'illegal', he seldom worked and had no right to a bed in reception centres. He used to come to Naga-har every day. For him, it was a space where he could collect information about the routes to other European countries. Between cups of tea and comments on the facts of the day, the guests in the TV room usually talked about the routes they had taken and the ones they were planning to take. While listening to the others, Babacar also shared information, thus contributing to the mobile commons. Information is shared not only with close friends. According to Papadopoulos and Tsianos (2013), the mobile commons exists because of the cooperative contributions of mobile people. These contributions are not related to natural solidarity; instead, they originate in the fact that migration is a "process which relies on a multitude of other persons and things. This

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<sup>36</sup> Such remarks were expressed by Egas to me during casual conversations both within and outside Naga-har.

extreme dependability can only be managed through reciprocity, and reciprocity between migrants means the multiplication of access to mobility for others” (p. 190). Hence, Naga-har exists because of the migrants’ need for a mobile common. Babacar, like others, was attracted to Naga-har precisely because his network referred him to it:

*“The first time I came here because of some friends. They kept saying: come to Naga! [...] We the migrants know that Naga-har is good, they work hard, working people are good, they help us, everyone knows it and [...] if we see you’re good, we come, but if some of us says you have acted bad, you don’t see us anymore”*

The day before he left, I saw Babacar in Naga-har. He invited me to take a tea with him, and he informed me about his intention to cross the border. I had not seen him for a few days, but what he told me was not surprising because he had been increasingly engaged in collecting information about the best route. The following is an excerpt from my observational notes about that encounter, which reveals that the act of moving requires preparation and resources:

*I met Babacar when I entered the TV room. He was apparently very happy to see me [...]. We took the tea and watched the news. Then after a while he went to the bookcase, took his bag and showed me a paper with his plan [...]. He told me he couldn’t bear the situation any longer so he decided to leave for France again [...]. He wasn’t here for some days because he made the tour of his friends in Milan, greet them and collect the stuff in the bag. Then he asked some friends to help with the ticket and borrowed some money from them [...] When we said bye, he told me we should stay in touch and visibly excited added: I hope I will have the good chance with me this time!*

For Egas, Naga-har was a crucial resource for finding a job, obtaining a driving licence and gaining social mobility. In contrast, Babacar visited the centre to obtain that information that would enable him to be physically mobile.

### *Omar*

However, not all guests found that their engagement with Naga-har facilitated their mobility. Omar’s story illustrates an unsuccessful outcome. Omar was an asylum seeker who had visited Naga-har regularly in the previous two years. He was a cultured person in his country of origin, but in Italy he could not find a stable job and the position to which he aspired. I was told that Omar had many friends in Naga-har. Over time, however, this situation changed. During my time in Naga-har, Omar roamed around the centre in anger. He even had emotional outbursts in which he insulted the volunteers and other guests. For many guests, the time spent in Naga-har is a time of relaxation and diversion from daily problems, a hiatus from worrying and a period of leisure and socialising. This dimension, I argue, is crucial because it provides the space to escape temporarily from the anxiety of the present and to think about possible futures. Indeed, in Naga-har, guests can meet, recall times in their country of origin, talk about what they want to achieve, share information and plan for the future. This imaginative mobility (Musselwhite, 2017) counteracts the constraining conditions of their lives and allows them to vent to their frustrations. Thus, the guests are able to maintain a sense of the self while aspiring to a brighter future (Goffman, 1968). However, for Omar and some other guests, this is not the case. Instead, they seemed caught in an eternal present, locked outside the life that they had envisioned and that they saw others enjoying. Even in Naga-har, they were isolated, and they seemed absorbed

in thinking about their present condition. Therefore, they developed feelings of anger and dislocation. The following excerpt is from an interview with Mustapha, a former guest who became a volunteer. He pinpointed the causes of this negative outcome:

*“There are guests with their ‘head outside’...I mean, head outside because...when someone lose his/her mind s/he has the head outside [...]. The problem is the situation: someone is here from 2011 and found nothing, lives on the street, sleeps rough and so gets mad”*

In other words, these guests were not able to use Naga-har as a resource of mobility, if not physically or socially at least imaginatively. For these guests, Naga-har was not adequate. Such guests should be redirected to a medical service. For example, Omar was redirected to psychiatric treatment. Anna, a volunteer, clearly expressed these negative consequences:

*“For me, Naga-har is good if it represents a stepping-stone for one year, a place you come in when you have few references. But if it becomes more than this...it is a symptom of something bigger, because the guests start considering Naga-har as the only point of reference, without looking for something else[...]. The person will live a conflict because we cannot provide for what s/he wants”*

In other words, the drop-in centre supposedly alleviates the problem of waiting by offering the possibility of a vision for the future and diversion from the present. However, in my observations of the trajectories of some guests, another dimension of Naga-har was revealed. Indeed, the centre could function to cause the ‘closure’ of mobility by contributing to fixing certain guests in a permanent state of marginality. If guests do not find a way to use Naga-har to obtain mobility, the centre could represent a point of anchorage, not a point of departure.

## **CONCLUSION**

The paper explored some ways in which an urban drop-in centre for forced migrants may promote their mobility. Based on the findings, it is appropriate to conceive of Naga-har as a setting in which a plurality of experiences co-exist. The stories of Egas and Babacar illustrated some possibilities offered by Naga-har, such as the social mobility achieved by Egas and the physical mobility obtained by Babacar. Nonetheless, Naga-har did not always function as a resource of motility, which was exemplified by Omar’s story. When the drop-in space does not succeed in providing social, physical or imaginative mobility, and the guest uses it as an anchorage rather than a point of departure, it can become one of the liminal settings that constitute the refugee city. As described in section 3, the refugee city is comprised of locations (e.g., soup kitchens, dormitories and welfare offices) that constitute the daily lives of the forced migrants in Milan. Despite the good intentions of the providers of the services in these locations, these settings could tend to suppress the mobility of their users, thus perpetuating their lives on the margins of society.

These findings can be positioned in relation to other studies on drop-in centres and other spaces of hospitality, especially in the debate on the city of refuge. Research by Conradson (2003a; 2003b) on drop-in centres highlighted the drop-in centre as a therapeutic environment, emphasising egalitarian relationships and practices of care between its staff and its guests. This environment is valued as an expression of commitment of and for the local community, and it is best appreciated when the drop-in centre represents a reference point around which guests organise their day. Following Conradson’s contribution, Darling (2011) studied the drop-in centre as a crucial space of care for asylum seekers within the city of refuge. Against the backdrop of an unwelcoming city, the drop-in centre is a welcoming site of hospitality that focuses on the relations of mutuality and care developed through physical proximity. As stated

by its volunteers, in so doing, the drop-in centre functions to welcome all sorts of people with different problems by providing a of warmth of feeling that 'absorbs' guests so that they feel comfortable (ibid., p. 410).

Nonetheless, the notion of hospitality related to these spaces of care within the city of refuge has been subject of criticism. Bagelman (2013) suggested that this type of hospitality elicits the sense of dependency, uselessness and invisibility. In this respect, the drop-in centre as part of a network of hospitality, although temporary in purpose, can serve to facilitate the guests' 'integrating into destitution or chronic dependency on charity' (ibid., p. 54). Darling (2011) did not spare criticism in warning against the risk that the care provided through drop-in centres will reproduce a system of discrimination and division in which the guests are constructed as non-political subjects and denied agency.

In this paper, I developed a conceptualisation of the drop-in centre as providing conditions that enable mobility. Indeed, such centres represent a resource for increasing *motility*, which is the capital of mobility (Kaufmann, 2002, p. 3). In this interpretation, drop-in centres are spaces that are 'open' to the outside and that can contribute to breaking the cycle of dependency on charity. Albeit part of the charity network composing the *refugee city*, drop-in centres such as Naga-har may accompany and ease migrants' exit from this the cycle of dependency. This is done by providing vocational training and a space in which guests can gather information about how and where to migrate and be diverted from the daily anxiety about their constraining circumstances. Moreover, the fieldwork allowed me to appreciate the role of drop-in centres in the context of the struggle to establish mobility. From the perspective of the migrants who were guests in Naga-har, to migrate meant to react to the desire for belonging, which was addressed by changing their existence to move socially, physically and/or imaginatively. Most of the forced migrants interviewed in this study were enlivened by their aspirations for the future. For them, Naga-har represented a space that was informed by these aspirations and enabled their future mobility.

Finally, this conceptualisation of the role of the drop-in centre in city of refuge's literature is also important from the point of view of policy. Drop-in centres could be planned to offer resources that enable the release from the subaltern condition of forced migrants. Based on my experience at Naga-har, this dimension is already present in the centre although it was unplanned. However, in the existing literature on the city of refuge and the organisational principles of drop-in centres (e.g. the *City of Sanctuary* movement in the United Kingdom), this dimension is underestimated. This role of the drop-in centre demands an approach that differs from that in the literature. This role demands the focus on the provision of opportunities to empower guests while giving them the space to develop their own 'infrastructure of connectivity'.

## CONCLUSIONS

From 2015, the arrival and reception of migrants in Europe has highlighted the city as both a context and an actor. The misnamed migration/refugee crisis, indeed, has placed the city of Europe under the spotlight. Milan proved to be no exception. It has represented an important crossroad, stepping-stone and destination of human mobility; at the same time, its local government has showed all its entrepreneurship by designing innovative policies for the reception and assistance of migrants that counterbalanced the national and European approach (see Appendix). In order for me to investigate the Milanese context and answer to the initial questions, I looked at the responses of Milan through the lens of City of Refuge debate. To conclude, I will briefly summarize my research, whose results I detailed already at the end of each paper, and present some important observations and possible future research developments.

As a whole, this contribution provides a thick description of aspects regarding the reaction that the city of Milan had displayed with regard to the surge of force migration at the time of the misnamed refugee crisis, by zooming in on dynamics of hospitality and hostility and asking questions about practices of solidarity and rejection. The notion of the City of Refuge proved to be a compelling idea, one around which to develop not solely this work but also claims of justice across countries. However, as I found out, this notion should be approached with caution. My contribution examined aspects at the core of the notion of refuge. However, this has spurred an exploration not only of the welcoming actions of civil society actors and the resources that forced migrant may find in particular settings driven by ideas of hospitality (i.e. drop-ins). It has also shed light on the opposite response of an authority such as Questura and on how migrants have experienced and responded to different, and at times overlapping, processes of refuge and refuse, mobility and dependency (see article three).

It should not surprise us that seemingly contradictory concepts such as refuge and refuse are closely interlinked. Already Jacques Derrida noted that the word hospitality (cognate with the notion of refuge) “carries its own contradiction incorporated into it” (Derrida 2000: 3). In particular, Derrida showed how hospitality can never be complete, by implying a host who “receives, welcomes, offers hospitality in his house” and “maintains his own authority in his own home” (2000: 4). In other words, welcome is always premised upon the power to impose limits and rules of such welcome. Therefore, the notion of refuge illustrates a paradox: within it, hostility and hospitality ‘walk together’, a duality captured by Derrida through the term of *hostipitality*.

The consequences of this paradox should not prevent us from practise or theorise about refuge in cities. To ignore the oppositional forces does not represent a viable option (an option that can genuinely contribute to the academic debate), nor to abandon the idea that the city can acts as a refuge. In their introduction to a recent issue, Louise Berg and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2018) insist that we can overcome, theoretically and practically, this *trap*. However, for them, this implies going beyond simplistic analyses of the city of refuge (the ones that reveal lack of depth). In order to do so, we need to:

- “Explore the justifications or motivations that guide those showing hospitality and hostility” (Louise Berg and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2018:3)
- “Think of relationships and social actors, of power and hierarchies, but also of agency and, as part of this, diverse modes of resistance” (Louise Berg and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2018:3)
- “Remain attentive to the realities of structural inequalities and power imbalances [...] that can act as barriers to different forms of solidarity” (Louise Berg and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2018:4)

I believe my work resonates with these intellectual objectives and can contribute to the development of the debate intersecting refuge and the city, forced migration and the urban sphere. This thanks to the different inputs that each of the papers has given to the whole work and that I summarise in the following paragraph.

In the first article, I explored the motivations that guide those showing hospitality. I showed how these motivations concern both an intellectual curiosity and moral imperatives. In light of the “everyday geographies” of encounters, then, the process of recognition that emerge in “being together” between hosts and strangers discloses its potentials. We found out that being together with strangers represent a strong antidote against indifference and hostility, not only at the personal level. The experiences of pro-migrant volunteers may represent a means for opposing the wave of anti-migrant discourse and policies Europeans are facing in the aftermath of the misnamed ‘migration/refugee crisis’. Indeed, by catalysing the efforts of multiple individuals in different volunteer organisations, volunteering has a remarkable public impact. In particular, we saw how these voluntary groups in Milan were able to counterbalance the public hostility and even push the Municipality to implement innovative policies in the field of migrants’ reception and assistance.

By the second article, I illustrated how powerful authorities reacted to the surge of force migration with increasing hostility. We saw the ‘erection’ of internal borders as a result of the actions of one of these authorities, the *Questura*. In particular, the Questura has emerged as a place through which bordering practices occur by the implementation of obstructions to the regularisation of migrants’ and refugees’ legal statuses. In this respect, this second paper deals with the realities of structural inequalities and power imbalances. In this paper, the local-level has emerged as a crucial field which witnesses the intersection of international, European, national and local policies in the field of asylum. Indeed, such *border within* emerged to resonate with the wider political orientation in migration management at the European-level in the post-2015 period, and extended the effect of borders inside the national territory. In this regard, we have found out that bureaucracy can have violent effects on individuals. The bureaucracy and the related obstructions of immigration, in this sense, represent one of the main elements that form what I called in the last paper the *constraining conditions* affecting the lives of the forced migrants in Milan. Questura’s obstacles, indeed, are bearers of feelings of dependency and uncertainty towards the future, thus affecting the subjectivity of migrants and their everyday-life. I argued that in living in similarly precarious conditions, being a forced migrant represents a process that involves material and normative states as well as stigmatising discourses, and that this process results in psychological stress that may lead to physiological decline.

In the last paper, however, the investigation conducted inside a drop-in centre has shed light on how certain urban settings may represent a way-out to this condition. This third article showed how space of encounter like drop-in centres can (and, possibly, must) represent not solely spaces of care but also spaces of autonomy, ‘detachment’ from a charitable form of support and ‘compensation’ for power imbalances. In this article, I looked at the practices and I developed a conceptualisation of the urban drop-in centres as providing conditions that enable mobility. Indeed, migrants’ lives are often carried out within a *refugee city* of precarious accommodation, soup kitchens, help centres and charity organisations in which migrants get stuck and are unable to escape, both physically and psychologically. Against this backdrop, drop-in centres may represent spaces that are ‘open’ to the outside and that can contribute to breaking the cycle of dependency on charity. A drop-in centre such as Naga-har, therefore, represents a *space of refuge* within the city. It is, however, not a space of refuge that wishes to limit and protect the migrant people within a setting (as in certain understanding of refuge); rather this space

(sometimes) succeeds in accompanying its guest toward autonomy and mobility. In this way, it shed light on the *agency potentials* of the same migrants.

In the rest of these conclusions, I would like to expand further the discussion on the promising venues and the enduring risks concerning CoR. The question of refuge is the most durable element of discussion across the articles, and the juxtaposition between this theme and the material from my fieldwork brought out further fundamental issues concerning the practices and theorisations of CoR. The debate on the City of Refuge offers significant potential for both migration studies and urban studies. However, we must be aware of the risks it runs. Therefore, in the following part of the conclusion I will focus on these problematic aspects. This is not to imply that my present contribution gives a definite answer to these problematic elements. Indeed, the present work has focused on a single city (for reasons of temporal convenience) in a limited amount of time: a comparative research and a deeper exploration of what happens within the city in 'micro-publics', namely through localized and frequently mundane practices of refuge, can benefit our understanding and provide more information on actual practices of refuge at the urban scale. Therefore, the following paragraphs present considerations that have arisen only at the end of my endeavour. Nonetheless, I believe that such considerations are important reflection for a future and praiseworthy research.

#### **SOME CONCLUSIVE REMARKS ABOUT THE CITY OF REFUGE...**

The *urban dimension* of forced migration is getting more and more relevant. Statistics showed, for example, that already in 2011 more than half of the world's 10.4 million refugees and at least 13 million conflict-related internally displaced people lived in urban areas (UNHCR, 2012; IDMC, 2011). Additionally, over the past decades, worldwide we have witnessed a *decentralisation trend* that brought unprecedented powers to the city level in terms of designing and implementing social policies (Oomen 2016; Zapata-Barrero, Caponio and Scholten 2017). On the face of it, the emergence of the notion of 'City of Refuge' is located within this context of growing prominence of the city in social policies' domain. This idea posits the institutionalization and practice of hospitality and welcome in cities as a way to transform and reorient the politics of the nation-states regarding migration governance and political membership, and with good arguments if we consider that, historically, cities have represented the main source of rights for their residents, well before the nation-states (Glaeser 2011).

However, we should take the idea of the city as *de facto* a site for social justice with a pinch of salt. First, indeed, all cities are not equally interested in putting forward such an agenda. Urban authorities (within and across cities) are not unified actors: they have different ideological orientations and sometimes conflicting commitments in relation to the reception of forced migrants (Darling 2016a). Additionally, the city is a site of contestation, as advanced by Young (2011). It represents a welcoming site as well as a 'difference machine' (see Isin [2002]) wherein differences are produced and perpetuated through spatial and governance practices. The 'city-as-refuge' exists, indeed, within an 'agonistic' city-arena where *hospitable* actions are in tension with *hostile* practices (Young 2011). Therefore, the scholarship on the city of refuge should be wary of uncritically celebrating the city and aware of the risks connected with its romanticisation. In this thesis, I have identified at least three of them.

1. *The risk of over-emphasizing urban players and downplaying national and supra-national stakeholders*

There is much at stake in cities engaging with migration and forced migration. The 'local turn' and the decentralisation policies evoke, to some extent, the 'ancient glories', when cities used to defend and bestow rights on their inhabitants, from Athens to the medieval city-states (Glaeser 2011). Yet, the contemporary context is not so radically different from when the scholarship on migration was hegemonised by the study of national models (e.g. Castles 1995). Even if we witness to the growing prominence of the local authorities on migration governance, it would be incorrect to claim their pre-eminence since city's authorities need to share their prerogatives with actors of national and supra-national levels. In fact, migration governance is a multilevel accomplishment: the city is just a node within a wider network (e.g. Balbo, 2005). As argued by Uitermark, Nicholls and Loopmans (2012) and reiterated by Darling (2016a), the contemporary scholarship revolving around the 'right to the city' and city of refuge often shows to be caught in a 'local trap' (Purcell 2006), a spatial closure, by focusing solely on urban actors and reducing every challenge to the urban level.

### *2. The risk of adopting an unproblematic and 'top-down' approach to the City of Refuge*

Both as a concept and as a practice, the City of Refuge risks focusing on how rights are given or bestowed from above, namely from authorities. Squire and Bagelman (2012) found that whereas 'sanctuaries' for migrants have moved beyond secluded and religious sites, our understanding of CoR still emphasises the sanctuary as a place 'cut off' from the public or political realm. In a similar vein, Ehrkamp and Nagel (2014) advanced the idea by discovering that the refuge offered by religious congregations in the US frequently fails to challenge the *status quo*. Bagelman (2013) argued that politics of refuge can even be at service of the existing migration governance. All these authors criticize an understanding of CoR that prioritizes the policy activities of public authorities. Instead, they articulate an idea of CoR in terms of a 'bottom up' struggle emanating from campaigns, activists, migrants' movements and negotiations. As Young (2011: 534) puts forward, "the city holds promise as an emancipatory space not through invocations of hospitality but rather because it is struggled over by its various inhabitants". Therefore, this take advances the idea that cities and local movements are not static but aspire to spread beyond the locality. Indeed, coherently with its characteristic of decoupling from national level policy and rhetoric (see Introduction), CoR's claims seem to exist in a political tension with the codified ways of governing forced migration (often originating from national authorities) and aspire to change the existing conditions.

### *3. The risk of 'flattening' the notion of City of Refuge*

There is a further critical aspect in discussing the cities of refuge. The notion and the practice of CoR risk to be 'flattened', by prioritising the rhetoric over the practical implementation. As noted by Darling (2016), cities may position themselves as open, cosmopolitan and migrant-friendly for reasons of city marketing. It is a sort of 'moral urbanism', namely "attempts to position a city as representing a set of moral values or virtues without necessarily embedding those values in policy or practice" (Darling 2016a:128). The danger here is that the principles linked to CoR are supported only in an abstract manner. In this regard, scholars who uncritically accept this rhetoric would fail to account for the way in which the city becomes a refuge in its different spaces and aspects. Indeed, the 'city' and the 'refuge' interacts only in some 'instances'. As shown across the papers, indeed, it would be rather superficial to depict the city in its entirety as a refuge; rather the refuge emerges in particular spaces and occasions within the city (see also Young [2011]).

A reading of the City of Refuge that falls into one of these three risks will not withstand the test of time. As advanced by Mezzadra, indeed, the recent dynamics highlight migration as a social movement with a strong impact on our contemporary world (Bay 2015). The migration movements of 2015 in Europe referred to as the *long summer of migration* (see Kasperek [2016]), for example, elicited a strong response from the civil society in different countries (and especially in Germany) which stood in contrast with the hostility of many institutions. From rights not to be deported to new approaches on citizenship, this event has been utilised as a means of highlighting and contesting the existing governance of migration.

What we can observe now is a multiplicity of actors and an unstable *power geometry* on the field of migration governance at the local level that make us wonder what to focus on when examining city's action. In this context, the idea of negotiations could be helpful in framing the 'local migration regime'. This implies the examination of the interactions between city' and 'refuge', the claims made by all residents, as well as the ways in which the state and its borders occupy space in that.

The city emerges in a scenario of a particular political and material space. First, it represents a kind of space with a peculiar political, economic, material and social landscape distinct from those of non-urban or rural spaces (Landau 2004; Darling 2016). Second, the analysis of urban 'forced migrants' presents special challenges to the researcher, which are unlike those of refugee camps: for example, urban migrants rely on local markets and social services, interact with local populations to a degree not necessarily seen among camp-based refugees and tend to build strong social networks within their migrant groups (Landau 2004). Moreover, the city, as "a particular kind of place that occupied a central role in the functioning of the state" (Young 2011:538), is the setting where migrants engage with the authorities in their actual forms. In this sense, the city can be interpreted both as a site wherein migration governance is forced upon and where this same governance can be contested.

It is my believe that the scholarship on the City of Refuge would benefit from rejecting *granitic* understandings of the way in which CoR is accomplished. On the contrary, scholars should concentrate efforts on reconstructing the constellation of different actors that weight in on local migration governance. In order to avoid the risk of being caught in a 'local trap' (see Uitermark, Nicholls and Loopmans [2012]), the challenge becomes to engage with translocal and non-local actors and show how such processes are 'place-based' but not 'place-bound'.

However, reconstructing the constellation of actors and institutions would not be sufficient. Indeed, actors, including migrants themselves, support, influence or contest the local migration regime: they conflict and negotiate. Within CoR, rights are not simply 'given' but are actively 'obtained' from the 'bottom up'. Darling (2016a) asserts that CoR comes from within the city, from a political struggle that challenge the membership associated with citizenship, residency and formal rights to services and belonging. Squire and Bagelman (2012:159) claim that CoR is not limited to request a more hospitable setting but entails a bottom-up movement for "the right to move around and interact".

In this regard, the 'migration-regime perspective' can be of use for at least two reasons. First, it can help to account for the roles of different actors in the local accomplishment of migration governance. Indeed, without reconstructing the migration-regime debate in detail, migration-regime literature have explored the idea that forced migration is the outcome of a process of determining and reacting to the endless effort to shape people's mobility (see Casas-Cortes et al. [2014]; Horvath and Peters [2017]). This reading recognizes the multiplicity of actors, norms,

discourses, categorizations and practices at work, and puts forward the idea of migration as a social force in itself. It focuses on practices which are considered to be determined not by a central power authority but through negotiation processes. In these negotiations, a variety of factors and a changing assemblage of individual, collective and institutional actors, play a role - even migrants, who represent proper agents of migration - albeit with different powers to shape decisions. Within the migration regime perspective, therefore, the concept of 'zones of negotiation' emerged. This idea implies to speak of negotiations and the role of spatial references. In this respect, Hinger, Scäfer and Pott (2016) consider the city as a crucial local zone of negotiations. The city becomes an *arena*, and actors like the volunteers and activists that we encountered in the first paper are important stakeholders within this local zone of negotiation. Finally, in migration regime literature the city represents "an entry point to 'study through' [...] the different intersections and overlapping of scales in migration regimes" (Hinger, Scäfer and Pott 2016:7; see also Glick Schiller 2012). As seen throughout this work, there are actors whose role is to filter, push to the margins and hinder the access to the 'city of refuge' to migrant people (i.e. *Questura*) and actors which try to extend welcome and refuge to those same persons (i.e. pro-migrant volunteers). It is important to understand these two dimensions of the city as always in tension in the everyday life of the forced migrants. In this context, refuge is an everyday process that takes place in local spaces and relationships, between the exercise of border control and the feelings of being safe and secure. In this sense, thinking about refuge as a process means also locating it. Indeed, refuge takes place in a number of sites and spaces such as 'our' Naga-har, namely places that represent 'sanctuaries' for migrants. Therefore, rather than classifying a certain city as whether a *refuge* or *refuse city*, my proposition is to look at the negotiations, conflicts, settings and actors that impart hospitality or hostility to forced migrants. In this sense, I want to dedicate the last few lines of this conclusion to an aspect that lingered on all the papers without being the 'protagonist' -but that I consider extremely relevant for future research: the relationship between our migrant participants and the city of Milan.

### **...AND THE FORCED MIGRANTS VIS-À-VIS MILAN.**

Looking closer at how refuge is enacted in cities means also to talk about the actual relationship between the city and its forced migrant population. Indeed, refuge is above all a feeling, the feeling of being secure and safe (Young 2011). In this sense, the city turns into a refuge when able to provide this feeling to its forced migrant population. For this reason, knowing migrants' point of view is crucial. This work is based on an ethnographic-oriented fieldwork that I carried out between January 2017 and February 2018. Through interviewing, taking part in activities and following the migrant participants I was able to get closer to their points of view on their life in this city. Indeed, this work would not have been possible without the willingness of Babacar, Egas, Kubrom, Cheick and all the migrant people who, together with the volunteers, activists and workers, kindly found time to tell their stories, opinions and experiences to me. Too often, we hear about migration flows, fluxes and waves. These are all expressions which suggest the image of anonymous masses. However, behind these expressions there are actual men and women.

In the case of Milan, I realized that this city represents simultaneously both a refuge, a border and an important hub for the passage, circulation and settlement to an extremely broad population, composed by asylum seekers, refugees, rejected asylum seekers and undocumented migrants, that I pigeon-holed into the notion of forced migrants. I was able to grasp their condition of vulnerability originating from the discretion of the authorities which they need to interface with, the enforcement of policing and the risk of being attacked or robbed. Whereas

the assistance network is often perceived as demeaning, the participants voiced their need for autonomy and mobility in a broad sense, which they try to secure by strategically integrating into (more or less legal) job markets and co-ethnic social networks.

Obviously, this has much to do with 'us' and the ways in which the reception and assistance system in Milan is designed. Indeed, talking about the everyday-life of this population means also to talk about Milan, the way in which this city, its native population and Italy reacted to the surge of arrival of forced migrants during the 'migration/refugee crisis'. It tells us about the Italian attempt to block these people from coming by externalizing controls, a process that is in resonance with the European approach on migration and asylum (e.g. see Ambrosini [2016]), and, once entered, the Italian attempt to deny human rights even at the local scale. It tells us also about the effort of the many organizations and groups working toward the inclusion of these people into the city. Finally, it tells us that Milan is one of the cities that hosts the highest number of migrants in Italy, however its migrant population is often forced to sleep rough, work in the black economy and depend on charity to survive.

Milan has been, indeed, a focal point for migrants but often it has been a stepping-stone and unstable and precarious anchorage point, and seldom it embodied the final site of settlement. That is to say that Milan represents a crossroad and the *centre of gravity* of a mobility directed both inwards and outwards Fontanari 2016b). This *need for mobility* risks to clash with a reception and assistance system which is often conceived under a 'sedentarist metaphysic'. In this sense, the role of the Third Sector, so prominent in Milan, has been crucial and made up for public authorities' inattentions. However, often it also reproduced the sense of dependency and frustration that characterizes migrants' life and showed to be unable to cope with the actual necessities of the migrant people of Milan. In this respect, this collection ends with a paper that tries to bring some hope: the hope in an assistance system that place these people at the centre as individuals by helping them to obtain autonomy, rather than stripping them of their personality and aspirations, as sometimes happens.

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## APPENDIX

### SOME REFERENCE POINTS ABOUT MILAN AND THE EUROPEAN 'MIGRATION CRISIS'

#### 1. THE 'EUROPEAN MIGRATION CRISIS': THE BREAKDOWN AND RE-BUILDING OF THE EUROPEAN BORDER REGIME

Europe has recently faced an unprecedented inflow of forced migrants, primarily due to the turbulent condition of neighbouring countries on the opposite side of the Mediterranean Sea. Between 2013 and 2017, indeed, more than four million people applied for asylum in the European Union (Eurostat, 2018). Even if this number constitutes only a fraction of the population of refugees and displaced persons worldwide (Turkey alone has hosted three million migrants in the same period), it has been enough to be considered a European 'refugee crisis' (New Keywords Collective, 2016). In this period, seaborne migration through the Mediterranean Sea has reached a structural and critical dimension: almost two million migrants disembarked on European coasts between 2013 and 2017 (ISMU, 2018). Italy and Greece have been at the forefront of this phenomenon, receiving the brunt of this influx as the first countries of arrival in Europe. However, migrants who reached Europe (crossing the sea or trekking across the Balkans) have consistently moved further northward and westward, where they envisage better prospects of receiving social benefits as well as finding jobs or connecting with their migratory networks.

During this time, the cornerstone of European Union policies on processing asylum-seekers (the Dublin Regulation that, as will be seen, designates the first EU member-state of arrival as responsible for the treatment of the asylum claimant) has created a fracture between the 'disembarkation' and 'arrival' of asylum-seekers and forced migrants (Brekke and Brochman, 2014). Indeed, a great deal of migrants who disembarked on Greek or Italian coasts refused to claim asylum in these two countries, choosing to apply elsewhere, resulting in a 'transit movement' originating from discrepancies between reception policies within EU countries and favoured by the same Italian and Greek state authorities and their decisions not to comply with EU regulations on the identification of incoming migrants.

The unexpected surge and 'internal' movements of migrants caught European governments by surprise. The first action came in May 2015 when Jean-Claude Juncker, president of the European Commission, proposed a relocation mechanism to share a quota of asylum-seekers among EU member-states, a proposal that was promptly followed by the refusal of many members. Subsequently, during the summer of 2015, national borders of many central-eastern European countries such as Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland were closed (Wihtol de Wenden, 2016). In this context, the abrupt announcement from Angela Merkel, chancellor of Germany, on 7 September 2015 expressing the intention to welcome 800,000 asylum-seekers seemed to indicate an alternative direction that was more open to migration (Kasperek, 2016). However, at the crossroads between embracing a novel approach that was more open to discussing a favourable attitude toward forced migration and reaffirming closure policies, EU governments chose to endorse 'emergency logics, aggressive policing and militarised borders' (Castelli Gattinara, 2017:11).

Since 2015, indeed, European governments have revealed all their hostility toward forced migration. In particular, they opted for a solution based on controlling borders instead of cooperating to redistribute responsibilities concerning asylum processing. In this way, the European governments legitimised the equation between migration and insecurity and placed the blame on the 'refugee crisis' and the unexpected number of forced migrants. In addition,

governments in Europe, unable to agree on shared solutions, have resorted to the original strategy of ‘externalising the borders’ in an attempt to re-border the European territory. At the origin of this inability are the provisions of the ‘EU border regime’, a systemic collapse of its migration and border policies based around the Schengen and Dublin regulations.

### *1.1 The EU border regime: The Dublin regulation and the externalisation paradigm*

We can arguably say that the central rationale at the core of the European migration regime is the paradoxical situation established by the twofold ambition of the Schengen Agreement (Walters and Haahr, 2004). The agreement on the free movement of persons within Europe relies on the ability to reconcile the free circulation of goods, services and capital while controlling the movement of people from outside Europe. To reach this goal, the EU has based its policies on two ‘pillars’ (Hess and Kasperek, 2017). The first pillar is the internal regime based on the Dublin Regulation. The Dublin Convention, set out in 1990 and essentially reconfirmed in 2003 and 2013 by Dublin II and Dublin III, established a closer collaboration between EU signatory states in the field of judicial and police cooperation on the management of asylum requests. According to this convention, EU countries take measures to create a defensive system against the increasing number of asylum-seekers in Europe.

At the centre of this system lies the so-called ‘Dublin principle’. The Dublin principle places the responsibility to process asylum claims and take legal responsibility of migrants on the first state of entry (‘one stop, one shop’ system) (Wihtol de Wenden, 2016). Moreover, to guarantee the functioning of this system, signatory states have the obligation to register and update the fingerprints of all incoming asylum-seekers and irregular migrants to the Eurodac database, a large database shared between member-states that allows the EU to determine the first country of arrival’. This system places most responsibility on countries along the EU’s southern border, especially Italy and Greece, generating political tensions between countries ‘at the forefront’ and ‘internal countries’ (Castelli Gatiinara, 2017).

The second pillar deals with the externalisation of European borders and the control of external borders by technological apparatuses. The externalisation and control of European borders has required the collaboration of extra-European countries. Through international treaties and initiatives such as the Barcelona process (1995), the Rabat process (2006) and the Mediterranean Transit Migration Dialogue (2007), many European governments outsourced the duty of blocking the movement of migrants to African authorities while European agencies focused on monitoring the situation at the borders (Hess and Kasperek, 2017). There are two prime examples of this strategy: the Spanish agreement with the Moroccan authorities for the control of their shared borders at the end of 1990s and the Italy friendship treaty of 2008 with former Libyan dictator Gheddafi aimed at closing the migration channel from Libya to Italy.

In sum, we can argue that since 1990, a security approach based on instruments of dissuasion, repression and confinement (that, inter alia, caused the deaths of 30,000 people in the Mediterranean Sea between 2000 and 2015—around 15,000 between 2014 and 2017 alone; see ISMU [2018]) has prevailed in Europe. In other words, Europe seems to endorse an approach aimed at discouraging migrants’ arrival, even at the cost of denying their human rights (Wihtol de Wenden, 2016).

### *1.2. After 2015: European re-bordering*

This architecture of the European border regime broke down under the pressure of the surge of migration during the so-called ‘refugee crisis’. Particularly crucial was the cross-border migration that occurred in summer and autumn 2015 when forced migrants who arrived in Greece continued their journey into northern and western European countries (Hess and Kasperek, 2017). This collective movement began in early 2015; however, it gained attention in August when thousands of migrants who were blocked in Budapest launched a ‘March of Hope’ to reach Austria and Germany by foot (ibid.). As seen, however, this so-called *long summer of migration* was (non-coincidentally) followed by a process of European re-bordering. Europe returned to the old, failed solutions that were part of the crisis—a crisis of solidarity much more than of refugees (Wihtol de Wenden, 2016 )—whose prime example was internal border

closures between EU member-states (nine out of 25 Schengen member states resorted to the closure of their national borders from September 2015 to the end of 2017) (Premarini, 2017). In this scenario, EU authorities were not inactive. Their most notable initiative was the European Agenda on Migration (EAM). In May 2015, the European Commission presented the EAM, which delineated new guidelines for managing migration and asylum in Europe. The Agenda is an umbrella approach containing a plethora of initiatives to enforce the EU's external and internal borders. This document proliferated the notion of hotspots and the hotspot approach. Hotspots were defined by the European authorities as a method for the management of exceptional migratory flows that support member-states at the forefront in their activities (Sciurba, 2017). In reality, these hotspots resemble 'identification centres'. Located at the fringe of southern EU territories, they implement quick identification, registration and fingerprinting of disembarked migrants to sort them into appropriate channels (Dimitriadi, 2017; Sciurba 2017). These centres create a summary division between asylum-seekers and 'economic migrants' but without guaranteeing that migrants' asylum rights to apply are respected (Wihtol de Wenden, 2016). In this context, Greece and Italy operate as border zones, applying identification procedures to all irregular arrivals<sup>37</sup>. In other words, 'points of entry such as Greece and Italy have been transformed into spaces of detention, sorting and deportation (New Keywords Collective, 2016:18).

In parallel with this system, the EU's effort concentrated also on the establishment of complementary measures of externalisation. The most important involved Turkey. In March 2016, Turkey agreed to 'protect' the external EU border, namely the Greek-Turkish border, in exchange for a liberalisation of the freedom of movement in Europe of its citizens (Wihtol de Wenden, 2016). While this agreement has proved effective in reducing migration from Turkey, it did so at a significant cost, blocking a high number of people—about 50,000 in mainland Greece alone. Furthermore, it did not solve the 'problem' of migration flows directed to Italy, where malcontent toward the arrival of migrants grew and manifested in the following period.

## 2. THE ITALIAN 'REFUGEE CRISIS'

Between 2011 and 2017, Italy experienced an unprecedented increase in arrivals and asylum applications from migrants (Fig. 1). This increment has been due to both the turbulent conditions characterising countries on the opposite side of the Mediterranean Sea and the breakdown of the external border regime established by European and extra-European nation-states, which gave leeway for the arrival of forced migrants (see previous section). Two phases by which the Italian authorities approached this phenomenon can be observed. At the beginning, Italy tolerated the mass arrival of asylum-seekers, mainly through seaborne migration, and concentrated its efforts on the rescue and first assistance of the prospective asylum-seekers without, however, adequately developing its reception system for those who landed or disembarked in Italy. In contrast, the Italian authorities have tacitly favoured the migrants' transit movements toward

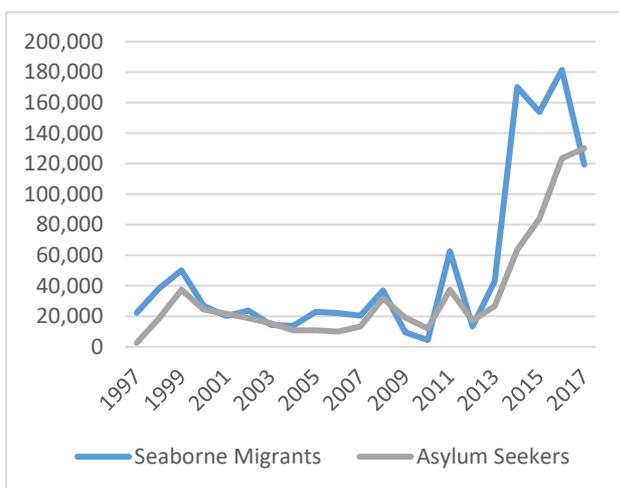


Figure 1 Absolute number of seaborne migrants and asylum applications in Italy between 1997 and 2017. Elaboration from ISMU 2018

<sup>37</sup> It is noteworthy that this attempt followed a previous EU infringement procedure against Italy, Greece and Croatia for the non-identification of disembarked prospective asylum-seekers.

other European countries (the so-called 'secondary movements'; see Brekke and Brochman [2014]).

However, Italy reversed direction in 2015. The Italian authorities have taken a harsher approach on forced migrants' mobility by blocking their movement both before and after arrival (Denaro, 2016), and Italy's European partners have also increasingly shown intolerance and repulsion to secondary movements within the Schengen Area. Therefore, Italy has initiated a process of realignment with the demands of its partners by implementing the programs included in the European Agenda on Migration (like the hotspot approach) and by making arrangements with extra-European governments to prevent the arrival of new asylum-seekers (Castelli Gattinara 2017). Furthermore, Italy has introduced several modifications to its asylum system. These modifications concern both its reception system, born recently out of a series of 'emergencies', and its legal processing structure. The Minniti-Orlando decree of 2017 has had the largest impact. This decree aims to streamline the evaluation process of asylum claims and increase the number of rejected asylum claimants, even at the cost of people's 'legal guarantees' (Panzera, 2017). This represented a strong signal along which the following actions of the Italian government have continued in an even more restrictive way.

### *2.1 A brief outline of the Italian asylum system*

Italy has regarded itself exclusively as an emigration country for a long time, as illustrated by the fact that the first specific legislative package on immigration is dated 1986. Accordingly, the question remains of how concerns regarding receiving and assisting refugees and asylum-seekers emerged only at the end of the 1980s -especially as Italy had signed the Geneva Convention on refugees and stateless persons in 1954 (Colombo and Sciortino, 2004). The Italian government finally tackled this issue in 1990 when it instituted the National Commission for the Recognition of the Refugee Status (Van Aken, 2008). This measure followed the murder of a refugee from South Africa (i.e., Jerry Maslo) and the popular indignation of a nation that realised the disadvantaged conditions characterising refugees' lives in Italy. In fact, the Italian approach to 'refuge' has always been to take action after triggering events, emergency after emergency.

Another important development followed the mass arrival of Albanians in the early 1990s. The so-called *legge Puglia* in 1995 provided reception centres on the coastline of this region to provide first assistance and screen economic migrants from asylum-seekers. Subsequently, the Balkan war and the Kosovo crisis brought out a 'humanitarian emergency' that pushed 33,000 people to request asylum in Italy in 1999, a record number in the country. Under the pressure of this inflow, the actors involved in the reception and assistance of asylum-seekers and refugees in Italy laid the foundations for a more consistent national system with an initiative (*Azione Comune*) aiming to coordinate the assistance of Kosovan asylum-seekers and set common standards of reception (Van Aken, 2008).

The reception and assistance system saw a great transformation with the new century when the arrival of asylum-seekers became a structural phenomenon. *Azione Comune* lasted one year and was subsequently substituted by a more centralised, 'top-down' initiative—the National Asylum Programme (*Programma Nazionale Asilo*)—which gathered local projects around a coordinating central secretariat. Furthermore, in 2002, within the measures produced by a new law on migration (the so-called *Bossi-Fini*), the National Asylum Programme became the SPRAR system (*Sistema Protezione Richiedenti Asilo e Rifugiati*). The SPRAR system was designed to aid asylum-seekers, political refugees and beneficiaries of other forms of protection. Based on European benchmarks, in the SPRAR system, local authorities play a central role in the ideation and organisation of the assistance of forced migrants in its different reception centres. Moreover, it represents the cornerstone and an exemplar model for an Italian reception system. The current Italian asylum system is constituted of the national reception system (whose exemplar model is SPRAR) and the legal processing system. Both comprise a multitude of actors that are involved with different duties and goals. The reception system is based on a two-level intervention. On one hand, actors and interventions are dedicated to the rescue and first assistance of migrants. This level includes the reception centres established by the *legge Puglia*,

the hotspots—which Italy instituted after 2015—and the government’s initial reception centres (*centri governativi di prima accoglienza*)<sup>38</sup>. Subsequently, asylum claimants are moved to the second level of assistance. This level involves SPRAR reception centres and CAS (Centri di Accoglienza Straordinari), namely ‘unordinary’ reception centres, which host asylum-seekers when SPRAR centres are filled. This second assistance, on paper, extends to asylum-seekers throughout the entire duration of claim processing until the territorial commission decides upon the claim or, in case of rejection, until the appeal against the territorial commission’s decision is terminated. Moreover, when a form of protection is recognised to the asylum claimant (in Italy, the forms of protection are political asylum, subsidiary protection and humanitarian protection), the refugee has the right to stay for six additional months in the reception centre (Melting Pot Europa [n.d.]).

The legal system for granting refugee status has a complex architecture, too. An individual who wishes to request asylum in Italy must file a claim either at the border police office or in Questura, the peripheral police office delegated with migration tasks. Once the claim has been verbalised, territorial commissions evaluate the claim (via a face-to-face hearing and collected evidences). They can either provide political refugee status, grant a subsidiary protection, reject the claim or declare it inadmissible or ask to recognise *humanitarian protection*, a residual form of protection for those who are not eligible for political or subsidiary protection; if political asylum is rejected, the claimant has the right to request an appeal on the decision (Melting Pot Europa [n.d.]).

Both systems have experienced rapid transformations in recent years. While the reception system worked hard to keep up with the increase in asylum applications<sup>39</sup>, domestic and European dynamics seem to lead in the direction of migrant limitations. Regarding Italy in particular, we witnessed legislative actions aimed at restricting the option to appeal rejections in the hopes that this would discourage migrants from arriving and push them to return to their original countries<sup>40</sup>.

## 2.2 Italy facing the ‘refugee crisis’: From ‘laissez-passer’ to securitisations

Italy and Greece have served as the primary ‘first arrival countries’ in Europe in recent years. Between 2013 and 2016, approximately 550,000 migrants disembarked in Italy alone (ISMU, 2018). During this time, Italy focused more on rescuing the newcomers than organising their reception. For example, after two infamous shipwrecks in early October 2013, the Italian government launched the Mare Nostrum operation, the largest ‘humanitarian’ operation in the Mediterranean Sea, saving 146,000 people between 2013 and 2014 (Wihtol de Wenden, 2016). Mare Nostrum’s main goal was to rescue migrants in distress at sea, in discontinuity with the defensive measures of previous operations (e.g., Heller and Pezzani, 2016). Simultaneously, the system of reception could not keep up with the inflow of people; the Italian authorities thus implemented strategies to prevent the settlement of asylum-seekers, seeking to duck the responsibility the Dublin Regulation confers to first countries of arrival. In this context, Italy was not the ‘country of asylum’ for many of these disembarked people: from 2013–2016, Italy received only 300,000 applications vis-a-vis 550,000 arrivals by sea (ISMU, 2018); 250,000 migrants ‘disappeared’ from the system—roughly 45% of the disembarked migrants. In many

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<sup>38</sup> Asylum-seekers are supposed to reside in these first assistance centres just long enough to be placed in a second assistance structure but, in fact, their stay can extend to the entire period of assistance

<sup>39</sup> For example, the capacity of the reception system passed from 22,000 individuals in 2013 to 176,000 in 2016 vis-a vis an increase in applications that went from 26,000 to 123,000 per year in the same period (ISMU, 2018).

<sup>40</sup> In September 2018, the new government introduced the so-called *Decreto Salvini*. This decree would lead to significant effects concerning the Italian Asylum system including: a reform of the types of statuses (and notably the abolished of the humanitarian protection), a limitation of the beneficiaries assisted by the SPRAR system and the parallel increment of resourced dedicated to detention centres at the expense of the resources for the reception centres (see: <https://www.meltingpot.org/Decreto-Immigrazione-e-Sicurezza-una-scheda-per-operatori-a.html#.W-X-g5NKg2x>). In this Appendix I do not focus on this development, which has still to be implemented and is later than my fieldwork; anyways it verifies my statements regarding the restriction trend on the asylum rights (see paragraph 2.2)

cases, these people headed to North and Central Europe in defiance of the ‘one stop, one shop’ Dublin Principle (Denaro, 2016). This was possible thanks to the tacit acquiescence of the Italian authorities on the provision of fingerprints, a ‘closed-eye’ approach that lasted from 2013–2014 (Denaro, 2016).

However, these initiatives were not welcomed by many EU partners who blamed Italy for non-compliance with the Dublin Regulation. France and Austria repeatedly closed their borders with Italy, while the EU condemned Italy for not enforcing measures for migrants’ identification (Castelli Gattinara, 2017). Eventually, Italy replaced Mare Nostrum with Triton, a more traditional operation aimed at monitoring and controlling migration in the Mediterranean Sea, and realigned with the *desiderata* of its partners. After the European Agenda on Migration, Italian authorities have increasingly enforced measures for the identification of incoming migrants, thus blocking their movement to other countries. Hence, even Italy has demonstrated the gradual ‘securitisation of migration’, in terms of both policies and discourse (Castelli Gattinara, 2017).

In this respect, the years 2016 and 2017 represented a turning point. While Italy had faced a constant increment of arrivals since 2013, according to the Pew Research Centre (2017), Italy has shown an ever-growing negative attitude toward migrants and refugees. As a result, the former centre-left government took a harsh stance on migration (Castelli Gattinara, 2017): policies focused on migration control shifted from *laissez-passer* to a stricter border enforcement; locations close to national borders such as Ventimiglia, Como-Chiasso and the Brenner turned into *border places* (see Tazzioli [2017]), locations where practices of control, containment and forced mobility were deployed. In effect, these new securitisation guidelines led to stretching the borders inwards and outwards. Indeed, in February 2017, the Italian government signed a contested agreement with Libyan leaders aimed at fighting the ‘illegal migration’.

Internal borders have also been reinforced through the Minniti-Orlando Decree issued by the Italian parliament in April 2017. The decree issued new measures characterised by the shift from humanitarian concern—typical of the years 2013–2014—to a form of internal security. Passed into law on 13 April 2017, it combines two different themes in the same text: reform of the judiciary and administrative systems on international protection (Panzerà, 2017) and the establishment of a *new power-geometry on urban security* (Gonnella, 2017). As for the judiciary system, it introduced new elements to quicken legal procedures on international protection. In particular, it provided for new special chambers in court and new notification procedures on asylum proceedings, modified the Territorial Commission hearing process and eliminated the second appeal against Territorial Commission decisions. Moreover, to reduce ‘illegal migration’, new detention and repatriation centres (*centri di permanenza per il rimpatrio*) were established throughout the territory, while hotspots were recognised as important instruments for the identification and custody of migrants (Panzerà 2017). Finally, it introduced new instruments for public security at the local level: the local police authority in agreement with the mayor could ban from public areas individuals whose behaviour is ‘outrageous’ and ‘dangerous’ (Gonnella, 2017). This measure appears to justify the nexus between migration and criminality by merging judiciary and administrative modifications on migration and the introduction of new security measures (ibid.).

In conclusion, we can argue that in recent years, a process of securitisation of migration is rampant. As a result, policies and measures not only target those migrants who enter the country (i.e., hotspot approach) but also aim to make life more difficult for those who are already settled. This situation appears to turn Italy into Europe’s gatekeeper, which seems increasingly reluctant toward the mobility of (certain) migrants. Ultimately, these interventions can be interpreted as ‘building blocks of the European politics of fear’ (Castelli Gattinara, 2017:11).

### **3. THE LOCAL DIMENSION OF MIGRATION GOVERNANCE IN ITALY**

Cities in Italy have traditionally been crucial settings for migrants and refugees (Van Aken, 2008), both numerically (e.g., the foreign population in major Italian cities in 2012 reached 9.6%, compared to a national average of 7.4% on a municipal scale; see ISTAT [2013]) and in

terms of policy. Indeed, differently from countries like France, Italy has never adopted an explicit national model on migration and integration; however, it has developed an 'implicit model'. This 'model', sometimes called 'local-adaptive' (Briata, 2014), is characterised by a limited institutional regulation from the nation-state and by the significant influence on policy-making of a heterogeneous coalition of local actors (i.e., local authorities, associations, religious institutions and trade unions). Resulting from a weak intervention of national authorities, this model has fostered the emergence of two main actors with respect to the governance of migration: the local administration and third-sector organisations (Caponio, 2007). The lack of interest of national authorities resulted in a devolution to local administrations that, in turn, bestowed third-sector organisations with the task of practically implementing and organising the policies (Caponio, 2007). The result is a situation characterised by a *patchwork* of policies closely tied to a territory, but not always for the worst. Indeed, cities have had the opportunity to develop different policy approaches and, in some cases, to become laboratories of policy innovation from the 'bottom up', rather than from the 'top down' (Briata, 2014).

In this scenario, therefore, local policies on migration represent the outcome of complex interactions between different actors. Local politicians have a prominent role but often not a preeminent or leading one, as migration is an unsettling issue under the scrutiny of the mass media and often negatively perceived by a significant portion of the electoral body (Mantovan, 2013). However, if we broaden the perspective to the 'governance' of migration (i.e., how migration is actually managed), a plethora of private actors stand out. This ensemble of actors prominently comprises trade unions, migrant associations and third-sector organisations (particularly Catholic-related associations) and plays a decisive role in shaping local administrations' approaches and policy-making (Caponio, 2007).

The literature on local migration policymaking in Italy has often highlighted the role of these actors and their networks (Caponio, 2007; Briata, 2014). For example, it has been argued that they often orient local politics and policies on migration in a more decisive way than the local administration does (Caponio, 2007). The fact that migration policies at the local level originate from the indications of civil society has brought scholars to approach the analysis of local migration policymaking onto an original path: in this perspective, the policy is not only the 'end product' from which departure is made but also the process (a process that gathers a diverse set of actors and authorities) to investigate (Caponio, 2007).

Against this backdrop, the rest of the appendix is dedicated to scrutinising local policies toward migrants and refugees in Milan. In particular, it focuses on the last five years (when the intense arrival of transit migrants and refugees generated a peculiar policy reaction: an infrastructure of welcoming and reception that comprises an original coalition of actors) and the most recent developments observed during my fieldwork. Therefore, in the next section, a brief outline of Milanese intervention from the 1970s to the early 2010s will be drawn. Then, we will examine the actions of Giuliano Pisapia's administration, who was elected mayor of Milan in 2011 with a political agenda that promised to break from the previous administrations—migration approach included. In addition, I will specifically focus on policies regarding 'transit migrants', probably the most remarkable initiative of the new administration, and illuminate some important aspects through both desk research and field research analysis<sup>41</sup> before addressing recent developments, from the election of the successor of Pisapia, Giuseppe Sala, to the 'end' of policies on 'transit migration' and the new directions that characterise Milan's approach to migration, with particular attention to what emerged during the fieldwork.

#### **4. THE BEGINNING OF THE MILANESE APPROACH TO MIGRATION**

International migration came to the forefront in Italy only at the end of 1970s (Colombo e Sciortino, 2004). In Milan, Catholic groups were the first actors to mobilise around this issue. In this period, immigration in Milan was considered an issue related to destitution and marginality;

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<sup>41</sup> In particular, I conducted a 13-month ethnographic study (between January 2017 and February 2018) during which I also conducted 61 in-depth interviews with volunteers, civil servants, legal advisors and forced migrants in Milan.

therefore, charitable organisations (i.e., oratories and religious institutes) were the main service providers (Caponio, 2007). However, in the 1980s, an alternative vision came forth (Caponio, 2007) concerning squatting initiatives that involved Eritrean migrants, and dimensions like access to welfare services and the political participation of foreigners found space in the political discourse (Van Aken, 2008). In this period, the local administration endorsed initiatives that tried to go beyond the provision of basic services through religious organisations. These initiatives involved the recognition of migrant groups and associations, which consequently occupied the centre of the welfare system for migrants in Milan, empowered by the implementation of services and the organisation of reception centres (Caponio, 2007).

This situation came to a halt with the new decade. In 1993, Marco Formentini, a member of the Northern League, was elected mayor. Formentini took a harsh position against migrant associations, accusing their lack of preparation and expertise<sup>42</sup> for the 'failure' of Milanese policymaking on migration developed in the 1980s.

This impasse was overcome in 1995 when Formentini decided to install Graziamaria Dente as a council member. Appointed to the department for social services, Dente was an example of the influential power that key individual actors can hold in local policymaking. During her two-year tenure, Dente, a prominent member of the Milanese voluntary sector, made a decisive impact on migration governance in Milan. Dente overturned policy implementation architecture on migration. The 'new system' was based on the municipal Foreigners' Office that had acquired a special status as a decision-maker with respect to the distribution of economic resources to private actors, notably 'civil society organisations'. Those organisations were crucial because the Foreigners' Office represented the 'contractor' while the third sector was not only the 'maker' but in many cases the policy designer as well. Rather than develop original policies, Milan's municipality acted as a 'policy enabler' for policies designed by such organisations (Caponio, 2007). This mechanism, which privileged certain private partners (namely, Catholic organisations) while excluding others (notably secular organisations and migrant associations) (Caponio, 2007), had a significant impact on the city's welfare system. During this period, organisations like Caritas and Cariplo Foundation came to the fore as the main service providers in the field of migration, constituting the 'Catholic pillar' that has borne migration governance in the city long-term (Barberis, Kazepov and Angelucci, 2014).

This 'architecture' was a constant characteristic during the centre-right administrations of the city (which comprised Albertini's—between 1997 and 2006—and Moratti's—between 2006 and 2011—tenures). In this period, local migration governance took a peculiar form, characterised by the aforementioned partnership between the Foreigners' Office and the 'Catholic pillar', as well as by two other elements: an assimilationist approach and an aggressively negative public discourse on migrants. The policies implemented were inspired by the individual integration paradigm with little room for multicultural recognition (Marzorati and Quassoli, 2015). In this sense, the 'Milanese identity' did not have room for non-Italian culture recognition. Instead, emphasis was placed on the capacity of individual migrants to be on par with their fellow Italian residents (Marzorati and Quassoli, 2015).

The third element that came to the fore was the harsh political discourse toward migrants. In this respect, we must note the weight given to cultural incompatibility and the discursive conflation of migration with security issues operated by these administrations. This discursive strategy was heavily employed following conflicts of space allocation between Italian residents and foreign shopkeepers in Milanese Chinatown during Moratti's tenure (Briata, 2014).

In conclusion, it can be argued that Milan followed two different approaches between the 1970s and 2011. Between the late 1970s and 1993, an approach based on the involvement and recognition of migrant groups hesitantly matured. Subsequently (between 1994 and 2011), a system based on individual integration and empowerment of a third sector with a Catholic connotation dominated local policies on migration.

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<sup>42</sup> For example, the department for health, hygiene and social exclusion was delegated with migration—a strong symbolic action to frame migrants as a social problem.

## 5. PISAPIA: A U-TURN FOR MILAN?

During the centre-right administration, local migration governance in Milan was based on an assimilationist approach, delegation of powers to Catholic third-sector organisations and an aggressively negative public discourse on migrants. In 2011, the election of a new mayor promised to start a trend reversal. After 18 years of centre-right governments, Giuliano Pisapia (a Milanese civil rights lawyer) was elected within a centre-left coalition and with a rather progressive political platform in which diversity and immigrant management represented very relevant issues (Marzorati and Quassoli, 2015). Pisapia's political programme was intended to mark a stark change with the past, particularly via a more multicultural approach to migration. The new administration, despite not being as revolutionary as expected<sup>43</sup>, brought out important elements in the governance of migration (Barberis, Kazepov and Angelucci, 2014; Marzorati and Quassoli, 2015). It can be argued that with Pisapia, the 'Milanese identity discourse' switched from a strong emphasis on its 'Italianness' to a more fluid understanding, an identity that is more 'open' to diversity and cosmopolitanism. In contrast with the previous centre-right administration, the new administration focused on immigrants' recognition and dialogue with foreign residents. In this regard, two initiatives of Pisapia's administration are particularly noteworthy: the opening of a 'Centre of Migrant Cultures' and the GLab, a project lab located in the city centre intended to assist second-generation immigrants, teachers and social workers to find information about education, employment and naturalisation opportunities (Marzorati and Quassoli, 2015). Furthermore, the centre-left administration inaugurated the Milan World City Forum, a permanent assembly gathering members from migrant associations created in view of the 2015 Universal Exposition held in Milan (Marzorati and Quassoli, 2015).

Of particular interest are policies on irregular 'forced migrants'. In this field, the local government opened a window for initiatives that were alternative/conflictual to national policy, particularly opposition in 2011 toward the re-opening of an infamous identification, detention and expulsion centre for irregular migrants in Milan (i.e., *CIE Corelli*)<sup>44</sup>. More recently, Pisapia's administration took a strong stance toward the phenomenon, which had monopolised the Milanese migration discussion since 2013: the transit of hundreds of thousands of forced migrants through and into the city. The next section will discuss this aspect.

## 6. MILAN WITHIN TRANSIT MIGRATION: AT THE ROOT OF 'SISTEMA PROFUGHI'

Between 2013 and 2016, Milan was greatly affected by the transit migration that spanned from Southern Italy to Northern Europe, a transit based on overcoming the Dublin Regulation by avoiding the provision of fingerprints in Southern Italy, which created, for hundreds of thousands of people<sup>45</sup>, 'internal routes' to reach the northern borders (Denaro, 2016). Among these internal routes, the itinerary connecting the southern regions and Milan was the most conventional path due to Milan's geographical position and transportation infrastructure (Briata, Castelnuovo and Costa, 2017). According to the municipality, the city of Milan has witnessed the passage of more than 130,000 refugees (Comune di Milano, personal communication, 28 November 2017), including half of the Syrians who eventually reached Germany between 2013 and 2014 (Minoia, 2016). In other words, beginning in 2013 (long before the transit migration along the Balkans) Milan has been the backdrop for an intense phenomenon of 'stop and go' of forced migrants, whose migratory project did not contemplate their long-term settlement in Italy. In Milan, this movement has pertained two physical settings: Milan's railway Central Station and the Porta Venezia neighbourhood. Two different populations

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<sup>43</sup> In particular, scholars have pointed out how the policy implementation remained anchored to the network constituted by Catholic third-sector organisations, and the approach of the municipal staff shows continuity with the previous assimilationist paradigm (Pilati 2012; Marzorati and Quassoli, 2015).

<sup>44</sup> The new administration took an oppositional stance from the beginning in defiance of the decision made by the national authorities to re-open the old expulsion centre and was successful. Indeed, instead of having an expulsion centre, Milan inaugurated a reception centre in the same building in 2014.

<sup>45</sup> As previously mentioned, the mismatch between the arrivals by sea and asylum applications in Italy amounted to 250,000 people between 2013–2016.

characterised these settings; however, similar measures were put in place thanks to the active involvement of local authorities and civil society.

From the summer of 2013, Syrian migrants (often families) arrived en masse in Milan's Central Station, a historical space of migration in the city (Colombo and Navarini, 1999), while journeying northward. Between 2013 and 2014, 40,000 Syrians arrived in Italy, and just 2,000 of them requested asylum in the country (Denaro, 2016). In this situation, Milan served as a door to Europe (Denaro, 2016). Upon arrival by train from Apulia or Calabria to one of the Milanese train stations, Syrian migrants would stop in Milan for a few hours (the necessary time to buy a train ticket to Switzerland or Germany) to a few days (in case they needed to withdraw money from a money transfer or rest) before departing. In the meantime, they often settled temporarily and slept within the premises of the Central Station.

Another population in transit characterised Porta Venezia: transit migrants from the Horn of Africa. Porta Venezia is the 'Eritrean neighbourhood' of Milan and, as such, offered the presence of co-nationals who eased their passage. Moreover, Porta Venezia is located near a park where, in 2013 and increasingly in 2014, hundreds of Eritrean, Ethiopian and Somali migrants found shelter during their journey to Northern Europe, creating tensions with the local residents (Grimaldi, 2016).

Both situations were initially dealt with by voluntary activism. As the fieldwork allowed me to discover, a group of second-generation Syrians and members of Milanese Muslim associations provided support to Syrian refugees in the Central Station, while second-generation Eritreans did the same in Porta Venezia, subsequently supplemented by more structured associations, notably the local branch of the *Community of Sant'Egidio*. However, in October 2013, the local administration stepped in. From that moment, Milan witnessed the inauguration of what has been called the 'Milanese sistema profughi'.

'Sistema profughi' involved the establishment of a registration desk and reception point at the mezzanine level of the Central Station. From there, incoming migrants who wanted to temporarily stop were sent to reception centres—at the beginning, two centres for 240 people. In these 'municipal' centres, board and lodging, medical care and clothes were given. This system was coordinated by the local administration that, in turn, outsourced implementation to well-enmeshed third-sector organisations. At this time, a more spontaneous 'wave of welcoming and generosity' from civil society evolved. Voluntary paediatricians and doctors assisted underage and adult migrants, private citizens brought food and clothes and NGOs like Save the Children guaranteed support to migrants. The following is the recollection of a civil servant, an assistant to the Councillor for Social Policies, concerning the context that characterised Central Station's registration desk:

*You need to figure this mezzanine floor, the two side included, where the entire world gathered. Where we, all together, gave the food, the doctors examined the people, there was a playground for the kids, donations from the citizens that we had to stop because it was too much. [...] Many different actors, also the Municipal Voluntary Office, which created a list of volunteers to address their number.* (Assistant of the Councillor for the Social Policies; 28 November 2017)

'Sistema profughi' featured a crucial aspect for the assistance of a transit migration. These municipal reception centres were not part of the regular reception centre circuit (like SPRAR and CAS in Italy), which provides assistance to migrant people under the condition that they request asylum. Instead, it represented a system (parallel but not overlapping with the national system) accommodating migrants without asking for formal identification and without the requirement to request asylum. It provided assistance to transit migrants who were, as such, in a legislative 'grey zone', caught between the legislative requirement (imposed by the Dublin Regulation) to be identified and request asylum in Italy and the necessity to avoid identification

to achieve their desire to settle in another country. This ‘semi-legal’ system<sup>46</sup> was the outcome of a temporary arrangement between the Italian interest to disobey the Dublin regulation and transit migrants’ strategies of movement and gave birth to a ‘humanitarian channel’ through which migrants were *de facto* allowed to move northward (Briata, Castelnuovo and Costa, 2017).

During the period 2013–2017, sistema profughi was able to host about 130,000 people (and more people were assisted but not hosted). Furthermore, in the same period, it was able to evolve in two directions.

On one hand, it expanded by accompanying the structuring and development of the refugees’ municipal welfare sector, which was previously very limited. Under the incitement of an ‘emergency’, Milan developed and structured its welfare sector to accommodate asylum-seekers and refugees. On the eve of the forthcoming ‘transit migration’ in 2013, Milan’s municipality was involved in a project (*progetto Morcone*) for the reception and integration of refugees that concerned 300 refugees; in addition, Milan hosted approximately 100 people in the SPRAR project (Comune di Milano, personal communication; 9 November 2017). Starting from 240 migrants hosted in two centres in October 2013, sistema profughi was able to host up to 2,000 people a day in a dozen centres at the end of 2016 (Comune di Milano, personal communication; 16 May 2017). Simultaneously, the ordinary reception system expanded, yet in 2015, the city’s SPRAR facilities provided assistance to 500 people and CAS assisted at least 2,000 migrants (Naga, 2016). Moreover, the third-sector associations that implemented sistema profughi in partnership with Milan’s municipality expanded their expertise and capacity. For example, *Fondazione Arca*, a large third-sector agency that previously focused on assisting the homeless and drug addicts, ran the reception desk for sistema profughi. During this period, the reception desk changed location and scope from the mezzanine of the Central Station (from 2013 until 2015, where migrants were allocated to centres and food and clothes distributed) to via Tonale (2015) near the station and finally to via Sammartini. Set in a more peripheral space, Sammartini ‘Hub’ (as it was then known) provided food, medical advice, orientation to other services and even accommodation to migrants all under one roof. This was intended to increase the workforce and skill levels, as explained by a manager of Fondazione Arca:

*“We went from 40 to 300 workers [hired for migration-related jobs]. [...] On the one side, we created a Project Office and a training department, expanded the HR department, we have a scientific committee now and a monitoring department”* (Fondazione Arca, personal communication; 14 January 2018)

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<sup>46</sup> The system was justified on a legislative trick by the municipality according to which these people were identified as “people temporarily staying on the territory”. As such, they had an 8 days window for asking asylum (Comune di Milano, personal communication, 9 November 2017).

Furthermore, sistema profughi became increasingly universal, broadening the groups of migrants assisted. Sistema profughi was originally designed to care primarily for Syrian nationals. Between 2013 and 2014, Eritreans and other nationals were also assisted, mainly by volunteer groups in Porta Venezia and other parts of the city. A process of 'equalisation' between Eritreans and Syrians, with the accommodation of Eritreans within the municipal centres of 'sistema profughi', caught on in 2015. Subsequently, since late 2015, 'sistema profughi' offered hospitality to all migrants, even those who did not want to transit and instead requested asylum. As shown in Figure 2, starting in 2015, the majority of migrants assisted through sistema profughi ended up requesting asylum in Italy.

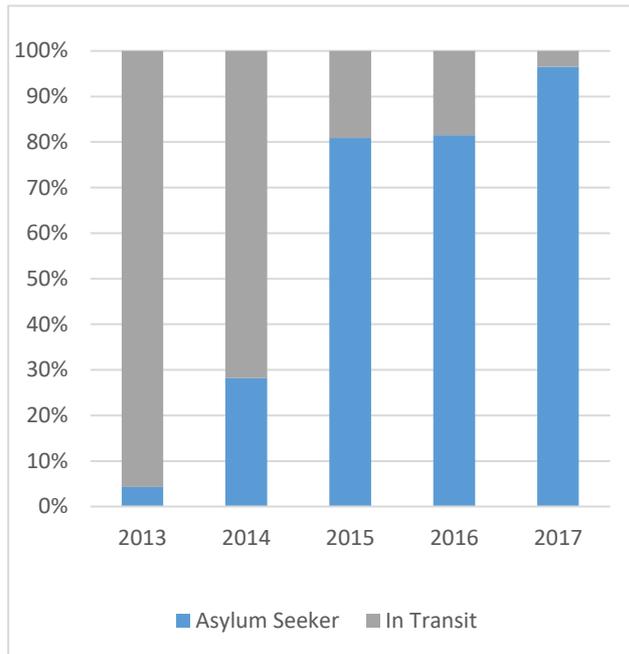


Figure 2 Percentage of asylum-seekers and transit migrants hosted by 'sistema profughi' between 2013 and 2017. Source: Internal memorandum by Comune di Milano

This decision, together with a crackdown on migration movement in Europe, radically shaped the aim and scope of sistema profughi.

The different approach to migration control that Italy and its neighbours took (i.e., the 'closure of borders') determined the fall of transit migration. Consequently, municipal reception centres within sistema profughi began hosting a more 'sedentary' population, as can be inferred from municipal statistics indicating sistema profughi's guests' preferential arrival countries in 2014 and 2017 (Fig. 3).

In this period, sistema profughi acted as a 'buffer space' from homelessness for all migrants who were outside the ordinary reception system (mainly 'escapees' from the reception system in Southern Italy or people who tried to transit and failed), irrespective of their legal status. In other words, as said by the manager responsible for the registration desk, 'we witnessed to the confluence of migrants in Milan, the migrant people who were incapacitated to transit out of Italy'<sup>47</sup>.

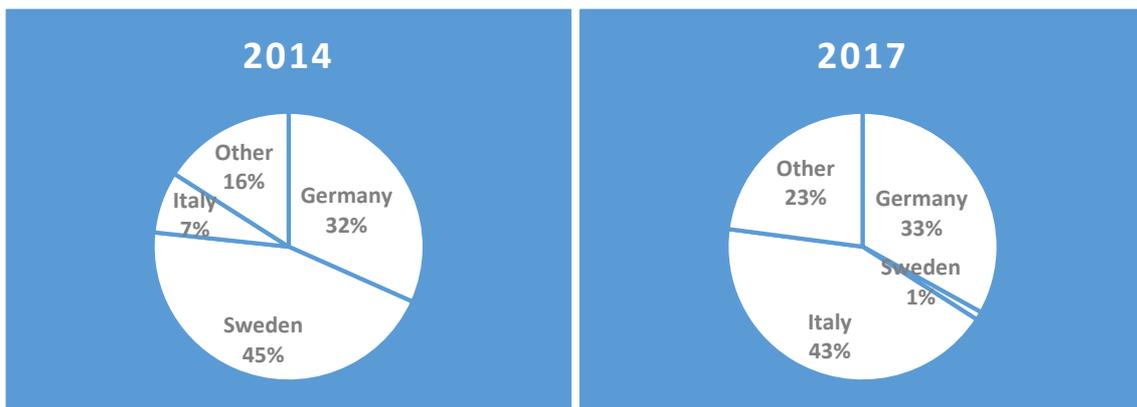


Figure 3 Preferential arrival country of 'sistema profughi' users in 2014 and 2017. Source: Internal memorandum by Comune di Milano

<sup>47</sup> From a personal interview with the civil servant responsible for the registration desk on the 16 May, 2017.

In conclusion, sistema profughi was the initiative that dominated Milan's action toward forced migrants from 2013–2016. It saw the creation of a coalition, formed by the local administration, 'implementing' third-sector and civil society actors to help a significant number of migrants. These migrants included transit migrants (especially in the years 2013–2014) as well as forced migrants who risked falling outside official assistance (between 2016–2017). To these people, Milan was able to provide basic assistance: food, medical care and accommodation. Moreover, the sistema profughi initiative defied European and national rules for asylum processing. This was possible thanks to two elements: the political stance that the municipality took due to the commitment of key local political figures and the role(s) played by third-sector and civil society actors in implementing, designing and urging interventions.

### *6.1 Sistema profughi: Political investment and local political leadership*

Sistema profughi has been part of a political investment that attempted to frame migration under a different light, in discontinuity with previous administrations. As seen, Pisapia's coalition, elected in 2011 with the idea to mark a stark change from the previous centre-right city's administrations, engaged from the beginning in opposition of the re-opening of CIE Corelli, the detention and expulsion centre for migrants. Within this same process of decoupling between the previous administration and local and supra-local approaches to migration, we can read the decision to establish (although with many hesitations) sistema profughi. As the assistant of the Councillor for Social Policies explained, the response that the local government took via sistema profughi followed the decision to frame the transit phenomenon mostly as a humanitarian issue and not a security threat:

*"When we met with the Councillors and the Municipal council, [...] we decided to take a decision, the decision that we must accommodate these people [...], to give a humanitarian hospitality, since the regional government did not respond, the national government did not understand nor reply, thus it has been a local response to a global phenomenon. The decision of the former Pisapia's administration was that Milan couldn't turn its head, since it was not an issue of security and identification, [...] but a question of humanitarian reception on our territory"* (Assistant of the Councillor for Social Policies)

As illustrated by another civil servant at the Department for Social Policies, this decision was crucially driven by the desire to send a strong political signal to national and European authorities through the decision not to comply with the Dublin Regulation.

*"Milan has played an important role by opening a humanitarian channel when Europe, UN and Italy decided not to intervene, [...] because when people say that we break the Dublin Regulation we say yes, we did it but taking a conscious" position.* (Civil servant at the Department for Social Policies)

It can be argued that the political leadership of part of Pisapia's administration played a crucial role in this decision, especially the influence of Marco Granelli, the councillor for security, social cohesion, local police, civil protection and volunteering, and Pierfrancesco Majorino, the councillor for social policies, welfare and rights. Both had a personal interest in migration and volunteerism. Apart from being major supporters of this Milanese approach, as explained by a member of the Community of Sant'Egidio, Granelli and Majorino became the reference for the infrastructure of welcoming that was generated from the mass arrival of migrants by demonstrating an openness toward the ideas of civil society organisations.

*"We raised this issue with the municipality with respect but insisting on it. [This was] an administration with which we had a previous connection through Councillors Majorino and Granelli. [...] We saw an opening from them because we gave stimuli, but they allowed themselves to be encouraged"* (member of local branch of Community of Sant'Egidio)

Pierfrancesco Majorino's efforts were concentrated on characterising his political actions in relation to both welcoming refugees and migrants in transit and diversity in the city. This is evident as Majorino's department on social policies was the main municipal body in charge of *sistema profughi*. Moreover, Majorino himself promoted initiatives as well as advertised the role of Milan during the 'refugee crisis'. For example, he spoke before an audience of mayors and local administrators in 2017 during the Global Mayor Summit<sup>48</sup> and organised a pro-migrant demonstration in May 2017 that gathered 100,000 people<sup>49</sup>. As theorised by Caponio (2007) with respect to the action of local Italian politicians, Majorino stepped in when migration was a highly debated issue in the local arena; eventually, he was able to reorient the debate and action toward 'opening' the city with an initiative like *sistema profughi*.

In conclusion, we can assert that the local administration appears to have been able to collect and invest political capital on migration to build an alternative 'framework' thanks to two key political figures, Majorino and Granelli. However, other actors were also extremely influential. Third-sector and civil society groups were crucial in two ways: they practically implemented and designed this system and generated and maintained consensus toward such initiatives.

### *6.2 The roles of the third sector and civil society in sistema profughi*

The local administration was not the only actor mobilised for the assistance of transit migrants. Within the Italian 'local-adaptive' approach on migration governance, third-sector organisations have been a key element (Caponio, 2007). In this regard, after a first phase in which they develop a new framework of action on this issue, local politicians usually outsource implementation of the interventions to third-sector organisations (Caponio, 2007). During *sistema profughi*, the local administration empowered dozens of 'implementing' third-sector organisations (such as *progetto Arca*) with the realisation of welcoming and reception activities linked with *sistema profughi*. This operational pattern is nothing new: since the 1990s, Milan has delegated migration-related initiatives to the third sector, mostly to Catholic associations that constitute the so-called 'Catholic pillar' (Barberis, Kazepov and Angelucci, 2014).

More surprising (but in line with research on Milan; see Van Aken [2008]) was the strong investment of grassroots organisations in *sistema profughi*. As discovered through the field research, many grassroots associations, volunteer groups and civil society networks mobilised to assist incoming migrants (in transit or not) and introduce this population to the identity and fabric of the city. This group represented an *infrastructure of welcoming*, less formalised than the one constituted by the implementing third-sector associations but equally important. Their first act was to provide concrete assistance. As previously discussed, the first actors to mobilise in both the Central Station and Porta Venezia were volunteer groups and associations. In this regard, it is necessary to mention the members of Muslim associations, such as *Giovani Musulmani d'Italia*, for their assistance to Syrians and a group of second-generation Eritreans in Porta Venezia that constituted *Cambio Passo*. As said by an office manager at the Department for Social Policies:

*"In the face of these crowds of people, the city has reacted in a genuine and spontaneous way by giving and making itself available"* (Office manager at the Department for Social Policies)

This contribution of civil society is highlighted by two anecdotes: first, the number of individual volunteers was so high that the municipality felt the urge to formalise the spontaneous presence of volunteers by creating a manifest and giving them an official status; second, an informal reception centre for transit migrants was entirely operated by volunteers. This centre, originating from the desire to assist transit migrants and wished for by the Community of

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<sup>48</sup> <https://www.concordia.net/annualsummit/2017annualsummit/global-mayors-summit/>

<sup>49</sup> <https://www.wantedinmilan.com/news/milan-to-hold-pro-immigrant-march.html>

Sant'Egidio and by the local Jewish community, has given shelter to thousands of people since its opening, in 2015, in the Milanese Holocaust Memorial<sup>50</sup>.

As pinpointed also by these examples, civil society was the *backbone* of sistema profughi. First, civil society organisations were the 'spur' that urged the municipality and its members to intervene in the first place. Thanks to personal connections, the Community of Sant'Egidio and Giovani Musulmani d'Italia pushed the local administration for an intervention in the Central Station, while Cambio Passo actively campaigned for the *process of universality* that characterised sistema profughi in 2015. The local administrators, as highlighted by the next excerpt, have acknowledged this role:

*"The 'watchmen' of the city were fundamental to us since [...] these volunteers made us realise that a new phenomenon has been taking place here"* (Assistant of the Councillor for the Social Policies; 28 November 2017)

Local administration was favoured for its action by another element brought out by civil society activities: the people's consensus of the municipality's actions. This element has been embodied by the 'wave of generosity' that hit Milan (and especially the Central Station) through individual donations of goods and the activities of these volunteer groups; at the same time, this wave of generosity is the result of the work that civil society associations pursued throughout this time. As recalled by many informants, the activities of these organisations were also based on counteracting a negative discourse and on 'generating' a positive breeding ground by which new people could join. This was achieved by promoting forums for discussion and showing their presence in the territory through activities carried out in different neighbourhoods<sup>51</sup>.

In conclusion, the third sector's role (both 'implementing' and more 'voluntary' organisations) went beyond implementing the interventions passed down from local authorities; they participated in the design of the intervention, concrete assistance, communication with local administrations and cultural suasion. In this regard, I want to conclude with the clarifying words of a volunteer and member of the Community of Sant'Egidio that well-represent the 'spirit' of sistema profughi:

*"These are important aspects: cultural, concrete helping, political aspects like the communication with the municipality. We must consider these element altogether, since asking to the municipality to take a position like they did with the transit migrants means you need to build a consensus, neighbourhood by neighbourhood"* (Member of local branch of Community of Sant'Egidio)

## **7. MILAN BEYOND AND AFTER SISTEMA PROFUGHI: CONTINUITIES AND DISCONTINUITIES**

Sistema profughi ended in May 2017. This was due to a decrement of the transit phenomenon as well as a political climate that had changed since 2016 with a national government that increasingly aimed to control migration movements (see section 2.2). Notwithstanding, Milan has arguably maintained an 'open' attitude toward migration. The city elected a new mayor (Giuseppe Sala) in June 2016 from the same coalition that supported Giuliano Pisapia (who autonomously decided to conclude his tenure without participating in a new election) and kept previous influential politicians like Councillor Majorino. Even after the end of sistema profughi, this new administration seemed to be in line with the previous approach on migration with a notable difference. While the previous tenure was dominated by the 'emergency' linked to the transit migration phenomenon, the official position of the municipality seems to indicate the start of a 'post-emergency' phase.

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<sup>50</sup> As explained by a manager and member of the Community of Sant'Egidio, during the summer and fall, migrants have had the opportunity to access food, accommodation and hygiene facilities on the organisation's premises. Moreover, it was unofficially part of the sistema profughi, tacitly acknowledged by the municipality but operated by volunteers and completely autonomous from a financial perspective.

<sup>51</sup> As said to me by several volunteers that I interviewed from volunteer groups and local oratories that organised meetings with the local citizenry and the most 'oppositional' neighbours in the city.

*“We try to go back to an action devoted to the integration rather than to emergency because even if we are the territory of the emergency, we are not appointed with the power to solve the emergency”* (Civil servant at the Department for Social Policies)

In this regard, the local administration does not consider its role in migration concluded but wants to redirect its efforts to increment the city’s SPRAR system (the goal is to give assistance to 1,000 people through SPRAR).

*“The idea is to have less and less CAS reception centres in our territory while incrementing the accommodations in SPRAR reception centres [...] The goal is to increase the SPRAR accommodations up to 1.000”* (Office manager at the Department for Social Policies)

Against this backdrop, Milan has represented a ‘hosting’ setting for forced migrants. In 2017, approximately 13% of asylum-seekers and refugees that fall within the national system of reception are allocated in Lombardy (Milan’s region), the highest number in Italy (SPRAR, 2018). In this period, Milan hosted the highest number of refugees in Lombardy: more than 4,000 migrants between CAS and SPRAR reception centres (without counting the migrants hosted in centres that were not part of the national system of reception, e.g., in the Holocaust memorial and homeless dorms), with a ratio of 2/3 throughout the province<sup>52</sup>.

In effect, the local administration on many occasions has defended the idea of Milan as an open city. The Councillor for social policies (Pierfrancesco Majorino) has characterised his political action with migration, advocating the role of Milan in Italy and abroad. For example, on 20 May 2017, the municipality organised a demonstration through the city to celebrate Milan’s diversity and open approach to migration. The demonstration, whose motto was ‘together without walls’, was just one of the initiatives that the local administration has put in place. It gathered 100,000 people and saw the participation of politicians, workers of the ‘implementing’ third-sector organisations, members of grassroots organisations, volunteers and residents who were sympathetic to the city’s welcoming spirit. The local politicians and the ‘mainstream’ groups led the procession, while the most radical voices were at the back. This latter comprised associations like *Cambio Passo* and *Naga* (an important Milanese secular local organisation; see Ambrosini [2015]) and social centres: groups characterised by a strong political vision that have traditionally been useful ‘partners’ for migrants in Milan (Van Aken, 2008). These groups were associated with the slogan of ‘no person is illegal’ (*nessuna persona è illegale*), a political, anti-racist campaign and network that originated in Germany and spread to other countries (Nail, 2010). The new relevance of migration in the city seems to have reoriented the actions of many individuals, including the most radical actors. As discovered through the fieldwork, migration has dominated the action of many social centres and left-wing activist groups in the last few years. This is perhaps one of the most important legacies from the mass arrival of asylum-seekers and refugees: the incremental involvement of a diverse set of actors around the phenomenon of migration.

### *7.1 Bordering Milan: Changes at the top, the ‘summer of rejection’ and long-standing inequalities*

Despite these aspects, during the so-called migration/refugee crisis Milan has increasingly seen dynamics that pushed in the opposite direction. Milan has been marked by opposition but was able to bring out the generosity and welcoming spirit of part of the city and devise a simultaneous bottom-up and top-down ‘sanctuary’ policy through *sistema profughi*. At the same time, Milan has also experienced old and new negative discourse.

It should be noted that the election of Giuseppe Sala occurred in a period marked by a new attitude toward migration from European and national governments directed toward a crackdown on migration movements (see section 2.2). Consequently, Milan has witnessed the

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<sup>52</sup> <https://milano.corriere.it/notizie/cronaca/18-giugno-30/crollati-arrivi-migranti-ma-due-tre-restano-milano-a76ddf90-7c23-11e8-87b8-02c87e8bc58c.shtml>

incremental deployment of actions that have further inscribed the city within an 'internal border regime', peaking with what can arguably be defined as the 'summer of rejection' of 2017. As a first step, in 2017, the migration-related authorities' top position in Milan changed. New leadership in Milan's Prefecture, Luciana Lamorgese, and Questura, Marcello Cadorna, replaced Alessandro Marangoni and Antonio De Iesu, respectively. These changes, according to many informants, resulted in a significant reversal of the local approach to migration. During the fieldwork, it became evident that both Questura and Prefecture enforced several police raids and numerous heavy-handed police interventions around Central Station, where the population of asylum-seekers and refugees have traditionally converged and gathered, in an effort to detect and expel illegal migrants. Moreover, in this period, Questura has implemented obstructions to asylum rights via administrative and bureaucratic praxes. These initiatives reached a climax in the summer of 2017, particularly from May to August, thus determining a crackdown on migrants' presence in the city. Sistema profughi paid the price for this change in attitude as well with its closure in May 2017. This shift was a major shock, but it came without surprise given the context, as highlighted in the next excerpt.

*"Since 2016, the context has changed. In this respect, the problem with the borders started emerging, namely the fact that there were people that had no chance to cross the border, in majority, people that wished to cross the border but had no chance. [...] The decision [to close sistema profughi] was a tough decision. We discussed about the closure from 2016. We closed it in 2017, but we have seen the changes from 2016 with the European Agenda on Migration and then the hotspots, the relocation program and other programs that the European Agenda put in place at the end of 2015"* (Civil servant at the Department for Social Policies)

This context has added to the long-standing difficulties that characterise the experience of migrants in Milan. As emphasised by the literature, Milan is strongly economically unequal (Cucca and Ranci, 2015), and these inequalities most affect the immigrant population. In this regard, the recent economic crisis has worsened migrants' condition (Cucca, 2012). Local administrations, even after the election of Pisapia, played a very limited role in easing the economic crisis for disadvantaged groups. Their political agenda was oriented to economic growth rather than developing an agenda for social cohesion and fairer economic distribution (Cucca, 2012). The result is that immigrants have been and remain segregated at the bottom of the occupational structure. This situation has not been significantly improved by local welfare initiatives. In the last few years, we have witnessed a general disinvestment from public authorities on welfare; they have 'rationalised' their welfare interventions by outsourcing to the third sector, which acts according to market-driven logic, even at the local level (Seeleib-Kaiser, 2008). In this context, Milan's municipal action has focused on fixing the oncoming emergencies and providing basic assistance to immigrants (through third-sector organisations), rather than prearranging interventions to sustain the long-term settlement and insertion of a new immigrant population into the economy.

In other words, even if Milan, with its administrations and local civil society, has shown an 'open' attitude toward migration in recent years, the experience of its migrants (especially the recently-arrived forced migrants who participated in the fieldwork) appears to be marked by many difficulties. These difficulties concern both initial 'settlement' and long-term insertion into the city's fabric; they determine the 'suffering' of many Milanese immigrants and well-represent the rejecting nature of Milan.

In such a context, characterised by both 'openings' and 'closures', Milan orients its present and future. The city, which, according to Ambrosini (2015), resembles a battlefield animated by opposing actors, therefore needs to be scrutinised and investigated not merely as the 'end product' but also as a process in which a diverse set of actors and authorities comes into play.