Excessive Presences:
An Ethnography of Experiences of Crisis in the Italian Asylum System

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Abstract

The debate around forced migration and mental health focuses mainly on the effect of stressful experiences on the wellbeing of migrants. Although there is a large body of anthropological literature criticizing the medicalisation of trauma and emphasizing the correlations between restrictive migration policies and migrants' mental distress, research rarely goes beyond the categories of suffering, illness and health. The assumption that a psychic life falling outside the ordinary is fundamentally a predicament is rarely questioned. The aim of this thesis is to fill this gap in research, by considering "divergent," non-ordinary experiences as possible other ways of being in the world. Therefore, this study examines alternative, idiosyncratic, ways of perceiving, sensing and making sense of the world, understanding them as unconventional narratives – and sometimes even as counternarratives – about their social, political and historical background.

The research draws on information collected from refugees during eighteen months of ethnographic fieldwork in Torino, Italy. The main research findings are twofold. Firstly, this thesis offers a new angle on the link between the social and the psychological. The research analyses the effects of asylum policies and practices on migrants' sense of self and of belonging, arguing not only that mental distress happens at the conjuncture between subject and macro forces, but also that mental disorders can provide a privileged perspective on the work of ordering mechanisms – namely, migration policies restricting citizenship's rights, and interventions reproducing precarity. Also, this thesis considers the relationality of mental distress, arguing that even the most idiosyncratic experience of crisis is always situated in a space of social, political and historical relationships. Therefore, crisis entails a

disruptive potential, for it creates a disturbance into the social world. By arguing for the need to include divergent memories in academic and policy discourses, this research contributes to the debate surrounding the politics of "refugee voices" in forced migration and refugee studies.

Secondly, this thesis contributes to the debate around ethnographical methods in anthropology. In employing mental disorder as an ethnographic object, this research makes use of the idiosyncratic as a device to unfold the opaqueness and the implicit in the collective. Also, this research provides a new understanding of the researcher's positionality, and, specifically, of the effects of being open and vulnerable to the field. By being simultaneously exposed and responsive to others, ethnographers are witnesses for they bear the marks left by field encounters.

A mia figlia Alice,
che è venuta al mondo a testa alta

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Introduction

In my mind this research began four years ago, in the basement of a building in the ex-Moi – the Torino 2006 Winter Olympic athletes' village – that was abandoned and then occupied by refugees in 2013. I had been called by a friend who was part of an activist group of physicians and psychologists advocating for the health rights of refugees and migrants and offering medical advice to those who had difficulties in accessing the national healthcare system. While volunteering at ex-Moi, they had met Mirela, a Romanian woman living with her boyfriend in the basement. She was in a condition of extreme marginality: homeless, alcoholic, probably suffering from a cognitive impairment, abused by her partner. Showing us a scar on her stomach, she asked to see a doctor: she had had surgery some time before, and she wanted to know if she could still have children.

I went back to Mirela a few times to take her to the doctor until she left the building and we lost track of her. Gradually, the road to her home became almost familiar: I had to cross a yard, go downstairs in the dark using my mobile for light, and walk through a long corridor, avoiding water leakages from the ceiling and puddles on the ground, bypassing the objects piled up by the occupants. The corridor was dark, the only light was provided by security lamps. There were some power sockets to which the occupants plugged electric stoves which functioned both for heating and cooking. There were no toilets or running water in the basement. It was dark, damp and cold. Also, there was a disturbing silence. Mirela lived in the room at the end of the corridor. Her partner used to lock her in when going out in the morning. She was alone all day, in a small room filled with objects: there was a bed on the left, some coloured flashing fairy lights hanging above the bed, and

Mirela's belongings – clothes in plastic bags, hundreds of little objects collected over time – piled against the walls.

The ex-Moi basements were a space of marginalization within marginality. While in the aboveground apartments there were difficult living conditions – they were overcrowded, with precarious sanitary conditions, and faulty plumbing and electricity – the basements seemed to me a dangerous, harmful place of confinement. This was an uninhabitable space. Yet, what struck me most was Mirela's deep attachment to that place, a home she had carefully decorated, collecting and arranging objects, and thus made familiar and intimate. A concrete cellar, turned into a home. Worried about her conditions, the group of activists tried to find other housing for Mirela through Social Services, and finally a place in a shelter was found. Once there, Mirela found that the shelter had rules, reporting times, and, most importantly, did not let her bring all her things. She stayed there for a few days, but found the place unliveable. She went back to the basement, and then left for good.

This encounter left me with a fundamental question which then guided my investigation: what makes a world inhabitable? And what happens when we have to leave our familiar world, for an unknown elsewhere? In this thesis, I understand the experience of forced migration as an unresolved process of displacement and emplacement. Migration involves a loss, and an ensuing effort of reconstruction and re-articulation of a liveable world. When forcibly leaving home and family, migrants experience complete dispossession. What follows is a constant work of relocation, reorientation and re-subjectification in which breakdowns and failures are common.

Theoretical and methodological framework

This thesis is rooted in anthropology. Anthropology provided me the theoretical lens and methodological practice to investigate the consequences of forced migration and displacement on people's lives. Aiming at analysing the relationship between migration and health, I started my research reviewing anthropological literature on forced migration and medical anthropology's perspective on trauma and migrants' mental health. Since anthropology is fundamentally an empirical knowledge, I defined the focus of interest for this research on how refugees experience mental distress, reflecting on the tension between psychological and social dimensions. On these grounds, I turned quite naturally to ethnography to find my methodological tools.

These choices mirror my background and reveal from the very beginning the deeply personal nature of this research – and, I argue, of research in general. I started my career studying cultural and social anthropology and when I carried out my first fieldwork, about Albanian migrants' funeral rites and mourning practices, I came across medical and psychological anthropology. That experience made me question my role and position as a researcher. I was not only rationally interested in the social and political dimensions of suffering, but also deeply touched by the encounter with my informants' pain. Afterwards, while doing fieldwork in Sarajevo about gender-based violence, I became aware of one of the most powerful features of an honest ethnography – the capacity of drawing the researchers truly into the field, requiring them to renounce a cosy, but fictitious, objectivity, in favour of an uneasy, intimate involvement with human complexity. The bluntness of ethnography makes me uncomfortable, and, at once, I feel I am in my proper place.

Hence, feeling questioned and challenged by ethnography, I tackled this sense of discomfort questioning and challenging ethnography itself. I explored different disciplines: I trained in clinical psychology, and more recently, in constructivist psychotherapy, focusing in particular on ethnopsychiatry. In the last few years, I have been working with migrants both as a researcher and as a psychologist. In my experience, these two positions – observation and intervention – influenced and transformed each other, leading to an interdisciplinary approach to research. Although my starting point was an anthropological perspective, the research process led me to combine and compare literature, theoretical frameworks, methods, thus creating a tension between different disciplines, and fashioning my own way of doing ethnography. By establishing a dialogue with other perspectives and methods, I wanted both to investigate how the researcher's vulnerability, her openness to the field, can be understood within a psychological perspective; and, in turn, how vulnerability and distress can be understood through an anthropological lens.

Research background and gap

The debate around forced migration and mental health focuses mainly on the effect of past, and more recently also present, stressful experiences on the wellbeing of migrants. Particularly, medical anthropologists have pointed out that the application of Western psychiatric categories often conceal the social, political, and economic factors that affect refugees' health and wellbeing (Summerfield, 2001; Watters, 2001). Also, epidemiological studies aimed at informing preventive strategies and mental health care services have been criticized for their tendency to

focus mainly on stressors rooted in pre-resettlement experiences (Watters & Ingleby, 2004). Scholars have argued for more attention to the correlations between, on the one hand, restrictive policies, limited access to work, housing, education and welfare as well as the effects of isolation and discrimination, and, on the other, the mental health of refugees and asylum seekers (Blight, Ekblad, Lindencrona, & Shahnavaz, 2009; Blight, Ekblad, Persson, & Ekberg, 2006; Craig, Mac Jajua, & Warfa, 2009; Humphris & Bradby, 2017; Silove, Steel, & Watters, 2000). Other scholars have pointed out how refugees are often wrongfully portrayed as passive victims suffering from mental health problems, therefore stressing the need for more research accounting for refugees' perspective: that is, the ways in which they perceive, interpret and cope with difficult experiences (Simich, Maiter, & Ochocka, 2009; Watters, 2001).

However, research on refugees' experiences of trauma and suffering rarely goes beyond the categories of illness and health. Even scholars criticizing the overuse of psychiatric categories and emphasizing the impact of social and political factors fail to transcend the health/illness dimension. In other words, mental distress is usually considered in terms of a disorder. Whether its causes are traced to individual factors, or to social and political circumstances, the assumption that a psychic life falling outside the ordinary is fundamentally a predicament is rarely questioned. Therefore, the aim of my thesis is to fill this gap in research, by considering "divergent," non-ordinary experiences as possible other ways of being in the world. The intention is not only to acknowledge and give voice to refugees' perspective on trauma and suffering. Rather, my research focuses on alternative, idiosyncratic, ways of perceiving, sensing and making sense of the world, understanding them as unconventional narratives – and sometimes even as counternarratives – about their social, political and historical background.

The main objective of this thesis is to analyse the relationship between individual, non-ordinary, experiences and social critique/change. Following Desjarlais (1997), I consider refugees' lifeworlds as their ways of being in the world, aiming at situating personal experience within structures of knowledge, morality and practice, and thus ask: what are the "sensed grounds" of life in the asylum system? How do refugees orient themselves in time and space? How do they perceive and experience their new world? And what are the conditions of possibility of these experiences? Also, with Throop (2010), I consider articulation as a symbolically mediated process through which chaotic impressions take a more definite form, and I choose to focus on the opaque, ambiguous experiences that resist articulation. Therefore, the aim of this thesis is to explore the ways in which personal experiences of suffering and crisis provide a critical angle on the predicaments of state policies and practices about migration, by asking:

- What is "crisis" in the asylum system? How do migrants experience distress and suffering in this social and political context?
- What is the relationship between individual crisis and forms of exclusions and marginalization resulting from contemporary migration policies? What does crisis reveal about the social and political circumstances in which it takes place and shape?
- And finally, how does crisis resonate across the social space? What is its transformative potential?

This thesis is an analysis of trajectories in the asylum system, that is, how migrants perceive, and navigate through, asylum claim procedures and resettlement projects. I look at the encounter between subjects and asylum policies and practices, focusing on the costs of this encounter. In other words, I investigate the effects of contemporary migration policies on migrants' subjectivities, on their bodies, sense

of self and belonging. Particularly, I explore experiences of failure, when something goes wrong in the encounter, producing a disruption that affects not only the person, but also the world around them. In this thesis, I conduct an ethnography of experiences of crisis in an effort to find new ways to link the individual and the collective, the phenomenological and the political. I consider the experience of mental distress as an object reflecting a crisis in the conjuncture between the subject and the historical, political, economic and social forces. From an ethnographic perspective, subjective disorders become prisms with a disordering potential. On the one hand, narratives of personal crises speak of the link between mental distress and social context, revealing the implicit, and often ambiguous, side of the asylum discourse. On the other, crises have a transformative potential, for they resonate across the scene, disturbing and challenging it.

Italy as a fieldsite

The larger context of this work is the European asylum system – its political and moral frame, together with its contradictions and inconsistencies. I chose Italy as ethnographic field, to look at the ways in which supranational policies are transformed locally, affected by, and affecting, national politics and society. Since its foundation, the European Union has been characterised by a tension between integration and fragmentation, due to distinct national histories of the state. Therefore, decisions taken at a supranational level are frequently adapted locally into different practices, often reflecting national political cultures, and revealing the tension between macro and micro levels.

Especially with regards to migration, Italy has had a particular trajectory, more akin to that of other Southern European countries, than to Central and Northern ones. Migration is also one of the issues which reflects more significantly the debate around the country's position within the EU. Historically a country of emigration, Italy became a "destination" only in the 1990s, with a sudden increase in its migratory inflow during the 2000s (Ambrosini, 2005). Similarly to other Southern European countries, migrants continue to be considered "useful invaders" (Ambrosini, 1999) and are accepted mainly as labour force for unskilled occupations, with a little possibility for social mobility and secondary or higher education (Calavita, 2005; Reyneri, 2004; Reyneri & Fullin, 2011). Coherently with other European countries, immigration laws have become progressively more exclusionary and restrictive, thus making migrants more exposed to exploitation both in the regular and in the "grey" or "black" labour market (Tuckett, 2016).

The legal and economic marginalization, reinforced by widespread sentiments of racism and xenophobia, engender a sense of disappointment and personal failure (Grillo & Pratt, 2002). For these reasons, as Tuckett (2016) argues, in the social imaginary of migrants Italy is often portrayed as a "stepping stone", rather than a country of arrival: thanks to the relatively malleable Italian immigration laws and the possibilities offered by the Schengen Area (Tuckett, 2015), migrants arrived on the Italian shores apply for asylum in the country, but then try to move on to Central and Northern European countries, perceived as wealthier and more inclusive, with the hope of improving their life conditions. However, as I will argue in the next chapters, mobility is often more imagined, and desired, than practised. A lot of migrants stay, or come back to Italy, which has become in the last decades more and more a place of residence, and not only of passage. Therefore, as the literature discussed in the next chapter will show,

researchers have begun considering Italy not only as a border country, but also a place where migrants articulate a new life. In my ethnography, I chose to observe their struggles, together with failures and crises, for the right to be "present" and recognised in the Italian social space, to analyse the tension between humanitarian and security principles in supranational and national migration policies.

Structure of the thesis

Chapter 1 reviews the literature analysing the birth of the category of "refugee" and the process of "refugee-making", highlighting the contradictions and paradoxes of the asylum system. I compare this strand of literature with a line of research focusing on refugee agency and autonomous practices, which exceeds the asylum policies and citizenship projects. The second section focuses on research employing the notion of experience, in the effort of comprehending the subjective acts and practices within the system. I emphasize how the notion of experience has been frequently employed to refer to the system's negative impact on individual lives, and therefore often associated with the psychiatric category of "trauma". I suggest reconsidering the notion of trauma through the "social suffering" framework, which better accounts for the relationship between individual experience and social processes. Finally, I introduce my research aim, that is, exploring the asylum system's predicaments through the analysis of refugees' experiences of breakdown.

Chapter 2 describes the broad context of my research, outlining the forced migration phenomenon and explaining the international agreements about the institution of asylum, European regulations and common measures, and the Italian

asylum system. The second section explains my ethnographic practice, describing my field sites and methodological choices, and reflecting on some ethical concerns about doing research with vulnerable groups.

Chapter 3 provides some methodological reflections about the investigation of experiences of crisis and how it can contribute to the analysis of the bond between individual and collective vulnerability. I put into dialogue Bourdieu's considerations on the ordinariness of precarity with Butler's view of its paradoxical character. Finally, I review de Martino's analysis of psychopathological disorders as objects for ethnographic investigations.

The second part of this work constitutes three case studies exploring refugees' "intimate experiences of state". The three chapters address a common question: how do refugees perceive and embody resettlement policies and citizenship projects? And how do they try to make sense of these experiences, articulating them through language in the effort to make them communicable? The case studies analyse, respectively, temporal, spatial and bodily experiences of crisis, focusing on an interrupted/interrupting time, a disorienting/disoriented space, and, finally, on two bodies on the verge of a collapse: what can these experiences reveal about the implicit working processes of the asylum system? How do these processes act? And what margins of autonomy are possible?

Thus, Chapter 4 focuses on the process of subject formation in a condition of social marginality by following Baran, a Kurdish man who fled Turkey, describing his experience of a fracture in the flow of time. Chapter 5 reflects on dispossession with Lily, an Iranian refugee, feeling lost in her new, empty room, and trying to re-orient herself in the new world while re-orienting the new world around her. Finally, Chapter 6 explores Asha and Saeed's use of active metaphors and their

bodily effects, considering how imagination can represent a space of autonomy and, sometimes, the only viable opening towards the future.

In sum, this thesis addresses two main subjects. Firstly, I aim at finding a new angle on the link between the social and the psychological, by analysing the ways in which macro forces and structures are embodied and experienced in "social bodies" (Lock & Scheper-Hughes, 1990) and "social minds" (Kienzler, 2012). Secondly, I aim at rethinking the ethnographic practice, both by asking whether, and how, it can be employed in the analysis of individual, and often idiosyncratic, experiences; and by critically reflecting on the experience of the ethnographer and her position in the field. Therefore, this thesis engages with the debate on forced migration and mental health by shedding new light on the ways in which moments of breakdown affects the process of subject formation in migration. Also, this research contributes to the discussion of qualitative methodology, by providing a new understanding of the researcher's positionality, and, specifically, of the effects of being open and vulnerable to the field.

1. From exception to excess: A review of the literature on migration paradoxes

The aim of this chapter is to critically review some strands of literature that address, from different angles, the fundamental questions guiding this investigation: what kind of life is possible in the asylum system? What is it like to be a "refugee"? What happens when migrants encounter state policies and projects? What are the effects and costs of that encounter? In order to define my object of study and my theoretical perspective on it, I begin by unpacking the terms of the questions. I then proceed to review existing research, identifying two dialectical approaches: "refugee making" and "refugee experiences". By examining relevant contributions across disciplines (forced migration and refugee studies, migration and transnationalism studies, medical anthropology), the aim is to analyse the ways in which those research objects are investigated, worked and re-worked, defined and then deconstructed.

In this analysis, I employ the term "migration" in a very broad sense. The intent is to encompass the multiple trajectories and temporalities of people moving across spaces and borders, thus looking at migration as an evolving, interactive dynamic between migrants' subjectivities – experiences, hopes, and desires – and the system of mobility control. This choice allows me to position myself within the public debate, refusing to participate in the classificatory process that legitimizes, authorizes, and opposes some forms of human mobility over others. Moreover, I want to acknowledge the variable and provisional character of migratory projects that intersect, and sometimes contradict, definitions, thus defying the ordering purpose. Forced displacement, economic migration, genuine/bogus refugee, asylum

seeker, irregular/illegalized migrant, assimilated (but probably never full) citizen: the heterogeneity of migrant conditions rarely fits within categories.

In this work, therefore, I think of migration as *an unstable, recursive, and open-ended process of displacement and contested emplacement*. With this last attribute, I want to draw the boundaries of this broad meaning and discriminate between migration and other forms of human mobility. In this analysis, I look at migrants as individuals for whom the right to move cannot be taken for granted.[1] Hence, migration is a process implying a contact between mobile subjects – that is, people moving across national borders – and political, legal, social, and moral systems of mobility control on the other. The relational asymmetry is clear, for migrants occupy a marginal, subordinated position. However, the outcome of this encounter is not very predictable, and it can take different shapes – a struggle, a resistance, a negotiation, a collision.

This research looks at such encounters, and, specifically, at their consequences: the marks that are left on people. The intent is not to employ a deterministic approach and examine causes and effects. Rather, as will be clarified in the following sections, I look at the reciprocity of these encounters, the dialogues between individuals and power institutions. I consider people's choices and acts – whether in compliance, violation, or defiance. However, bearing in mind the inherent inequality between the parts, I draw attention to the *costs* of these

[1] I acknowledge that migration cannot be reduced to forced and labour migration and is embedded in broader mobility processes including non-economic processes, study, professional advancement, marriage, retirement, lifestyle migration and tourism (Castles, 2010). However, for the purpose of this study I chose to emphasize the specificity of the refugee experience and to look at the effects of dispossession (of a familiar place, social network, affects, belongings, status, citizenship rights, etc.).

encounters, asking how individuals are affected, changed and disturbed by their relationships with the state.

Finally, I consider the multiplicity of those costs. When macro forces enter individual lives, the effects are varying and cannot be fully predicted. Even in the most rigid structure there is always a little room, literally a margin, for autonomy. Structural forces create conditions and delimit the range of possibilities. However, a phenomenological perspective allows me to see a whole horizon and different shades of experiences happening in this margin. I consider power structures and relations as the context within which personal trajectories take place, focusing on their multiple, diverse turns. And it is in this margin that lies a potential – one that is never for free, that always has a cost attached – for a tentative, momentary space of movement, creativity, and even subversion.

"Refugee making": Categories producing liminality

In this section, I discuss some of the literature that contributed to founding refugee studies. In particular, I examine research drawing on a Foucauldian approach and focusing on the productive effects of political and legal categories. This body of research addresses the truth claims and truth effects of serious speech acts and discursive formations (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982; Foucault, 1980), exploring the ways in which macro forces enter the process of subject formation, creating the condition for its existence. As Zetter (1991) puts it, this perspective analyses the processes of "labelling refugees", that is, how migrants are stereotyped, normalized, grouped into a category, or disaggregated in different classifications.

The focus is on power relations and the conflicting, politicized meanings that labels assume for both the labelled and labellers.

The birth of a categorical order. In her seminal article, Lisa Malkki (1995b) warns us against considering "the refugee" as something real, a generalizable type of person. Rather, the author emphasizes that this is a historically, politically and culturally constructed category that later became an object of knowledge. According to Malkki, the refugee label includes a broad variety of forced movements with diverse historical and political causes, socioeconomic statuses, personal histories and psychological conditions. When addressing such an unstable social phenomenon, we cannot assume an essentialized "refugee identity" or "refugee experience". The author examines the history of the category, recognizing that it was instituted as a specific sociolegal classification, and consequentially as an epistemic object, in post-World War II Europe.[2] After this period, a whole area of studies, professions, discursive domains and legal apparatuses was developed, producing what has later been called a "refugee system" or "refugee regime". Malkki (1996) continues by examining the consequences of processes of reification. Constituted as a human category, the refugee is located within the register of universal suffering and is thus dehistoricized and depoliticized. Refugees are transformed from historical actors, into speechless victims: a bare, minimal, and abstract humanity, "a merely biological or demographic presence" (p. 390).[3] When "wounds speak louder

[2] Particularly, Malkki follows Arendt (1968) in emphasizing the necessity of examining statelessness and displacement in relation to the history of national states and the loss of a polity.

[3] Malkki draws on Arendt's definition of the refugee as "nothing but human" (1968).

than words" (p. 384), experts and knowledges – medical sciences in particular – can claim both a narrative authority and an audience.

Although arbitrary, once established, a category produces effects and has a social life. In her classic work Malkki (1995a) looks at the encounter between displaced persons and the system of nation-states, analysing "the contingent and sociohistorical process of making and unmaking of categorical identities and moral communities" (p. 17). According to the author, refugees occupy a liminal position[4] in the "national order of things" (p. 5). She privileges this definition over that of "nationalisms" to define the nation as a system of cultural signification: "a powerful regime of order and knowledge that is at once politico-economical, historical, cultural, aesthetic and cosmological" (p. 5). According to the author, nations are a powerful system of classification – a "categorical order" (p. 6) – perceived as natural and thus legitimate. By being interstitial within this order, displaced persons have the potential to question common categories of community, territory, and political identity. In displacement, "liminal collectivities" have two possibilities. They can try to adapt and adjust within the receiving system, thus perpetuating its categorical order. Or, liminality can become a refusal to be categorized, thus challenging and

[4] Malkki refers to van Gennep's (1981) classic definition of liminality in rites of passage as a transition phase in which people are on the threshold of entering a new status, having left the previous one behind. See also Turner (1967), who describes the liminal person as a "naked unaccommodated man", an "undifferentiated raw material", to emphasize the fact that when in a liminal phase, people are "at once no longer classified and not yet classified".

shattering categories. As liminal, structurally invisible, transitional beings,[5] refugees can be particularly polluting, posing a danger to the categorical order of nations.

"Self-making and being made." From their marginal position, refugees defy the national order, representing a threat to the body politic. Drawing on, and at once challenging, Foucault's notion of biopolitics, Aihwa Ong (1995) enquires into the social techniques that make refugees' bodies governable, not only through oppression, but also through their aspirations. Specifically, the author focuses on the use of the medical gaze as means to discipline, describing biomedicine "as a mix of good intentions, desire to control 'diseased' and 'deviant' populations, and the exigencies of limited resources which often compel medicalization" (p. 1244). By investigating the encounter between health workers and Khmer refugees in the United States, the author observes how refugees are considered both contagious to, and dependent upon society, and thus they must be treated, normalized, transformed into healthy and culturally proper subjects. However, Ong emphasizes the dialectical nature of power relationships, of oppression and contestation.

> The clinicians themselves appear to be both agents and objects of biomedical regulation. They seek to reduce patients' cultural beliefs to biomedical terms, but at other times subvert medical procedures in order to provide emotional support; they instruct patients in the norms of medical regimes and yet are must [sic] sometimes adjust to patients' insistence on "deviant" behaviour. (p. 1254)

[5] Turner (1967) suggests that the condition of liminality is potentially polluting, threatening, since transitional beings are neither one thing nor another, and therefore they can be unclear or contradictory.

The body of the refugee becomes a locus of resistance, refusing and subverting medical discipline. In the micropolitics of clinical encounter, refugees manipulate their bodies – through silence, inscrutability and passivity – to evade control, seeking to pursue their own needs. Therefore citizenship, as the dialectical, often ambivalent and contested, relationship between individual and state can be seen as a "dual process of self-making and being made" (Aihwa Ong et al., 1996, p. 738): people are not only submitted to but also exercise a form of power, framing and making claims of the state.

In her research, Ong focuses on the multiple ways in which migrants negotiate institutionally produced categories and identities (2003; see also Zetter, 1991, 2007). Following Deleuze, she looks at power as an assemblage and at the process of citizen-making as the aggregated effect of multiple actors:

> Instead of considering citizenship solely in terms of the state's power to give or deny citizenship, I look at social policies and practices beyond the state that in myriad mundane ways suggest, define, and direct adherence to democratic, racial, and market norms of belonging. … This diffusion model of power locates its dynamism in the pervasive, mutable system of relations and interactions among individuals, focusing on the effects an actor has on the action of others in realizing a successful goal. … [C]itizenship is the cumulative effect of a multiplicity of bureaucratic figures who are concerned with the practicalities of democracy. (p. 15-17)

The author focuses here on the micropractices of control that mould subjects into citizens, but without completely objectifying them. Control is, indeed, an open-ended, inherently ambivalent, process, that "never works out as planned".

The paradoxes of citizenship. In their writings, Malkki and Ong focus on the implicit side of power and on what can be termed the "paradoxes of citizenship". To

better understand what I mean by paradoxes here, it is first necessary to unpack the definition of citizenship. Generally, I consider citizenship the relationship between the individual subject and the polity, and therefore related to the issues of belonging and membership – that is, to the various forms of mutual recognition between the community and the individual in terms of rights and reciprocal responsibilities. As Sassen (2002a) points out, this relationship can assume different configurations, depending on the definition of the polity. In Europe, during ancient and mediaeval times, citizenship was linked to the city; subsequently, the process of state formation established the tie between citizenship and national state. Recently, several transformations associated with globalization – such as economic privatization/deregulation, the significant role played by the international human rights system, the rise of groups and communities unwilling to identify with the state – have destabilized that "historical bundle", allowing for the emergence of new subjects and spaces for politics which Sassen defines as "denationalized forms of citizenship"[6] (2002a, p. 80, see also 2002b).

[6] Sassen draws a distinction between *postnational* citizenship, linked to processes of deterritorialization locating the institution outside the borders of the national state, and *denationalized* citizenship, which remains situated in a national setting, but is considered as a changed and changing institution due to the transformation of the national state itself (Sassen, 2006): "That is to say, insofar as globalization has changed certain features of the territorial and institutional organization of the political power and authority of the state, the institution of citizenship — its formal rights, its practices, its psychological dimension — has also been transformed even when it remains centered in the national state. ... In considering denationalization, the focus moves on to the transformation of the national, including the national in its condition as foundational for citizenship. Thus it could be argued that postnationalism and denationalization represent two different trajectories. Both are viable, and they do not exclude each other" (Sassen, 2002a, p. 88).

Citizenship is therefore an institution in continuous change. However, it reflects not only the transformation of the polity, it also describes different aspects of the relation between the individual and the polity. Particularly, Sassen (2002a) focuses on how citizenship is affected by the position of minority groups within the nation-state and the practices of social membership enacted by people facing exclusion from full participation. The author points out the difference between formal and effective citizenship in order to shed light on the "informal social contract" between the state and citizens who can be "unauthorized yet recognized" (such as undocumented immigrants raising a family, schooling children, holding a job) or "authorized yet unrecognized" (full citizens who are not recognized as political subjects, such as housewives, mothers, immigrant women). As Sassen (2002a) argues, those informal and extra-statal forms of participation allow for a partial recognition, a movement between membership and exclusion, thus engendering a process of redefinition and negotiation of the different dimensions of citizenship. According to the author, to better understand how citizenship changes and new forms of political participation are constituted, research should focus on experiences of citizenship and on the practices that have to do with "the production of 'presence' of those without power" (ivi, p. 90) – that is, "on the condition of being an actor even though lacking power" (ivi, p. 92).

Similarly, Castles (1995) defines as "differential exclusion" the simultaneous incorporation of migrants into some areas of society, mainly the labour market, and exclusion from others, such as welfare and citizenship. However, differential exclusion is better understood in continuity with the notion of "differential inclusion" which accounts for the multiplication of migration control devices both within and beyond the borders of nation-states, and the multiplication of citizenship and non-citizenship statuses they generate (Casas-Cortes et al., 2015). As Bosniak

(2008) argues, the "noncitizenship of citizens and the citizenship of noncitizens" reveal that citizenship is not a unified institution but the outcome of different conventions and practices that are both converging and autonomous. In other words, citizenship is not binary; it can be better understood as a continuum, or a series of concentric circles of belonging. Although citizenship is related to political participation, full inclusion is actually unachievable, and the tension between inclusion and exclusion cannot be reconciled. Rather, the issue at stake is where to properly locate the boundaries with regards to responsibility and belonging. According to Bosniak, it is the paradoxical condition of aliens who can partake in only some aspects of citizenship that reveals the impossibility of dissolving citizenship's ambivalence: "Aliens are liminal characters, subjects of contrasting and sometimes competing citizenship worlds. ... Alienage, we might say, pits citizenship against itself" (ivi, p. 140).

Citizenship policies, categories, and practices aim at perpetuating the national order against the risk posed by migrants who claim forms of belonging from the standpoint of (partial) exclusion. This creates a paradox. On the one hand, migration cannot be suppressed: even when restricted, people do not stop moving, and migration is one of the main forces powering the neoliberal capitalist machine. On the other hand, complete inclusion of migrants would undermine the notion of citizenship:

> Imagine a scale where we have on the one pole full rights and on the other complete illegalisation and invisibility. It is somewhere between these two extreme poles that a cut is placed. This cut is citizenship. … There is a paradox in this function of citizenship as the regulatory mechanism of inclusion and exclusion: the more a society moves towards citizenship, the more it creates the conditions for its disappearance as a form of governance. If you include everyone and if you assign

> rights to everyone, citizenship becomes obsolete. "Citizenship for all" is an impossible term. (Papadopoulos & Tsianos, 2013, p. 182)

As a consequence, migrants are differentially included into society and rendered subjects of labour through different modes of access into the country, different (sometimes reversible) citizenship statuses, and flexible, precarious jobs (Anderson, 2010).

Rights and fears: the ambivalences of asylum. The tension between inclusion and exclusion produces a contradiction. Categories co-exist with spaces of non-classification, that allow for some forms of partial recognition. Malkki and Ong explore these interstices, looking at the ways in which ambivalence enters the process of formation of migrant subjects, asking what it is like to be recognized only as a speechless or helpless subject in need of protection. Other authors have further developed this line of research. Drawing on the work of Agamben (2005), Ticktin (2005, 2011) describes how humanitarian policies render migrants the ultimate subjects of exception, who are admitted to the social space not as rights-bearers, but only as victims and objects of compassion (see also Fassin & Pandolfi, 2010). Fassin (2013) emphasizes that the contradiction can be revealed by the origin of the word "asylum" that, in Latin, designates both a safe, inviolable area – a space of exception – outside the city for slaves, criminals, and political opponents; and a place where to find hospitality. In this second meaning Fassin traces a profound ambivalence towards the stranger. Indeed, hospitality derives from the word *hospes* (guest) that stems from *hostis* (enemy):

> Considering this dual semantic as well as historiographical legacy, we have then two founding truths of contemporary asylum: the sacred right to protection in an

> inviolable space, independent of the refugees' condition, and the ambivalence of hospitality, always in danger of hostility. (ivi, p. 43)

The author looks at the history of contemporary asylum politics, analysing the consequences of this dual semantic. In its early stages, asylum was constituted as an exceptional path, secondary to immigration associated with employment or family reunification. When European states started applying restrictions on work permits, narrowing, and almost shutting, the previous entry route, asylum applications started to increase. The inclusion of asylum under the logics of immigration control contributed also in changing the relation between applicant and institution: from admiration, compassion, and trust, to suspicion, mistrust, and exclusion. Fassin (2013) argues that "[t]he lack of confidence in asylum seekers has for corollary [sic] an idealized construction of the truth of asylum" (p. 47). Thus, the system discriminates between true refugees, who deserve compassion, and bogus refugees, who are a threat. An ambivalence emerges from the tension between two principles, efficacy and fairness. States need a strict process of assessment of those who deserve protection, to reduce (or, at least, discourage) migration flows, and are simultaneously required to formally respect the human rights principles on which they are founded. As a consequence, the asylum system is based on systematic suspicion, and is devoted to the search for the truth (Fassin, 2013). The author identifies the basis of the asylum system in a "humanitarian rationale" (Fassin, 2001), a dialectical logic combining compassion and repression (Fassin, 2005):

> States have two main means of resolving the tensions between asylum seekers' loss of credibility and their inevitable presence due to persecutions around the world: repression, aimed at deterring or even punishing them, and compassion, rendering them acceptable. (Fassin, 2013, p. 50)

Refugees are considered objects of compassion, rather than subjects of rights. Specifically, Fassin focuses on migration policies in France, that generate a shift of legitimacy, from entitlement to humanitarian obligation. Restriction of access and rights for "ordinary" individuals, and the illegalization of non-credible asylum seekers, are associated with the legalization of migrants holding a certificate that proves the existence of a medical condition or a trauma (Fassin & D'Halluin, 2005; Fassin & Rechtman, 2009).

> Asylum seekers are expected to unveil themselves, to recount their histories, and to exhibit their wounds. The casuistry underlying the supposedly fair processing of applications is itself based on an extreme singularity of situations. Each case is different, we are told, and therefore justifies distinct treatment. Accordingly, it is each biography that is explored, each anatomy that is searched. As in the case of other dominated categories – the poor or the foreign – the government of refugees in French society operates through … [a process] of production and submission of the subject whose body is supposed to deliver the "ultimate truth". (Fassin & D'Halluin, 2005, p. 606)

Fassin and colleagues show how exception – and, specifically, exception founded on humanitarian obligation towards "victims" – represents a discourse granting legitimacy to some positions of subjectivity, and denying others. These considerations have been further developed by scholars examining the different variations of this discourse, and how exception is shaped and translated through other practices and objects.

The border regime. In the last two decades, borders have become among the most investigated objects in migration studies. Borders and "borderscapes" are indeed a strategic site for shaping discourses and practices around migration

(Mezzadra & Neilson, 2011). In particular, scholars analysing Europe's process of harmonization of migration and asylum policies[7] have drawn attention to its two main guiding principles – opening and closure. Those two poles create a tension between, on the one hand, the purpose of attracting investments, allowing free circulation of goods and "desired" migrants, and on the other hand, protecting the territory and discouraging unwanted immigration. This tension is manifested quite clearly in the border apparatus. As Balibar (2001) argues, the positioning and functioning of Europe's borders concerns not only external relations but also its own governmentality: the border has become the device allowing access to a territory where human rights are granted while at once protecting the boundaries, and therefore the existence, of that territory. As a matter of fact, the process of European integration did not involve the destruction of internal borders. Rather, borders continued to operate by being displaced, transformed into bordering measures, multiplied and spread over the whole territory (Rigo, 2007), producing and regulating relationships, not only between political entities, but also with political entities and individuals located outside those entities (Luhmann, 1982). That is, borders not only separate, but establish areas of contact, and therefore of differentiation.

Asylum and border are two inseparable institutions: they constitute each other whilst also defying each other. Indeed, asylum seekers and refugees are created through at least one border crossing which triggers the Geneva Convention signatory state's obligations (Loescher & Milner, 2011; Long, 2012). States are not compelled to recognize asylum status but, according to the *non-refoulement*

[7] See Chapter 2.

principle contained in the Convention,[8] they are required to process asylum applications and cannot return asylum seekers to countries where they face a well-founded fear of persecution. Therefore, the asylum system depends on, and at once challenges, the nation-state, for it restricts state sovereignty, and implies time consuming and expensive legal procedures to process claims (Hansen, 2014). Nation-states react by establishing barriers to prevent asylum seekers from reaching their borders or staying in their territories after rejection: visa requirements, lists of (often questionable) "safe" countries, extraterritorial detention facilities and increasing deportation measures (Hansen, 2014). European states have also increasingly engaged in an effort to shift their borders outwards. Borders are "dispersed" and expanded to third countries through the externalization of border authorities and control responsibilities to other countries' sovereign territories (Casas-Cortes et al., 2015). This is often justified using humanitarian reasons, as a means to protect the rights and safety of migrants, and not only as a policing strategy (Walters, 2011). Specifically, the European Union (EU) politics of externalization includes measures of transnational coordination between countries of origin, transit and destination, such as the development of areas of EU influence across the Mediterranean and in Eastern Europe, or the inclusion of programmes of selected mobility and joint patrolling of border zones as clauses in public investment and other economic agreements (Casas, Cobarrubias, & Pickles, 2010).[9]

[8] For a description of the Geneva Convention, see Chapter 2.

[9] See, among others, the 2003 proposal by Tony Blair for creating "safe havens" in transit countries for the external processing of claims; the 2008 Italy-Libya agreements, renewed in 2017, to counter illegal immigration, human trafficking, and reinforce border security in return for financial support; the 2016 EU-Turkey deal that allowed Greece to

Aiming at "de-naturalizing the border" and arguing for a constructivist approach beyond the dualism structure/agency (Walters, 2002), several authors have analysed how borders and migration co-constitute each other, looking at borders as sites of encounter, tension, and conflict, where power works as an assemblage instead of a unitary logic (Casas-Cortes et al., 2015). Moreover, scholars have introduced the concept of the "border regime" to analyse borders and bordering practices not only as geographical, but also as juridical and political spaces. In other words, the border regime does not refer to a precise, linear space; rather, it is an aggregate of practices, produced by multiple actors, and embodied in everyday relationships (Vacchiano, 2011). Borders are at once a physical, political, but also a metaphorical space, where frontiers are delocalized (Berg & Ehin, 2006). Borders are external *and* internal, objective *and* subjective: they are imposed through state policies, regulations and policing, but are also deeply rooted in collective forms of identification and belonging (Balibar, 2010).

According to this approach, borders are understood both as governmental technologies of surveillance, and as products of the movement of people and things, and thus constitute a site of constant encounter and tension between different logics (Andersson, 2014; Casas-Cortes et al., 2015; Karakayali & Rigo, 2010; Ticktin, 2009). In particular, borders discriminate between citizens and non-citizens, producing dynamics of differential inclusion and exclusion. The notion of differential inclusion points to the productive effects of the border, emphasizing the link between migration control and labour management in creating precarity, vulnerability

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return irregular migrants in exchange for an increase in the resettlement of Syrian refugees residing in Turkey, accelerating visa liberalization for Turkish nationals, and boosting existing financial support for Turkey's refugee population.

and/or opportunities by allowing or preventing access to resources and rights (Casas-Cortes et al., 2015). In other words, borders create the *polis* by establishing and sustaining the institution of citizenship as a mechanism of differentiation, creating asymmetries in belonging, affiliation, and entitlements (Rigo, 2007). Finally, in recent years, research has focused on the multiple nature of borders, not only as means of exclusion and violence, but also as devices producing different forms of access and rights (Casas-Cortes et al., 2015). Indeed, borders allow passage as much as they deny it, they increase or decrease the speed of movement as much as they hinder it, thus multiplying citizenship positions (Casas-Cortes et al., 2015).

As both a legal apparatus and a geographical space, borders are a tool, a *dispositif* in Foucauldian terms,[10] in the production of an additional critical category, and different forms of access and rights (Casas-Cortes et al., 2015). If, as described in the previous section, the wounded body is the stake in the creation of the true vs. bogus refugee, borders are the site of production of the other crucial classification: the "irregular" migrant (De Genova, 2002, 2013a). Border zones are indeed relational sites that differentiate between regular/irregular and legitimate/illegitimate migration. While the first is considered as a productive force to be exploited, the latter is seen as a destructive force to be hindered. A moral hierarchy is established, opposing desirable and productive migrants to undesirable and threatening aliens (Squire, 2010). For instance, a focus on irregularity makes migrants "culpable", delegitimizes their strategies, leading up to criminalizing the

[10] "What I'm trying to pick out with this term is, firstly, a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions – in short, the said as much as the unsaid" (Foucault, 1980, p. 194).

movement of people (De Genova, 2002). Indeed, irregularity is a product of political struggle and of bordering practices, where the work of national and transnational agencies comes into contact with the movement of migrants, rather than being the given, objective status of the individual. Then, research should "not approach irregularity as the end product of a politics of control, but rather … as a key *stake* within a contested politics of mobility in which migration or *movement,* as well as its control, plays an active role" (De Genova, 2002, p. 8; see also Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013). According to De Genova (2002), irregularity is thus an ambivalent condition, not simply produced, but also contested and (re)appropriated, separated from regularity by an obscure line (Coutin, 2005).

In this first section, I have examined research drawing on a Foucauldian approach, and investigating the productive effects of migration categories. Following Lisa Malkki, I have looked at the interstices within the categorical order, and at the threat they pose. With Aihwa Ong, I have focused on the system's efforts to control the threat, producing disciplined and acceptable subjects. I have emphasized how power is a dual process, based on dialectical relationships, and encompassing an inherent open-endedness. Particularly, following Didier Fassin, I have looked at the fundamental paradox of the asylum system, which is founded on the double and contrasting mandate of exercising compassion, while implementing repression. Finally, I have elaborated on the ways in which this paradox operates, focusing on two of the most fruitful epistemic objects of this field: the refugee's suffering body, around which is construed credibility and thus legitimacy; and border practices, revealing the daily negotiations, and embodied relationships, of inclusion/exclusion.

Refugee "experience": Living liminal spaces and temporalities

The body of literature discussed above analyses the encounter between migrants and migration policies, laws, and institutions through the lens of the oppression-resistance axis. Power relations are considered in their dialectical character: how oppressed and oppressor co-constitute each other. Still, they are read along a linear axis and imagined as a back-and-forth exchange. Where power is asserted, we can expect a form of resistance, for, in Foucauldian terms, "resistance is both an element of the functioning of power and a source of its perpetual disorder" (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982, p. 147).

But "man's behavior is not only reactional," Frantz Fanon reminds us (Fanon, 1986, p. 173). There is always something exceeding power, a possibility for an independent action – an act and not a response. Therefore, the second section of this chapter focuses on research that questions the power-resistance axis. I start by analysing studies that focus on the active role of migrants in both their countries of origin and of arrival. I continue by reviewing literature elaborating on the notion of agency, and introducing that of autonomy. I conclude by looking into literature debating the idea of migrants' experiences. The aim is to focus on research that looks beyond the power resistance dialectic, opening up an additional angle through which to investigate the implicit sides of life in migration.

Im/mobilities. Migrants' agency was first introduced in the debate by the seminal work of Glick Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton on transnationalism (1994; 1992). With this term, these authors aim to move past the classic approaches that analysed migration focusing either on countries of origin and push factors, or on

societies of settlement and pull factors. Rather, they emphasize how "transmigrants" establish social fields crossing geographic, cultural, and political borders, maintaining multiple familial, economic, social, religious and political relations (Glick Schiller et al., 1992; see also D. S. Massey et al., 1993) Research following this approach focuses on migrants' involvement – how they "take actions, make decisions, and feel concerns" (Glick Schiller et al., 1992, p. ix) – in both home and host societies, and the links that are developed among different countries. These studies examine how migrants construct and reconstitute their lives across societies, despite distances and borders, and how they contribute in transforming those societies (Caglar, 2001; Vertovec, 1999).

From this perspective, people's movement is considered as a form of social capital and of agency, associated with positive changes, progress and improvements in life (Salazar & Smart, 2011). The so-called "mobility turn" (Urry, 2000) in anthropology and social theory looks at human movement, and the related imaginaries, as a key social process. However, there is a tendency to idealize mobility, transforming it into a natural fact of life, and celebrating cosmopolitanism (Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013; Salazar, 2017). A more critical approach to mobility draws attention to its counterpart, "immobility" – "to assess the extent or nature of movement, or, indeed, even 'observe' it sometimes, one needs to spend a lot of time studying things that stand still (or change at a much slower pace)" (Salazar, 2017, p. 7). Particularly, Salazar and Smart (2011) argue that the ability to move is distributed unevenly, and the very processes producing movement also generate immobility, thus blurring the line between constraint/choice, forced/voluntary movement. In other words, a critical approach questions the idea of mobility as mostly a form of agency, highlighting the political and economic processes that

permit, force or arrest people's movement (De Genova & Peutz, 2010; Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013).

Autonomy of migration. Migrant agency has been further examined by a line of research focusing on the so-called "autonomy" of migration. Scholars following this perspective argue for a different gaze on migration, one that prioritizes the subjective practices, desires, expectations and behaviours of migrants themselves, without romanticization, and always bears in mind their inherent ambivalences (Mezzadra, 2010).[11] Autonomy refers precisely to those ambivalences, as the moments of *excess* in the tension between migration processes and politics of control (Mezzadra, 2010; see also Squire, 2010). The autonomy of migration theory (see, among others Mezzadra, 2006; Mitropoulos, 2007; Moulier-Boutang, 1998; Papadopoulos, Stephenson, & Tsianos, 2008) draws attention to the irreducibility of contemporary migration to economic factors of supply and demand, or to state policies that seek to regulate human movement. By emphasizing autonomy, this approach does not look at migration in isolation from social, cultural, and political structures, but within them (Mezzadra, 2010). Also, it draws attention to "the excess of practices and subjective demands that express themselves over and above the 'objective causes' that determine them …" (Mezzadra, 2010, pp. 5–6). In other

[11] As Mezzadra (2010) notes, the notion of autonomy is introduced by Castels and Miller's seminal text *The Age of Migration*: "… international migrations may also possess a relative autonomy and be impervious to governmental policies. [...] Official policies often fail to achieve their objectives, and may even bring about the opposite of what is intended. People as well as governments shape international migration. Decisions made by individuals, families, and communities – often with imperfect information and constrained options – play a vital role in determining migration and settlement" (Castles, de Haas, & Miller, 2014, p. 278, cited in Mezzadra 2010).

words, such an approach looks at migration as a constituent force in the formation of sovereignty (Papadopoulos et al., 2008) – a social and political movement, not just a response to social or economic necessities (Jessop & Sum, 2006).

Drawing on this approach, Mezzadra (2010) studies the relation between citizenship and migration by shifting the focus from categories produced by dominant forces to the contested processes in which subjective trajectories and autonomous, sometimes stubborn, practices are a fundamental factor. Citizenship cannot be considered as a binary condition (full citizens vs. people excluded from citizenship); rather, it is best understood as an "institution in flux" (Isin, 2009), a layered, and often racialized, system in which migrants live and struggle. Thus, drawing on Isin's definition of "acts of citizenship" (Isin & Nielsen, 2008), Mezzadra discriminates between the juridical and institutional frame of citizenship on the one hand, and citizenship movements, practices and everyday acts on the other. Following Butler, the author argues that migrants act as citizens independently of their citizenship status: "they are exercising these rights, which does not mean that they will 'get' them. The demand is the incipient moment of the rights claim, its exercise, but not for that reason its efficacity" (Butler & Spivak, 2007, p. 64 cit. in Mezzadra 2010). According to Mezzadra, the autonomy of migration approach does not aim at writing an "aestheticizing apology of nomadism," nor at "limit[ing] itself to merely integrating the macroanalysis of the structural processes with a microanalysis of the subjective dimensions of migration" (2010, p. 129). On the contrary, this line of research deals with elements of "turbulence" (Papastergiadis, 2000), that is, with the multiplicity and unpredictability of patterns of contemporary migration. Hence, this turbulence is analysed in its tension with the social and economic conditions, and the "equilibriums" (the functioning and reproduction), within, and against which, it occurs. According to Mezzadra the autonomy of

migration approach argues that "migration is structurally in *excess* of these equilibriums".

> It is around this excess that the redefinition of dispositifs of exploitation and domination … is continuously at stake. … It is thus clear that contemporary regimes of migration management are not geared towards the *exclusion* of migrants. Rather, such regimes function to value, to measure in economic terms and hence to *exploit* the elements of excess (of *autonomy)* that are characteristic of contemporary migratory movements …. (2010, pp. 129–131)

The excess. The mentioned approach seeks to escape the boundaries drawn by current discourses about citizenship rights and differential inclusion, drawing attention to "what lies after citizenship" or, as Papadopoulos and Tsianos put it, the "mundane ontology of moving people" (2013, p. 179). In other words, the two authors look at migration from the multiplicity of its organizational practices and "mobile commons", that is, migrants' "shared knowledge, affective cooperation, mutual support and care" (ibid.). From this angle, migration's autonomy refers to

> the capacity to develop its own logics, its own motivation, its own trajectories that control comes later to respond to, not the other way round … . In this sense, the autonomy of migration thesis is about training our senses to see movement before capital (but not independent from it) and mobility before control (but not as disconnected from it). (Papadopoulos & Tsianos, 2013, p. 184)

Thus, practices of control are seen, not as aimed at immobilizing migrants, but working towards the institutionalization of mobility, its codification, in order to make it productive and sustainable. For instance, Papadopoulos and Tsianos (2013) show how migration policies and the border regime work as equalizers between labour markets and migratory movements by adjusting the flow of mobile

individuals to the speed of assimilation into local markets (see also De Genova & Peutz, 2010). According to Papadopoulos and colleagues, secure borders cannot exist. Rather, we can speak of a "porocracy" (Papadopoulos et al., 2008, p. 200), in which sovereignty can be viewed as the (futile) endeavour to regulate the porosity of borders.

However, the autonomy of migration theory has been criticized for being overly encompassing of a broad diversity of migration experiences. It has been emphasized how this approach risks to homogenize and erase different subjectivities and forms of mobility (Düvell, 2006 cit. in Papadopoulos and Tsianos 2013). In response, Papadopoulos and Tsianos (2013) argue that this approach does not aim at flattening differences; rather, the effort is towards an articulation of commonalities among several forms of movement, and diverse struggles for movement. Moreover, the two authors question whether autonomy can be considered a form of political action, asking what kind of politics characterize migrant practices. They conclude that it is a form of mobilization that goes beyond the traditional collective organizations fighting against oppression and for civil rights. Papadopulos and Tsianos choose to define it as a form of non-politics, breaking with the dominant canon which assumes that migrant practices can become political only if they are integrated into the existing, recognized, system of representation. They imagine migrants' collectivity as a "spectre" rather than a social class or a political movement:

> The spectre of migration will never become a new working class. It will always remain a spectre, which comes in the night through the backdoor of your nation on a smuggled vessel, by using false papers, by crossing hundreds of miles of snowed mountains, by changing one's own identity, by destroying the skin of one's own

> fingertips with acid and a knife to avoid identification, by overstaying a visa, an au pair contract, or the regular tourist period of stay. (2013, p. 187)

Moreover, Papadopoulos and Tsianos look at migrant actions not as acts of resistance against domination, but as efforts to create a new ontology, generating alternative forms of life, and changing the conditions of social existence:

> These are politics which transform the political without ever addressing it in its own terms and practices. Migrants' politics develop their own codes, their own practices, their own logics which are almost imperceptible from the perspective of existing political action: firstly, because we are not trained to perceive them as "proper" politics and, secondly, because they create an excess that *cannot* be addressed *in* the existing system of political representation. (2013, p. 188)

To conclude, literature on autonomy of migration suggests looking beyond categories, and at the interstices between categories. This approach requires us to consider what lies at the system's margins and what exceeds its ordering principles. From this perspective, I have emphasized the multiplicity, irreducibility, and unpredictability of human mobility, for it is redundant – disentangled from the controlling system. I take this excess as my object of study, for how it has been defined in the previous section: migrants' subjective practices, desires, expectations – in other words, migrants' individual trajectories in their tension with the social and economic conditions, but also as something happening beyond those conditions, and as an effort to create, or at least imagine, new conditions.

Having provided a first, tentative definition, I am left with a methodological question: How can I investigate this excess? As already mentioned, when searching for new angles on a phenomenon, we are confronted by a risk of reification, and of fitting a fluid reality into a fixed paradigm. In this case, in the effort to look beyond

categories, we may eventually reduce mobility's excess into another category. However, as both anthropologists of the reflexivist turn (see, among others, Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Geertz, 1973) and theorists of the second-order cybernetic (Maturana & Varela, 1992) remind us, research cannot be considered as an objective gaze on facts. Rather, it is a performance enacted by a polyvocality of narratives (Clifford, 1986b), an heteroglossia (Rabinow, 1986). The act of knowing can be best understood as a process shaped through the interaction between the elements involved: what we know are not the objects *per se*, but only the relation between objects (Bateson & Bateson, 1987). Therefore, I will think of research as an intersubjective experience of knowledge, and consider the excess of mobility not as a fact but as it is imagined and experienced by migrants. In my research I try to keep a self-reflective gaze on the ways in which the excessive dimension of migration is narrated and thus re-experienced in the relationship with the researcher. In the following section, I will analyse anthropological literature looking at the relation between the collective and the individual through the notion of experience. Particularly, I will look into research focusing on the impact of different forms of oppression on migrants' lives, comparing literature reading refugees' psychic lives, their affects, reactions and desires, through diagnostic categories and the literature, from a subjective point of view.

Not a matter of fact: Investigating elusive objects

The trauma-focused approaches. There is a large body of literature in psychological and medical sciences focusing on the traumatic character of forced migration and considering migrants as a high-risk population for trauma-related

disorders (for a systematic review see Nickerson, Bryant, Silove, & Steel, 2011). Besides epidemiological studies, the vocabulary of trauma is also employed by humanitarian organizations to represent the condition of refugees (Pupavac, 2008; Rajaram, 2002). However, this perspective has been criticized for importing into research diagnostic categories whose universality and cross-cultural validity has been widely questioned (Kienzler, 2008; Littlewood, 1990; Pupavac, 2002; Summerfield, 1998). Furthermore, when it comes to policymaking, this approach shows its implications beyond epistemological or methodological issues. Indeed, it generates a sort of loop between academic inquiry and professional practice.

Firstly, by framing mental distress mainly in terms of negative impact of conflict and violence, this perspective contributes to inform and validate some of the assumptions underlying humanitarian programmes addressing the psychological needs of people who have survived violence and promoting their well-being (Watters, 2001). One of the fundamental, and at once most criticized, assumptions regards the notions of "trauma" and "post-traumatic stress disorder" (PTSD). Research has questioned not only their supposed cross-cultural validity, relevance, and measurability, but also the very direct association between traumatic events and pathological responses (Kienzler, 2008; Summerfield, 2000; Young, 1995). As Malkki argues, this can lead to an uncritical importation of such constructions into research as facts: "although many refugees have survived violence and loss that are literally beyond the imagination of most people, we mustn't assume that refugee status in and of itself constitutes a recognizable, generalisable psychological condition" (Malkki, 1995b, p. 510).

Secondly, when reducing experiences of distress to conflict's adverse outcomes, there is a risk of reifying notions of trauma and PTSD. In other words, when trauma is generalised to all refugees, PTSD becomes a "real thing," a disease,

with its aetiology and treatment, while its historical nature is concealed. Watters (2001) emphasizes that refugees' own voices, experiences and priorities are often ignored. Rather, they are labelled and homogenized as passive victims, encapsulated within the designation of PTSD or trauma-related problems. Facing such victims and their diagnosed disorders, programmes of treatment may be overwhelmed by a "responsibility to act", and renounce critical analysis in favour of a pragmatism that reproduces biomedical categories. In other words, in the name of people to be protected, humanitarian organizations appeal to the moral obligation to intervene, establishing a "temporality of emergency" that can become permanent. In emergency, the need to act justifies a "state of exception" that neutralizes political debate and critical evaluation, while mobilizing legal, epidemiological and logistical technologies (Fassin & Pandolfi, 2010).

Drawing on Foucault's theory of governmentality and biopolitics, Pupavac describes the effects of such processes in terms of "therapeutic governance", defined as a "new form of international governance based on social risk management" (2001, p. 258). According to the author, humanitarian interventions focusing on trauma take for granted not only that traumatic events cause psychological disorders; also, more significantly, that "unresolved" traumas ignite new violence. The author argues that psychosocial programmes thus "[make] a link between psychological well-being and security, and [seek] to foster personalities able to cope with risk and insecurity" (Pupavac, 2005, pp. 161–162) and have indeed a homogenizing, pathologizing, controlling, and depoliticizing approach to conflict (Pupavac, 2001). Ticktin (2011) speaks of "regimes of care" to describe the critical role of exceptional, humanitarian clauses and the related institutions in governing migration. Regimes of care enact a form of "armed love", combining "a moral imperative to act, to help and rescue" with practices of violence and containment.

According to the author, a politics of care is a form of antipolitics: only certain bodies (the sick, racialized, violated or suffering, but not labouring or exploited bodies) are recognized as morally legitimate. Migrants can access rights only insofar they remain disabled and worthy of compassion.

In sum, we may speak of a self-perpetuating process: research looking at mental suffering as a negative outcome will contribute in informing health policies and interventions aimed at dealing with, and containing, such impact. The result is the prioritization of mental health issues and a reification of a vulnerable social group that will eventually come back as object of research. The risk is to get entangled in a circular process that prevents us from looking beyond the traumatized subject, and defies the original purpose. We aim at focusing on interstices and margins, what lies above categories, but risk eventually fixing that excess into a diagnosis. As Summerfield (1999) points out, trauma-focused approaches pigeonhole forced migrants as suffering from PTSD but neglect their own perceptions, interpretations, and choices regarding suffering. I will now examine a line of research drawing on the literature on social suffering, that considers liminal experience in a more complex, and fruitful, meaning.

Anthropology of social suffering. According to a body of literature that we can group under the label "anthropology of social suffering" (Bourdieu, 2000b; Das, Kleinman, Ramphele, & Reynolds, 2000; DelVecchio Good, Brodwin, Good, & Kleinman, 1994; Kleinman, Das, & Lock, 1997; Scarry, 1985), suffering can be considered as a social experience. According to Kleinman (1995), suffering is a universal human experience, but it is not experienced by everyone in the same way. Burdens, troubles and wounds are perceived and expressed differently, not only across the world, but in the same community. Suffering is social, for it happens

within social relationships, and is both a social and moral construction and a professional discourse. By introducing this concept, Kleinman, Das and Lock (1997) offer a theoretical framework to anchor individual experiences of pain within political, economic, and cultural processes. As Kleinman and Kleinman argue (1991), the nature of suffering is fundamentally intersubjective and its roots are social.

> Social suffering results from what political, economic, and institutional power does to people and, reciprocally, from how these forms of power themselves influence responses to social problems. Included under the category of social suffering are conditions that are usually divided among separate fields, conditions that simultaneously involve health, welfare, legal, moral and religious issues. (...) For example, the trauma, pain, and disorders to which atrocity gives rise are health conditions; yet they are also political and cultural matters. Similarly, poverty is the major risk factor for ill health and death; yet this is only another way of saying that health is a social indicator and indeed a social process. (Kleinman et al., 1997, p. ix)

The concept of social suffering is similar to that of "structural violence";[12] both emphasize how larger forces are able to shape embodied experience. Quesada and colleagues (2011) suggest the notion of "structural vulnerability" to "extend the economic, material, and political insights of structural violence to encompass more explicitly (and to project to a wider audience) not only political-economic but also cultural and idiosyncratic sources of physical and psychodynamic distress" (p. 341).

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[12] See Paul Farmer (1996, 2003). Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (2004) criticize this notion for being a "black box" (see also Farmer, 2004). The authors point out that such an all-inclusive term conceals underlying dynamics and relationships of power. They suggest instead to use the notion of "continuum of violence" which accounts for – but differentiates between – different forms of violence.

The authors intend structural vulnerability as a positionality in the social network of relations and as a product of economic exploitation and discrimination.

Pedersen (2002) suggests employing the framework provided by the social suffering approach to look at trauma, as an alternative to the individualizing and depoliticizing gaze of psychiatry and psychology. According to the author, the notion of social suffering allows anthropologists to reclaim the experiential dimension of pain – perceptions, personal meanings and accounts – while analysing the ways in which experience becomes "biologically embedded with the more social and political perspectives" (p. 187). This perspective considers how macro and micro dimensions interact in the production of suffering or health: "The notion of suffering evokes an assemblage of human problems that have their origins and consequences in the devastating injuries that the existing social order of the world inflicts, in variable degrees according to local situations, on the experience of individuals up to entire communities and nations" (ibid.). Therefore, the aim is to investigate how inequalities are produced and how political and economic structures are embodied in experiences of distress, mental distress in particular (Good, 1994; Kirmayer & Pedersen, 2014).

Drawing on the social suffering perspective, Fassin and d'Halluin (2005, 2007) argue that trauma has been increasingly employed as a technology of governing in the form of medical certificates or expert testimonies. Trauma categories and politics operate in the construction of new forms of political subjectification (Fassin & Rechtman, 2009). According to Ticktin (2011), a political context admitting only suffering bodies produces subjects who trade their physical integrity for political recognition while continuing to live in marginality.

Other authors problematize the notion of trauma by including in their analyses not only pre-migration, but also post-migration risk factors, such as loss of

social support, economic pressures, low socioeconomic status, prejudice and discrimination, isolation, prolonged stress before or during immigration (Ager, 1999; Levecque & Van Rossem, 2015; Psoinos, 2007). Moreover, Ingleby (2005) points out that the trauma approach reduces the causes of migrants' suffering to a single catastrophic event, forgetting a whole context (both past and present) of uncertainty and deprivation, and the re-traumatizing potential of the asylum process itself (Rousseau, Crépeau, Foxen, & Houle, 2002; Steel & Silove, 2000). According to Ingleby (2005), the PTSD notion focuses on a limited cluster of symptoms, neglecting a range of experiences, and pathologizing emotions that may be reasonably expected as reactions to displacement.

On the contrary, research focusing on refugees lived experiences has shown that the "social embeddedness" of emotions is emphasized in their accounts (Brough, Schweitzer, Shakespeare-Finch, Vromans, & King, 2013; Haas, 2012; Hutchinson, 2010). Negative affects (frustration, uncertainty, hopelessness, shame, loneliness, disempowerment, anger) are directly linked to experiences of resettlement in a new country, offering a different allocation of responsibility (from individual to collective and political) (Tilbury, 2007). In refugees' narratives, post-migration experiences are deemed to be more important in affecting wellbeing than traumatic events pre-migration (Fozdar, 2009). Migrants experience a social liminality and a transitional state, involving both tensions and opportunities for negotiating an adaptation and a transformation that could enhance mental health (Simich et al., 2009).

Anthropology of experience. There is a rich tradition of studies in anthropology focusing on experience by drawing on a phenomenological approach (Csordas, 1990, 1993, 1994; Good, 1994; Jackson, 1996, 2002, 2005; Jenkins &

Barrett, 2004), while, at once, critically questioning the use of the notion of experience itself (for a comprehensive review, see Desjarlais & Throop, 2011; Willen & Seeman, 2012b). Desjarlais (1997) argues for a "critical phenomenological approach" in anthropology that allows a fine-grained investigation of cultural phenomena, how they are perceived and experienced, whilst moving beyond the phenomenological by trying to understand "the making of" perceptions and experiences (see also Desjarlais, 2003). The aim is to include into the investigation "the phenomenal, palpable force of the political, the cultural, the discursive, and the psychological in people's lives" (Desjarlais, 2012, p. 100). Aretxaga (1997) argues for an approach that takes into account the discursive construction of experiences, by looking at the mechanisms through which it is historically constituted. Csordas (1990, 1993) emphasizes that experience is always embodied, claiming that "the body is not an *object* to be studied in relation to culture, but is to be considered as the *subject* of culture, or in other words as the existential ground of culture" (1990, p. 5).

According to Willen and Seeman (2012a), the notion of experience could provide a fruitful point of departure to inquire into "the fullness, complexity, and indeterminacy of human life, both individual and collective, as it unfolds in space, over time, across moods and modes, and within multidimensional local worlds that are defined as much by their biographical and embodied particularity as by their intersubjective grounding" (p. 5). By focusing on intersubjective, embodied experience, anthropology could better understand large-scale political, economic and sociocultural forces for how they give shape to people's life (Jenkins, 1991). As stated by Desjarlais (1997), "anthropology is in dire need of theoretical frames that link the phenomenal and the political … especially [studies] that convincingly link

modalities of sensation, perception and subjectivity to pervasive political arrangements" (p. 25).

Following Desjarlais, Willen (2007) argues for a critical phenomenological approach to the study of categories of otherness related to migration. According to the author, the contributions from legal anthropology and migration studies should be combined with those from anthropology of experience. The multi-level analysis of social, discursive, and political forces is complemented with the analysis of how those forces enter migrants' lifeworlds. Thus, a citizenship category, such as "illegality", is analysed as threefold: as a juridical status, a socio-political condition and an embodied, sensory experience. Ethnography becomes a prism through which to thickly describe the impact of global inequalities and national politics of inclusion/exclusion on migrants lived experiences of space, time, relationality, and self. By zooming in on individual particularity we are offered a more comprehensive view of the tensions and contradictions of human movement, and of the experience of living in border zones (Grønseth, 2013).

The notion of experience has been employed to provide a fine-grained account of what happens on the ground, when migration policies are implemented and have an impact on people's lives. Agier (2008) describes the new forms of being-in-the-world engendered by refugees' practices, identifying the three founding moments of their "existential context" – destruction, confinement, action. Besides, the author argues, the analysis of this specific experience reveals something inherently human, since when we look at "human identity at the sites of its denial, we inquire more directly into its foundations" (p. 5). Jackson (2013) considers migration from an existential perspective, and migrant narratives as "allegories of human existence", revealing our common struggle for wellbeing through movement, metamorphosis and mutation.

Specifically, research has drawn attention to the consequences of citizenship categories, such as illegality or illegitimacy, on migrants' health, highlighting the role of anthropology in informing the public and policy debate. Categories of exclusion are seen as a risk factor, for they can be translated into multiple forms of embodied vulnerability (Gonzales, Suárez-Orozco, & Dedios-Sanguineti, 2013; Willen, Mulligan, & Castañeda, 2011). It has been suggested that "intangible factors" (social stigma, precarity, and a climate of fear and suspicion, among others) affect migrants' sense of "deservingness" and can hinder access to health care (Larchanché, 2012). Other authors show how migration policies produce positions of structural vulnerability in a hierarchical network of power relationships, and focus on the implications for migrants' health (Quesada et al., 2011).

Investigating excess: Research questions and aims

In this chapter I reviewed literature addressing, from different angles, the question of how migration affects individual lives. I opened by examining some seminal works exposing the paradoxes inherent to migration policies. The analysis focused on the interstices that result from the constant production of categories aimed at controlling and ordering, mainly through practices of exclusion. Following these considerations, I argued that migrants are subjects of exception, living in marginal, contested, spaces. I then looked at the ways in which those paradoxes operate, and on the sites where they emerge and are resisted – the suffering body, and border regimes. In the second section of the chapter, I drew on research challenging the oppression-resistance framework and focusing on migrants' actions, rather than their reactions. Firstly, I analysed the contributions about

mobility as a form of agency, also problematizing this assumption. Secondly, I focused on what lies beyond categories and acts of resistance against categories – migration autonomy, and excesses, as efforts to generate new ontologies.

As suggested by this body of literature, I found my object of study in that excess, that is, the irreducibility, multiplicity, and unpredictability of the migration phenomenon. Subsequently, I addressed a methodological question: how can excess be investigated? I compared anthropological literature about social suffering with ethnographies taking experience as an object of study and discussed the use of a critical phenomenological approach, to consider how that excess is experienced rather than reduced to a fact.

In particular, the analysis followed the misuse and misunderstanding of the notion of experience when it is equated merely with the impact and the consequences of migration policies on individual lives. By focusing in particular on studies about migrants' health and mental health, I emphasized the risk of creating a self-perpetuating process prioritizing mental health issues and reifying medical categories. On the contrary, I suggested turning to anthropological literature on social suffering to look differently at migrants' mental distress. By comparing these two approaches, I observed how mental distress can be reduced to a negative outcome or reclaimed as a possible, yet marginal, experience: a way of inhabiting, perceiving and construing the world.

Finally, I come to a definition of the questions informing this investigation. I will apply a critical phenomenological approach to the analysis of the structural vulnerabilities that are produced and re-produced by asylum categories, policies, and practices: how is the asylum system perceived, experienced, and embodied? How do inequalities enter and impact individual lifeworlds? By following a phenomenological approach, this research looks at critical, marginal states as

objects with a heuristic potential. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork on migrants' experiences of mental distress, I aim in this study to investigate how migrants embody different states of marginality – psychic, social, political. Such experiences of mental disorder are employed as lenses through which to look at the work and limits of ordering migration policies, categories and practices.

In this work, I consider marginality as a possible space for autonomy. Specifically, I am interested in experiences of breakdown, when suffering is expressed through symptoms, and the ordinary flow of the daily life is disrupted. For migrants, those are experiences in which a psychic marginality overlaps with other forms of exclusion, unfolding a moment of crisis. In employing the notion of crisis to refer to mental distress, my aim is twofold. Firstly, as already emphasized, I consider suffering as an open-ended experience, rather than pigeonholing it as a psychiatric taxonomy. Secondly, I want to stress its critical potential – that is, how mental disorder affects not only the life of the individual, but also poses an issue for the community and the larger social structure.

Hence, as I will argue in the following chapters, moments of crisis entail an unsettling potential, for mental distress resonates beyond the inner world, into the social scene. In my research, I look into these acts of disturbance, for how they affect the outer (presumed) balance and create disorder among ordering practices. However, my aim is not to idealize marginality, or to overestimate the influence of people who are, in fact, consistently excluded and subjected to discriminatory and violent policies. The power balance is disproportionate, and, under these circumstances, I cannot have an idyllic gaze on agency. I have met people in pain, oppressed, reminding that what to me is an object of theoretical reflection, to them is an embodied truth.

Still, those exhausting lives are not fully enclosed in, nor are entirely determined by, their oppressive conditions. Something is exceeding those conditions. When going off course, eluding containment and even comprehension, these lives produce an effect, a turbulence. While it is crucial to continue drawing attention to structural inequalities, I think that we need to acknowledge what exceeds the structure, representing a potential break and a form of political action. As I will argue in the coming chapters, in this excess I find an effort to reclaim a chance to act, or, at least, to create the condition for thinking and meaning making. Indeed, the turbulence usually affects the structure only marginally, or briefly, before it is contained and classified as a disorder of the individual. Even so, a disorder represents for the individual an existential possibility – a transformation whose outcome is unpredictable, since the stakes are high. The movement that is created reverberates, shaking the people around, and thus creating other possibilities for movement and change.

Consequently, by considering migrants' psychological distress as an autonomous act exceeding the order, I ask: what does the asylum system look like when observed through the prism of experiences of suffering? The aim is to investigate the ambiguities of the asylum system, by focusing on the psychic products of bordering categories, procedures and regulations. Mental distress is employed as a lens refracting the effects of arbitrariness and precarity on the life of migrants and the marginal positions they inhabit. The analysis focuses on narratives of symptoms as opaque images, capturing uncertainty and contradictions, and, at once, resisting language and defying comprehension. By closing in on the efforts to articulate perception in words, and moving between intelligible shapes and unutterable shadows, this research exposes the multiplication of margins in lives that encountered and, in a way, stumbled over, the asylum system.

2. Research setting: The asylum system

In this chapter I describe the context of my research in order to provide some references to better understand the lifeworlds in which my research participants move. Firstly, I focus on the broader frame, placing the refugee phenomenon within the long history of migration towards/in Europe. I give an overview of the first supranational measures implemented to address the phenomenon, initially to foster the right to asylum, and later to restrict it. I identify the historical conjuncture in which the figure of "the refugee" emerged, describing how it changed over time and how it intertwined with other categories (such as the "economic" or the "illegal" migrant).

In the second section, I analyse Europe's efforts to tackle and manage refugee flows, by establishing a process of harmonization of asylum policies and reception practices, that led up to the definition of a common asylum framework. I then look more closely at my research field, describing the Italian asylum system, procedures for the assessment of asylum claims, and provisions regarding the reception of asylum seekers and refugees. Finally, I focus on the main objectives of reception projects, that is, the production of autonomous citizens.

The European context

The refugee phenomenon. The refugee issue can be better understood when situated within the history of migration from and towards Europe. The current refugee flow is the recent configuration of a much broader, and long-term,

phenomenon: human mobility. It is not the purpose of this study to trace people's movements in Europe through the past centuries, however, it is important to stress that current migration flows and routes are related to European political, economic and social history, and recent history in particular. From the colonial occupations of South America, Africa and Asia, to the industrial revolution of the 19th century and the two World Wars, several migration flows have crossed Europe, both internally, and from and towards other continents. Whereas, until the Second World War, Europe was mainly an area of labour emigration, since the economic recovery of the 1950s, it has seen an increase in internal flows, mainly from Southern and Eastern countries towards Central and Western Europe, and in immigrants arriving from other continents (Ambrosini, 2005).

In the last century, another kind of mobility has emerged alongside the enduring movements of labour migrants. The totalitarian regimes established during the 20th century and the persecutions and violence committed before and during the Second World War engendered increasing flows of people seeking protection, both from within Europe[13] and from the rest of the world. Such circumstances induced the receiving countries to address the refugee situation by applying a supranational approach. The first measure applied at the international level to address the refugee situation following the Russian revolution was the 1922 "Nansen passport" system, an internationally recognized refugee travel document; it was followed by the 1933 and 1938 Conventions concerning refugee flows from Nazi Germany (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, Loescher, Long, & Sigona, 2014).

[13] Initially, people fleeing Nazi Germany, the communist regimes in Eastern Europe during the Cold War and, later, persecution and conflicts in former Yugoslavia.

The aftermath of war prompted the recognition and codification of human rights which, in Europe, led to the foundation of the Council of Europe and the adoption of the 1950 European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al., 2014). The first reference to the right to asylum is in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Art. 14(1), stating that "everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution." In July 1951, a diplomatic conference in Geneva adopted the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. The document defines who is a refugee and what kind of protection, assistance and rights she or he is entitled to receive. The first Convention was limited to protecting European refugees in the aftermath of the Second World War, but the 1967 Protocol expanded its scope by removing temporal and geographical restrictions (UNHCR, 2010b). The Convention establishes the individual's right to seek for asylum, but not a state's obligation to grant protection. Rather, through the *non-refoulment* principle,[14] the Convention demands signatory states to evaluate asylum claims, forbidding them from expelling claimants, even those who arrived "illegally".

First common measures. To address the increasing refugee flow, the European Union has continued to further develop the initial supranational agreements through the years and to establish a common refugee protection system founded on the principles of the Geneva Convention and the ECHR. During the Cold War, European countries had liberal asylum policies. Refugees, as with other immigrants,

[14] Geneva Convention, Art. 33(1): "No Contracting State shall expel or return ('*refouler*') a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion".

were generally welcomed due to the need for workforce during the post-war reconstruction. Refugee status was quite readily granted, the Geneva Convention was applied not only to individuals, but to groups, and residence permits were usually long-term (Joly & Suhrke, 2004). Indeed, refugees were not expected to return home, and policies were instituted to allow and promote their integration into the new society.

This attitude changed suddenly. In the mid-1980s, two main factors marked the beginning of a series of attempts to restrict the right to asylum: a large increase in migration and asylum seeking from the developing world and the collapse of state socialism, with consequent conflicts and upheavals, in Soviet Union and Eastern-Central Europe (Joly & Suhrke, 2004). During the late 1980s and early 1990s, European countries began to implement increasingly restrictive migration policies, first separately and then in cooperation, while, simultaneously engaging in the process of European integration. Alongside the dismantling of internal barriers and the constitution of an area of free movement, Europe established several measures to reinforce its external borders and to limit and regulate immigration, thus establishing what scholars have termed "Fortress Europe" (Geddes, 2008; Rigo, 2005, 2007).

Since the 1980s, immigration policies have moved towards restrictionism and deterrence against entry (Squire, 2009; Zetter, 2005). For instance, in the 1990s, refugees from former Yugoslavia fleeing the Balkan wars were granted a form of "temporary protection" that required them to return to their countries of origin, or to qualify for the Geneva Convention rights, after the end of the conflicts. Such temporary permits did not grant the same social rights as other forms of permanent protection and therefore aimed to prevent the integration of refugees in the host country, and to promote their "voluntary return" (Joly & Suhrke, 2004). Moreover,

European countries began to adopt large-scale approaches, developing a "comprehensive refugee policy" to extend the range of the intervention beyond their territories. Such policies aimed at establishing a sort of "preventive protection" through humanitarian interventions and political initiatives aimed at preventing or resolving conflicts, and therefore controlling the causes of refugee outflows (Joly & Suhrke, 2004).

The figure of "the refugee". The figure of "the refugee" emerges with the Geneva Convention, as a person who, "…owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his [or her] nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail him [or her] self of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his [or her] former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it" (Article 1A(2)). With this statement, the Convention marked the birth of the category of the refugee, and the sharp distinction between "forced" (political) and "voluntary" (economic) migrants. The 1951 Convention was only intended to address the refugee situation in Europe. As a consequence, the Convention excluded many other forced migrants – such as those fleeing post-decolonization conflicts in the global South or non-communist regimes in Southern Europe (Castles, 2007; Chimni, 1998). In 1967, the geographical and war-linked limitations of the Convention were amended and the refugee category was expanded, enabling people from the global South to seek protection in the global North. Nevertheless, the Geneva Convention has been criticized for providing a too-narrow definition of the refugee (Castles, 2003; Zetter,

2007) that neglects the diversity of causes of persecution (such as sexual violence or gender-related persecution).

Through the decades, the figure of the "refugee" acquired a growing importance. Indeed, far from restraining people's movement, the strict legal framework only created a privileged channel of entry that migrants began to employ along with others. For instance, people fleeing wars who could not be included in the definition of refugee arrived in Europe as "illegal migrants" and, once employed, were able to regularize their status as "guest workers"[15] or through other ex-post regularization channels (Karakayali & Rigo, 2010; Sciortino, 2004). In addition, the process of securitization of migration policies from the mid-1970s onwards led to a progressive reduction of legal channels of entry in Europe, and a consequent increase in asylum applications. Following the abolition of guest-worker schemes, the reduction of migration quotas, and increasing restrictions on family reunifications, the asylum system became the primary legal channel of entry (Karakayali & Rigo, 2010; Scheel & Squire, 2014).

The Convention instituted a forced/voluntary migration dichotomy that has then been applied to frame migratory movements that are much more blurred and complex, in which motivations for movement are mixed, and often inextricable (Scheel & Squire, 2014). As a consequence, another category emerged – that of the "bogus asylum seeker" falsely claiming to be a forced migrant, while in fact migrating for economic reasons, and thus exploiting the asylum system (Scheel &

[15] The category of "guest worker", mostly used in Northern European countries, refers to migrants whose right of residence is bound to their job contract.

Squire, 2014; Squire, 2009)[16]. Legal categories became moral categories as well: the dangerous, undesirable and illegal "bogus asylum seeker", taking advantage of the system, opposed to the passive victim, the "genuine refugee" in need of protection. Such a dichotomous logic implied a reduction of migration to a matter of security, or of humanitarian intervention (Scheel & Squire, 2014). The system reacted by taking an even more restrictive direction, developing "preventive protection" measures in countries of origin and policies of deterrence and containment of "illegal migrants" within the EU, and tightening the procedures of asylum recognition. Many scholars have argued that such measures initiated a recursive process of active production of the very same illegality they aimed to repress (De Genova, 2002; Rigo, 2010; Sigona, 2012).

The asylum system

Managing crises. Over the decades, refugee flows have steadily increased due to an enduring sequence of wars and persecution around the world – a condition that could be defined as "permaconflict" (Cohen & Van Hear, 2017). In the last twenty years, the global population of forcibly displaced people has grown from 33.9 million in 1997 to 65.6 million[17] in 2016, with a peak between 2012 and 2015

[16] For a more comprehensive analysis of the consequences of the dichotomous separation between forced and voluntary migration, see Chapter 1, sub-section *Rights and fears: The ambivalences of asylum.*

[17] This number includes 40.3 million internally displaced people (IDPs – individuals who have been forced to flee their homes "…in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflicts, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally

mainly due to the Syrian war and other conflicts in the region (Iraq, Yemen), and in sub-Saharan Africa (Burundi, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan, Sudan) (UNHCR, 2017). At the end of 2016, this growth slowed for the first time in recent years, although it remained at its highest point. Most displaced people remain close to home or move to countries close to their countries of origin, while some seek international protection in Europe, the United States, and Australia. However, developing regions continue to bear the largest responsibility, hosting 84 percent of the world's refugees under UNHCR's mandate (about 14.5 million people), with the least developed countries providing asylum to a considerable proportion (4.9 million refugees, 28 percent of the total) (UNHCR, 2017).[18]

Despite efforts to prevent and control migration influxes, Europe has continued in the last decade to receive a significant proportion of asylum seekers arriving in industrialized countries.[19] At the end of 2016, Turkey hosted the largest number of refugees (2.9 million), while the remaining European states hosted 2.3

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recognized State border" – Deng, Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement), 22.5 million refugees (as defined in the Geneva Convention), and 2.8 million asylum seekers (persons who have applied for international protection as a refugee and are awaiting the determination of their status) (UNHCR, 2017).

[18] Europe receives only a small part of the world refugee population, around 16 percent (UNHCR, 2017).

[19] When referring to "industrialized countries" UNHCR considers the 28 Member States of the European Union, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Montenegro, Norway, Serbia and Kosovo (S/RES/1244 (1999)), Switzerland, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Turkey, as well as Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea and the United States of America (UNHCR, 2015).

million (UNHCR, 2017). Over the last decade, the 28 EU Member States[20] registered an increase in asylum applications, from 286,700 in 2009, to 396,700 in 2013 and 570,800 in 2014, with a 44 percent increase between 2013 and 2014 (UNHCR, 2010a, 2015). Although Germany remains the first European country for asylum applications registered, during the last few years there has been an increase in applications registered in Southern Europe. In 2009, Germany received the largest number of asylum seekers (27,600 claims), followed by Sweden (24,200), Italy (17,600), Norway (17,200), Belgium (17,200), and Greece (15,900) (UNHCR, 2010a). In 2016, Germany still registered the vast majority of total applications (745,155 or 59.1 percent of the total – a 36 percent increase from 2015); however, there has been a sharp growth in applications registered in Italy (122,960 claims, 9.8 percent of the total, representing 47.2 percent increase from 2015) and Greece (51,110 or 4.1 percent of the total, a 287.1 percent increase from 2015) (*Rapporto sulla protezione internazionale in Italia 2017*, 2017). Together with France and Austria, those countries represent 79.6 percent of asylum claims registered in the EU.

Journalists and politicians have represented the peaks of sea arrivals to Southern Europe in terms of a "crisis". Several scholars have considered the productive dimension and the consequences of declaring a state of emergency and establishing the so-called "politics of the crisis", examining how they reveal an internal predicament of the European border and mobility control regime. As often

[20] The European Union reached its current size of 28 member countries in 2013 with the accession of Croatia. Although in June 2016 the citizens of the United Kingdom voted for Brexit, for the time being, the United Kingdom remains a full member of the EU (see https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/countries/member-countries/unitedkingdom_en#brexit last visited on 6 February 2018).

happens, by framing a complex phenomenon as something "exceptional", we tend to conceal and, therefore, to perpetuate the ordinary and permanent conditions that led to it (Fassin & Pandolfi, 2010; Ticktin, 2005). A state of emergency legitimizes and normalizes the use of exceptional measures as, in this case, expanding border enforcement and restricting immigration and asylum policies; also, a state of emergency tends to mask the responsibilities of macro-actors, both governmental and non-governmental, by "personalizing crisis" and relocating the problem in the migrant's body, who becomes a carrier of a "contagion" (De Genova, Tazzioli, & Álvarez-Velasco, 2016).

To manage the increasing flows and the recurrent "crises", EU states have promoted supranational policies and the implementation of so-called "durable solutions" – local integration, resettlement, repatriation. Particularly in the last decades, EU states have engaged in a shared effort to define a European Agenda on Migration[21] and a Common European Asylum System (CEAS).[22] The Agenda's purpose is to manage migration into Europe by enhancing cooperation with non-EU countries of transit and origin, by promoting agreements with neighbour countries, and implementing internal and external measures, such as providing funding to Frontex (the European Border and Coast Guard Agency), the Regional Protection and Development Programmes for relocation and resettlement, and to the most affected Member States at the EU's external borders. Moreover, the Agenda developed the Hotspot System, made of first reception facilities for the identification, registration and fingerprinting of incoming migrants. The CEAS aims

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21 https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration_en (last visited on 6 February 2018).

22 https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/asylum_en (last visited on 6 February 2018).

at harmonizing standards of protection by aligning EU State's asylum laws, and enhancing cooperation and solidarity within the EU, and between it and non-EU countries. On the other hand, the CEAS established several measures, such as the Asylum Procedures Directive, to define the decision process; the Reception Conditions Directive, to ensure respect for fundamental rights and minimum levels of reception conditions for asylum seekers, including provisions on the treatment of "vulnerable" people; the Qualification Directive, to clarify the criteria for eligibility for refugee status under the Geneva Convention, and define a minimum standard of rights to be granted to refugees; the Dublin regulation, to determine the State responsible for examining the application (usually the first European country of arrival or identification), and the EURODAC Regulation, to create a database of asylum seekers' fingerprints.

The supranational asylum system produces different statuses and citizenship categories. That of the "asylum seeker" is a temporary status, tied to the assessment of the asylum application: it grants the right to live in the country until a decision is made, and to have access to support, accommodation, free health care and legal representation. If the claim is accepted, the asylum seeker can be either granted international protection, subsidiary protection, or humanitarian protection, and thus a temporary permission to stay (that can be converted into citizenship status usually after five years). Applicants who are rejected can appeal against the decision, but if the appeal is unsuccessful, they are asked to leave the country; those who decide to stay becomes "illegal", risking detention and deportation.

The Italian asylum system. EU member states define their own systems for the assessment of asylum claims and the reception of asylum seekers within the common institutional framework. The Italian asylum system consists of the

regulations regarding the asylum claim and the provisions regarding asylum seekers' reception.[23] The first involves two phases: a first application, called *Modello C3*, registering personal data and a brief statement about the reason for claiming asylum, that is usually submitted in *Questura* (local police station) or first reception centres, together with fingerprints and passport or ID card when available; a second phase, during which the asylum seeker is interviewed[24] by *Commissione Territoriale* (Local Asylum Board), and his/her application is examined. If accepted, the asylum seeker receives permission to stay in the country,[25] and in the case of rejection, he

[23] In the last two decades, several laws and directives have followed one another, changing the structure of the Italian asylum system. In the next section I describe the current configuration, regulated by D. Lgs. 142/2015, accordingly to European directives 2013/32/Ue and 2013/33/Ue (For a history of the Italian asylum system, see Marchetti, 2016). At the time of writing, the system is undergoing changes that will have a significant impact in the foreseeable future. In November 2018, the government, led by two far-right and populist parties, Lega and M5S, approved a more restrictive law in the name of "national security" (Ddl 840/2018). Among other measures, the law abolishes humanitarian protections, limits the reception system, and extends the detention periods for migrants (see https://openmigration.org/analisi/approvato-il-decreto-sicurezza-migliaia-di-stranieri-rischiano-di-diventare-irregolari/, https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23908&LangID=E&fbclid=IwAR04QZzc2XqvnZzP3vKhaokj4Tj7TDQYgMOOapWhM8X_3ShoCw0tQW-limo and https://www.internazionale.it/bloc-notes/annalisa-camilli/2018/11/27/decreto-sicurezza-immigrazione-cosa-prevede, last visited on 29 November 2018).

[24] Any time before the interview, the asylum seeker can add to his/her application supplementary statements and any other evidence regarding his/her claim. The asylum seeker can also provide a medical certificate attesting the violence suffered, both physical and psychological.

[25] See http://www.meltingpot.org/La-procedura-per-il-riconoscimento-della-protezione.html#.Wr5F75PFJR1 and http://www.meltingpot.org/Il-permesso-di-soggiorno-per-motivi-umanitari.html#.Wr5BaJPFJR0, last visited on 6 February 2018.

or she can appeal to Court.[26] Positive decisions on asylum claims can provide different forms of recognition and different citizenship statuses:

- "Refugee status" is granted in cases of persecution and "subsidiary protection" in cases of serious harm against the individual. Beneficiaries of both refugee status and subsidiary protection are entitled to a five-year permission to stay, a travel document, the right to apply for citizenship after five years (instead of ten, as usual), the right to apply for family reunification even without meeting the income and accommodation requirements, access to employment, access to education and access to healthcare under the same conditions as Italian nationals.
- "Humanitarian protection" is granted when the applicant does not qualify for the first two statuses but there are "serious humanitarian reasons", that is, the risk of persecution in the country of origin or "an objective and serious personal situation" (usually related to health conditions) impedes the asylum seeker from leaving the country. Beneficiaries of humanitarian protection are entitled to a two-year permission to stay (that can be renewed or converted into a permission to stay for work or family reasons), access to employment, access to education and access to

[26] A recent law (46/2017) has substantially modified the appeal process to make it swifter. The main revision regards the elimination of the second-instance judgement. Previously, after a rejection in *Commissione Territoriale*, the asylum seeker could bring the claim to *Tribunale Ordinario* (First-instance Court). After a second rejection, he or she could apply for an appeal to *Corte d'Appello* (Court of Appeal) and, finally, to *Corte di Cassazione* (High Court, that ensures the correct application of law). The current model provides only for the first-instance judgement, usually without any hearing, and the final appeal to *Corte di Cassazione.*

healthcare under the same conditions of Italian nationals. They are not entitled to family reunification.[27]

The reception system is organized in three stages: a preliminary phase of rescue, first assistance and identification conducted in governmental centres[28] based in the main landing-points; a "first reception" phase, during which asylum seekers are transferred into governmental facilities[29] for completing identification (when needed), submitting the asylum application and undergoing a general health check-up; a "second reception" phase, during which asylum seekers who declare they do not have a means of subsistence are transferred into a local centre and can live there until a final decision is made on their application.

Second reception facilities are organized into two different systems, called SPRAR (*Sistema di Protezione per Richiedenti Asilo e Rifugiati* – Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees) and CAS (*Centri di Accoglienza Straordinaria* – Extraordinary Reception Centres). The SPRAR system is controlled by local authorities that outsource the service to local NGOs (associations and cooperatives) through a public invitation to bid. It is funded by the National Fund for Asylum Policies and Services, managed by the Ministry of the Interior. In case of emergency,

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[27] One of the most important change in the law approved in November 2018 is the abrogation of the humanitarian protection. The new law replaces the permit to stay for humanitarian reasons with a permit to stay for "special cases", which grant a more precarious juridical status. For instance, unlike other permits, they do not grant free access to the national healthcare system, but only "urgent and essential treatments" (see https://www.meltingpot.org/Immigrazione-i-5-nuovi-tipi-di-permessi-di-soggiorno-danno.html#.XLW14OszZR1, last visited on 29 November 2018).

[28] *Centri di primo soccorso e accoglienza – CPSA* (First aid and reception centres) and the recently established hotspots.

[29] Regional hubs, *Centri di accoglienza – CDA* (Reception centres) and *Centri di accoglienza per richiedenti asilo – CARA* (Reception centres for asylum seekers).

when arrivals outnumber the places available in SPRAR centres, local prefectures can set up CAS centres through directly-awarded contracts and without a public bid. According to the law, asylum seekers should live in CAS centres only temporarily and should be transferred to SPRAR as soon as there are available accommodations.[30]

The co-existence of ordinary (SPRAR) and emergency (CAS) facilities creates a double channel, with the former costing more money, providing a better service, but having fewer places available; and the latter providing (almost) all the places needed, but with a lower standard. Therefore, a sort of second-class reception is established. SPRAR, the ordinary system, is organized according to national guidelines and regularly monitored; other than basic resources (food, accommodation, healthcare), it provides complementary services such as legal support, social guidance and individualized programmes to promote socioeconomic inclusion and integration. Within the SPRAR system, some reception facilities are specifically addressed to "vulnerable" asylum seekers – mainly unaccompanied minors, women with children, trafficked persons, and persons with severe health issues (chronic/infective pathologies, or mental illnesses); such facilities can usually benefit from more resources, in terms of funding and staffing. On the other hand, the less-funded CAS facilities have usually lower standards (they can be overcrowded, located in isolated places, understaffed or with unqualified staff), offer inadequate services for legal advice, job guidance and healthcare support, and their management is less closely monitored (In Migrazione, 2017; LasciateCIEntrare,

[30] The so-called "security decree" (Ddl 840/2018) approved in November 2018 downsizes significantly the SPRAR system, which will be dedicated only to those who have been already granted international protection and to unaccompanied minors. Asylum seekers will be accommodated in CAS and CARA centres.

Cittadinanzattiva, & Libera, 2016; Marchetti, 2016). Although, according to the directives, the SPRAR system is considered the ordinary reception channel, data show almost the opposite: in July 2017, CAS provided accommodation for 77.4 percent of all asylum seekers living in reception centres, while only 15.3 percent had access to SPRAR, and 7.3 percent was in first reception centres (*Rapporto sulla protezione internazionale in Italia 2017*, 2017). This situation is related to another criticality: the prolonged duration of stay in reception facilities due to the long time needed for the assessment of asylum applications by both *Commissioni Territoriali* and Courts.

Paths toward autonomy. The Italian asylum system mainly has two purposes: on the one hand, it regulates access to citizenship through the evaluation of asylum claims; on the other hand, it defines "citizenship projects" (Rose & Novas, 2005), that is, the possible trajectories towards inclusion into the new society. In other words, the system not only discriminates between the "true" refugee, the one with a credible and verified story (Fassin & D'Halluin, 2005), and the "bogus" refugee, and thus between who has and who has not the right to become a citizen. The system defines also the ideal citizen – independent and productive – and the "educational process" through which the dependent migrant can be transformed into a valuable member of society (Vacchiano, 2011).

Indeed, as stated in its guidelines (Servizio Centrale del Sistema di protezione per richiedenti asilo e rifugiati, 2016)[31], among the main goals of the asylum system are to promote an "emancipatory reception", support refugees in "(re)acquiring personal autonomy"; and that the asylum seeker should become an "active

[31] All citations from the guidelines are my translation.

protagonist in the path towards social inclusion", autonomy and empowerment. Each asylum seeker is therefore entitled to receive a "personalized project", respecting the individual's time, needs and well-being, taking into account his/her background and aspirations, but always considering that the reception system is of a "temporary nature".[32] The aim is to overcome a "welfare mentality", by "encouraging asylum seekers not to be passive recipients, but rather active protagonists in the pathway towards social inclusion." Projects should "detail the different services provided, objectives achieved and to be achieved, actions implemented and to be implemented, and a timetable" and should be monitored regularly to verify progress.

The issue of autonomy is expressed mainly in socioeconomic terms. Among the listed priorities to support integration through personal autonomy, there are several interventions aimed at fostering access to the job market, focused on promoting language training, the recognition of previous education and work background, the acquisition of new skills through access to education and vocational training (Servizio Centrale del Sistema di protezione per richiedenti asilo e rifugiati, 2016).

In particular, the guidelines promote volunteering activities and internship programmes as means of inclusion into the job market. Those programmes, which are temporary and usually (entirely or partially) funded by the government (*Rapporto sulla protezione internazionale in Italia 2017*, 2017), are often the only channel through which asylum seekers access the job market. However, as argued

[32] Asylum seekers are entitled to live in reception facilities until *Commissione Territoriale* comes to a final decision and for six months after a positive decision. In extraordinary circumstances, mainly related to health conditions, they can apply for an extension for an additional six months or more.

in the next chapter, they contribute to reproducing precarity and, consequently, to creating a class of exploitable workers.

Research setting, methods, and ethics

As described previously, this research aims at investigating the encounter between migrants and the asylum system and, in particular, the critical products of this encounter. Drawing on the literature reviewed, I define the refugee condition in Europe as a process in which displacement and emplacement intertwine. Migrants have left a familiar place and struggle to reconstruct a viable world, while the host society has to deal with unfamiliar presences that are often perceived as unsettling. Through a complex system of citizenship policies, the host society tries to find the "proper place" for those presences – inside of, but excluded from, the social space. Since migrants can access only precarious forms of citizenship, their living spaces usually occupy a marginal position vis-à-vis the state and the community. As I emphasized in the previous chapter, social marginality engenders other forms of existential and psychic marginality – crises representing a critical presence for the society to deal with.

In this section I describe how and where I have observed refugees' efforts to articulate a liveable world, focusing on their failures, in relation to the system's practices of citizen making. I present my research methodology, reflecting on the issues raised by fieldwork and on the methodological choices I have made. Firstly, I describe my research setting, the sites that constitute my ethnographic field. Secondly, I detail how I met my research participants and how I conducted

ethnography. Finally, I consider the ethical concerns raised by doing research with a "vulnerable" population and the process of leaving the field[33].

Establishing the field. During the first stages of my research, while reviewing literature and defining my research questions, I came across the word "vulnerability" several times. Since I was interested in working with refugees who experienced some kind of mental illness while living in reception centres, I focused on interventions dedicated to "vulnerable" refugees. As described in the previous section, in the SPRAR system there are some reception facilities and services for asylum seekers who are recognized as vulnerable and in need of special care. Different groups fall under this label: unaccompanied minors, women with young children, victims of trafficking or slavery and people with serious health conditions such as chronic or infective pathologies, or mental disorders. I quickly realized that the opportunity to be included in those projects hinges on the recognition and recognizability of vulnerability. Both local asylum boards and central authorities have wide discretionary power in judging what counts as vulnerable and what does not. Particularly in respect of health issues, decisions are based on the evidence provided – an evidence that is more convincing if is visible on the body or, if invisible, certified by medical experts.

[33] Before starting fieldwork, my research project underwent an ethical review process. My field research at all times possible kept to the agreed protocols I had proposed in my application for ethical clearance and which were approved by Oxford Brookes University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) (see Appendices). Moreover, I addressed ethical considerations throughout the fieldwork, discussing emerging issues with my supervisors and my advisors on the field.

Therefore, I decided to carry out my research in the places where vulnerability is produced as a category and managed. I based my field in Torino, one of the largest cities in Italy, with a long history of immigration and a large network of reception projects for asylum seekers.[34] Also, Torino to me, is a familiar place; I had been living and working here as a clinical psychologist for some years. I had an existing network of relationships with people working and volunteering with migrants that proved to be a valuable starting point for defining the field and establishing contacts with gatekeepers.

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[34] In the post-war period, the city underwent a significant demographic transformation from a population of around 700,000 inhabitants in 1945, to over 1,200,000 in 1974. The population increase was due to the immigration of thousands of people, mainly from Southern Italy, looking for jobs in the Fiat factories and the several satellite activities in the region (Capello, Cingolani, & Vietti, 2011; Fofi, 1964). From the 1980s onwards, Italy became a country of immigration and not only emigration. As with other big cities, Torino became a city of arrival with increasing flows of immigrants mainly from North and Sub-Saharan Africa, Eastern Europe, and South America (Sacchi & Viazzo, 2003). In Torino, from 1997 to 2017, the number of immigrants increased from 1.46 to 9.62 percent of the total population – higher than the national average (*Osservatorio Interistituzionale sugli stranieri in provincia di Torino: rapporto 2016* http://www.comune.torino.it/statistica/osservatorio/stranieri/2016/. last visited on 6 December 2018). During the last two decades, the city began to receive its first refugee flows. In the early 2000s, Torino was one of the first cities to implement the initial asylum national programme (*Piano Nazionale Asilo,* later transformed into the SPRAR system). However, the refugee presence has become significant only since 2011, after the Arab Spring and the collapse of regimes in Tunisia and Libya. Since then, and through the following refugee crises, the number of asylum seekers has continued to increase, alongside the reception projects' network (*Osservatorio Interistituzionale sugli stranieri in provincia di Torino: rapporto 2016* http://www.comune.torino.it/statistica/osservatorio/stranieri/2016/, last visited on 6 December 2018).

My fieldwork lasted eighteen months, from July 2015 until January 2017. I spent the first two months exploring the field, establishing the first contacts with NGOs implementing projects for vulnerable refugees. I decided to start with formal groups, because I aimed at investigating the relationship between forced migrants and asylum institutions, assuming that the "refugee" is produced and reproduced in institutional places (border zones, asylum boards, reception projects, etc.), and does not exist independently from them. In my research, I consider organizations as "refugee laboratories" where migrants asking to be admitted to the society are faced with institutional actors responsible for their admittance. However, I am also aware that the asylum process has consequences outside those institutions, after the visa has been granted or denied, and the period spent in reception projects has expired. The years spent in the asylum system leave a mark, even when migrants cease to be refugees, and are (more or less) recognized as members of the different communities they live in – the workplace, their children's school, church, associations, etc. Therefore, other than spending time in NGOs, I met refugees in more informal places, in their daily lives.

During this scoping period I identified sites at which to conduct participant observation, presenting my research and making agreements with gatekeepers. While combining sites in a sort of geography of vulnerability, I confronted with the issue of establishing a field of observation that was comprehensive but not too dispersive. I drew my field's boundaries, excluding in particular two settings that engaged me at first, but would have radically changed my research focus: a camp in Ventimiglia, on the Italian-French border, where a medical NGO offered basic healthcare, where I noticed several cases of people in severe distress; and a refugee squatters' site that was being transformed into a legitimate reception project, where occupiers and activists were cooperating with the building's owners and an NGO.

After the preliminary phase I established contacts with three NGOs, making agreements to conduct participant observation during their activities:

- Associazione Tela,[35] a refugee association, aimed at fostering inclusion and integration. Among the several activities provided by the association (hosting an information point about refugees' rights and support network, legal counselling, awareness-raising events), I chose to participate in the women's group, held once a week and aimed at offering refugee women an occasion to talk, exchange ideas, and building a support network.
- Gaia, a women's centre, offered a wide range of activities (such as job training, career counselling, legal advice, psychological support, art laboratories, cultural activities and language classes) and promoted women's political participation. I decided to be involved in the Italian language classes for refugee women.
- Centro Kalima, run by a team of psychologists, psychiatrists, physicians, cultural mediators and anthropologists, providing psychological counselling to migrants and refugees. Other than getting involved in the clinical centre, we agreed that I could volunteer in Oasi, a reception project for refugees suffering from mental illness.

Participant observation and interviews. The ethnography was carried out across multiple sites, selected as representative examples of a range of not-for-profit organizations providing migrants with different forms of social care. I contacted gatekeepers on each site to propose a collaboration. We negotiated which settings

[35] All the names are pseudonyms.

and activities I could have access to, and I obtained permission to conduct participant observation (see Appendix III). I worked to establish a space of collaboration with the participants, based on mutual trust and confidence, in which we negotiated research aims, co-constructed meanings and addressed ethical concerns. I applied a relational approach to ethics, considering it as "an intersubjective and reflexive dialogue: a conversation between ourselves and our research participants" (Meloni, Vanthuyne, & Rousseau, 2015, p. 108). In each site, I met with the staff (practitioners, social workers, teachers, volunteers, etc.) and with migrants participating in the activities to present my project, share with them my research questions and aims, and gather their suggestions. I informed them about my research methodology, how I intended to combine participant observation and interviews, and explained the implications of their participation.

As discussed in literature (Green & Thorogood, 2013), consent can be problematic to secure in observational studies, especially when participants may change, or new people can enter the field over the period of research. Also, since most of the participants underwent immigration control and asylum screening process, and some of them were also non-literate, I did not employ written material, or ask to sign consent forms, which may be intimidating and undermine the research relationship. Therefore, I considered informed consent as an ongoing relational process, rather than a one-off event, and I based it on conversations and verbal agreements: I found several occasions to talk about my research and renegotiate consent throughout the fieldwork period. However, in a setting such as my field site, it is usually difficult to make sure that all the people present at every moment of the observation are fully informed about the study and have actively consented to participate, or to know at the time whether an informal conversation will be "data" in a formal sense.

With regards to interviews, for the overall aim of including "information-rich cases for in-depth study" (Patton, 1990, p. 182), I combined three strategies: typical case sampling, extreme or deviant case sampling, and snowball sampling. I approached potential participants in the NGOs, giving information about the object of the research and asking to those who were interested to "opt-in" to the study by contacting me. In case of snowballing, information about the research was passed on by participants already recruited, and those interested were asked to contact me directly. At the point of initial contact, I made clear to all participants that they were under no obligation to take part in the study and that they could withdraw at any moment. All participants were informed about how the interview would have been conducted and the data handled, and they were offered the option of having an interpreter. Informed consent was obtained verbally and, when the participant agreed, also audio-recorded. In case of follow-up interviews, informed consent was revisited.

To assure confidentiality, pseudonyms were used at all times and any identifying detailed information (such as where they were located at the time of research, the name of the NGO where they have been contacted, the particular region of the country they came from, etc.) are omitted from the present work. However, since the sample size is very small, participants were informed that full anonymity might be impossible to guarantee.

I conducted multiple interviews with eight informants, four women and four men. Five were in the 25-30 age range and three in the 35-45 age range. Five informants come from West and East Africa; the remaining three come from Turkey, Iran and Pakistan. At the time of the interview, all the informants had been living in Europe and in Italy for years, had spent years in the asylum system, and were beneficiaries of international protection. However, only three of them lived in a

rented apartment and had a source of income, while the others were still in precarious living conditions. Their life stories are ordinary and extraordinary at the same time – as stories of violence and marginality often are (Scheper-Hughes & Bourgois, 2004). More than narratives, the interviews produced counter-narratives providing a view of the asylum system, and the society which generates it, from the margins.

The sample is small and quite heterogeneous. Participants have in common the years spent waiting for a response to their asylum application, living in different reception projects, and the apparently permanent condition of precarity. However, their different backgrounds, positionalities and subjectivities generated a diverse range of experiences – and therefore of narratives – of similar present conditions. Also, their different backgrounds, positionalities and subjectivities influenced how they understood my questions, and the direction of the interview. The result is a collection of personal, intimate conversations, which took shape in the particular encounter with each of them.

Six interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed, while two were recorded through written notes. Throughout the fieldwork period I kept several journals, in which I noted my observations daily. To interpret data, I employed a narrative analysis approach (Riessman, 2008). Firstly, I familiarised with the material, by listening to recordings and re-reading transcripts and fieldnotes. Following on, I did a thematic analysis of each interview, to find recurrent contents. I made comparisons, both within and between cases, to find similarities and differences. I employed narratives as data, focusing on the ways people make sense of their own experiences, but also narratives as analytical devices, focusing on how stories are used, and how they circulate socially (Riessman, 2008). Interviews and fieldnotes provided a collection of deep and intimate information. As usually

happens in qualitative work, the personal character of data is both its strength and its bias. While these methods allow for an in-depth analysis of complexity, their main limitation is the lack of generalisability of findings.

In the writing process, I decided to present data in the form of ethnographic case studies, to give account for the specificity of each research encounter and provide "thick" descriptions that mean to be respectful and representative of informants' diverse backgrounds and experiences. The very personal nature of the interviews made them very difficult to cross-compare. Therefore, I chose to present the case studies separately, but juxtaposed, to consider how they resonate together.

Positionality. My profession and background offered me a particular position in the field. As a psychologist, I was able to ask to participate in activities for people with mental disorders offering an additional competence and sensitivity. Other than being a researcher, I have both a clinical understanding of mental illness and experience with patients, that helped me initially to win confidence with gatekeepers. However, my double "gaze" on mental illness also posed a risk of confusing, or misunderstanding, my role. Therefore, throughout the fieldwork period, I constantly sought to keep a self-reflective stance, while repeatedly clarifying my role to gatekeepers and research participants. Actually, self-reflectivity was helped greatly by participants' straightforward questions: who are you? Why are you here? Why are you doing this? And then, what are you going to do?

Together with the NGOs' project coordinators, I reflected on how to participate in their activities. At first it was difficult to define my role: I neither wanted to be a detached observer, nor to act as, or be identified as, a community worker or a psychologist. I was aware that positionality is a common issue in

ethnography. I discussed it throughout the fieldwork with research participants and with other researchers and professionals. At Gaia, these reflections stemmed from a misunderstanding. When I presented my research, I also suggested that I join their NGO as a volunteer Italian language teacher. I wanted to have an active role, to engage with the field and to give something back. The position also seemed to offer a good perspective on the process of refugee making and the relationship between language and subject formation. However, I overlooked the power dynamics within the organization. My offer, and perhaps the way I made it, sounded threatening for the delicate balance of roles and responsibilities in the group, which was very diverse and included young and elderly, migrant and national women. Realizing this, I took a step back, accepting what initially seemed a more passive role. I began attending the Monday class, sitting at the big table with the other students, and observing the interactions between them. Day by day, I realized that I was becoming more and more involved, in a different way than I had imagined. Sometimes, as I had expected, I was asked for practical help by both refugee women and the NGO workers. I was comfortable with these requests, since I felt they helped me significantly with my research and, by reciprocating, I wanted to redress the imbalance of fieldwork (MacClancy & Fuentes, 2013). But mostly I was asked to be honest, transparent – ultimately, to be "knowable". They asked me to be engaged in the relationship with them, to fully participate with my thoughts, emotions, and worries. This kind of involvement (and some of their questions!) made me feel quite uncomfortable, but also genuinely immersed in the field.

When introduced to people, I was careful to be clear about the fact that I was doing research. When engaging in activities, as a volunteer teaching Italian or helping students navigate the university system, I gave priority to participants' needs and then went back to them with my observations, asking for their view.

Researcher-participant relationships are usually very complicated, especially when the researcher has an active role in the field. I paid attention not only to communicate that their decision not to participate in my research would not affect our relationship or the support offered. Also, I tried to be sensitive about their reactions, hesitancies, and gentle resistances. When I was able to establish a trust relationship, I was usually also able to ask explicitly about their questions or concerns, and to have an honest answer. Whenever this was not possible, or if I still sensed that something was unclear, I decided to privilege participants' interests and to leave research aside, excluding those notes and conversations from the final writing.

During the first months of fieldwork I realized that ethnography is indeed something very personal. It is a praxis, informed by theory, or rather by the practice of other ethnographers, always rooted in the interpersonal experience of the researcher. Every ethnography originates from the researcher's personal dispositions, curiosities, and character. His or her presence in the field is made explicit, becoming an object of reflection. Essentially, the ethnographic field is made by the relationships between observer and observed and the uncertainties, tensions and doubts that inevitably occur when encountering the other. As Jackson (2007) puts it, when embarking on fieldwork, anthropologists experience "a particular instance of boundary disruption" (pos. 3258): at the threshold between the familiar and the foreign, ethnographers lose the normal balance between being open to the world of others while protecting their own sense of self. Therefore, the ethnographer should consistently practice reflectivity, which Jackson defines as "the twofold movement that takes one out into the world of others and returns one, changed, to oneself" (2007, pos. 3020).

According to Devereux (1967), the researcher is deeply upset by the investigation of other human beings. When studying human behaviour, the researcher is confronted by the complexity of life, and strives to bring an illusory order in situations that undermine her sense of security. In his seminal work *From Anxiety to Method*, Devereux looks at the research process through a psychoanalytical lens, arguing that the unconscious communication between observer and observed raises anxiety and engenders a defence reaction in the observer. The research encounter, and ethnography in particular, can arouse idiosyncratic fears or threaten existential vulnerabilities. Facing such a risk, the researcher could resort to methodology as a "professional defence", to "decontaminate" the research material by removing its emotional content – what resonates with her. When employed as a defence, methodology allows the ethnographer to detach herself from the emotional resonances raised in the research encounter, by scotomising, simplifying or intellectually systematizing material.

For Devereux, such efforts can only lead to distortions. Indeed, when investigating human behaviour, it is neither possible or desirable to remove subjectivity. Drawing on Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, the author argues instead for a creative use of the limits of research, suggesting to bring back the observer in the research scene, as a source of information. The presence of the observer produces "disturbances" in the field while, at the same time, the field generates unconscious reactions – in psychoanalytical terms, a countertransference – in the observer. According to Devereux, a "good methodology" considers countertransference and disturbances as research's "most crucial datum". The investigator should cope with her own anxieties, without scotomizing her research material by excluding experience, and thereby abolishing the observed. Rather, the

investigator should be aware of her own affects, using them as a creative source of information. Following the theorists of relativity, Devereux suggests studying phenomena happening "at the observer", at the point when she says: "And this I perceive". In other words, the researcher should allow the subject "to reach – and to reach into – [her]", studying the echoes and the reverberations produced in the encounter, the disturbances occurring "within" the observer.

Ethnography can be very demanding, for it engages the researcher completely: "Understanding comes of separation and pain. To understand is to suffer the eclipse of everything you know, all that you have, and all that you are. It is, like the Kuranko say, like the gown you put on when you are initiated. To don this gown you must first be divested of your old garb, stripped clean, and reduced to nothingness" (Jackson, 2007, pos. 3143). The ethical encounter with the other requires for the ethnographer to be vulnerable, "to be reached into". Then, her struggles, inquietudes and failures offer an insight that could not be achieved otherwise. According to Jackson (2007), here lies the potential of anthropology. In shifting from personal to interpersonal, anthropology has the capacity to participate in people's struggles, inquietudes and failures, transforming self-centred reflections into research concerning other lifeworlds, and the stakes of existence.

Unpredictability. I realized quickly that, despite my efforts to design the research process, fieldwork is a rather uncertain journey. Therefore, I learned to adjust to the multiple dimensions of the unpredictable (MacClancy & Fuentes, 2013), instead of trying to reduce them: by following my research subjects, I had to change the boundaries of my fieldwork sites and to refine my research questions. I have been facing unexpected accelerations and sudden stops in my work, thus going

through the whole range of emotions, from enthusiasm and fulfilment to discontent and even frustration.

One of the main difficulties was that of keeping in touch with the refugees I met. While some of them were striving to settle down, others were always moving. With the latter I had brief encounters – conversations that I was not able to follow up on. Fieldwork's "failures" can be frustrating and exhausting. For instance, when the women's group at Tela unravelled after a few meetings, I lost a fieldwork sites on which I had spent time and energy. I was discouraged and even felt unfit for research. I had to find another site, while my research deadlines were approaching. I was in the middle of a "data rush", worried about not having enough research material. With the help of my supervisors and my mentors, I came to realize that while doing ethnography, failures are themselves research material, for they offer the chance to interrogate our assumptions and pose new questions. Therefore, I have come to appreciate even those brief encounters as hints for further investigation. There is a large part of fieldwork that remains in the background of this work but contributed in moulding it. Every person I met during fieldwork offered suggestions that resonated with each other, aiding me in defining, or changing, my research questions. For instance, I talked to Nadine, who described the reception projects as a "trap"; to Ahmad, a student in Economics, who felt "stuck" in university procedures, struggling between a present suspension and a strong, almost stubborn, projection towards the future; and to Viola, who thought that the "bad attitude" of her male classmates could be explained with their need to "defend" themselves. Those similar, and at the same time different, ways of experiencing

restrictions and a sense of immobility eventually led me to be mindful of Asha's words, a "prison open on the top",[36] about the asylum system's inequalities.

Furthermore, missed encounters often revealed the daily precarity experienced by refugees. Indeed, along with temporary citizenship status, job insecurity and social exclusion, I perceived also a relational precarity. Hypermobility affects the sense of belonging, but immobility can also hinder full participation in the social space. Refugees moving throughout Europe can count on networks of solidarity or on forms of exchange that are not only economic: friends of friends, aunts and uncles, cousins offering a place to sleep, contacts in a new country, some money, that are eventually reciprocated. However, both hypermobility and immobility preclude inclusion and integration, making relationships very fragile.

Still, sometimes even fieldwork's unpredictability can offer an opportunity. For instance, while volunteering at Centro Kalima, I was asked to participate in a pilot project for refugee students that has been further developed and is currently running. The project was set up by two faculty members of the Department of Anthropology to support refugees studying at the University of Torino. As with other universities in Italy and Europe, the University of Torino had instituted a fee waiver for students who were granted international protection (political asylum or subsidiary protection). As the two faculty members noticed, refugees were thus encouraged to enrol, but faced several difficulties thereafter, both regarding their material circumstances (accommodation, living expenses, healthcare), and their existential condition, such as the discrepancies between the imagined career and the demands of a higher education institution.

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[36] See Chapter 6.

Initially, the two faculty members set up an informal group of Italian student volunteers to support refugee students in adjusting to the new environment.[37] I was asked to coordinate the group, collecting the refugee students' needs, and trying to find resources to address them. This position allowed me to meet several refugee students, and to hear their concerns and hopes about the future. My research questions were thus reoriented and I began to reflect about the relation between memory and imagination, and the interplay between different temporalities. Moreover, the project represented a good opportunity to engage with the field, assuming an active role that is still lasting beyond the research period. As I describe in Chapter 5, my role in the project gave me a direct experience that helped me understand the reactions of other project workers. As they often experienced,[38] I felt "implicated". By playing an active role, however minor, I had the chance of experiencing directly the ambivalence of participating in the system and benefitting from it, while at once being aware of its inequitable, sometimes oppressive, nature. Also, I established meaningful relationships with some students, tackling several dimensions of complexity. I had to consider participants' expectations about my role, clarify boundaries and try to make understandable a research process that often appeared intangible or futile.

As expected, misunderstandings were common in the relationship with participants. Again, when I learned not to consider them as failures, but as objects of research, misunderstandings offered valuable hints, contributing in defining the direction of research. For instance, my first "missed" interview was an occasion to reflect about the ethics of the research encounter and the limits of the researcher.

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[37] See Chapter 5 for a thorough description of the project.

[38] See Chapter 6.

At Gaia I was approached by Amal, a Somali woman. She did not speak Italian fluently, but I understood she was interested in my research, and wanted to talk to me. She gave me her phone number, and after a few days we arranged a meeting with an interpreter. I asked Gaia's workers if we could use one of their rooms, thinking that during the winter holidays it would be quiet, or at least much quieter than Amal's crowded apartment, and possibly more familiar than other places. The choice of sharing the interview arrangements with some Gaia workers proved to be more troublesome than expected. Firstly, one of the group facilitators, who was very interested in my research, asked at the last minute to be present during the interview. I made clear why this could not happen, but I knew I was taking a stand in a power dynamic, and that it would affect (in one way or another) my future work. There was also a second interference. The day of the interview, Amal was late, and then never showed. Noticing this, one of the NGO assistants decided, without consulting me, to call her and ask why she was late. She used the words, manner and tone of the usual "reproach" call that is made when someone in the project misses a mandatory activity. Later, I talked at length about what had happened with the interpreter, and this "failure" became a good cue for further reflections on how to negotiate my relationship with the NGO, and the active role I decided to assume.

I met Amal again a few days later, after the usual Monday group. We "measured" each other in a sort of "dance", getting closer and taking distances. I was in the NGO's kitchen and she approached me, we exchanged a few words and then she left. Then I approached her when she was sitting in a common area with other Somali women. With the help of one of them, we again exchanged a few words and I told her that if she wanted to, we could arrange another meeting. Then I left, and she followed me again to the kitchen, asking to be alone with me. We sat and talked, in Italian, barely understanding each other. She repeated the word *paura* (fear), and I

understood that she was scared of her former husband, an Italian soldier; she also told me that she could not talk about her fears with the NGO workers or with other Somalis, but that there was someone she could talk to (showing a piece of paper with the name of a psychologist and a cultural mediator working in a counselling centre). She then asked if I were a lawyer (using the English word), and I answered that I was a psychologist and a researcher, not a lawyer. *"Tu solo scrivi?"* ("You only write?") was her reply, and I repeated: *"Io solo scrivo."* She nodded, and then she left.

I reflected a lot on this incident, which showed clearly the dynamic and unfolding nature of research ethics. Since relationships are inherently unpredictable, I came to think that the ethical researcher is one who accepts the risk of, and takes responsibility for, encountering the other. There are indeed some risks in entering others' lives – from being intrusive, or insensitive, to being disrespectful, or even abusive. Even more, when doing research with people labelled as "vulnerable", not only the chance of doing harm, but also the burdensome process of ethical review, can be discouraging (see MacClancy & Fuentes, 2013).[39] However, I argue that the ethnographer cannot avoid completely the chance of misunderstanding, and possibly offending, or of being mistaken. At least initially, her steps in the field are clumsy. Ethnographers should be aware of this possibility, and gear up. We should take our blunders seriously, practicing self-reflexivity and being accountable for our mistakes. Moreover, while bearing in mind the asymmetry

[39] As MacClancy and Fuentes (2013) note, University Research Ethics Committees (URECs) often request that the trajectory of ethnographic research be precisely forecasted yet it is, by its nature, unpredictable and can evolve in surprising and unanticipated ways. Also, when the research involves "vulnerable" groups, ethical regulations can involve a burdensome review process, that can dissuade researchers from studying "ethically complex subjects" (Ibid., p. 19).

of the research relationship and the need to safeguard vulnerable participants, ethnographers should also respect participants' agency and resources in managing relationships, acknowledging their capacity of positioning. Disappointed by my honest answer, Amal left the room, clearly expressing her intention.

Conversations. As usually happens in ethnography, I combined participant observation with interviews. This allowed me to share with participants my thoughts about what I had noticed while spending time with them, and to elaborate further on the knots that emerged during informal conversations. The interviewing process was slow. The time spent in the NGO offered an opportunity to get in touch with refugees, talk about the aims of my research and establish relationships based on mutual trust. In my experience, other than requiring time, trust usually resulted from my own willingness to be honest and reliable. I entered the field prepared to be clear about my research aims and methods, equipped with info sheets and consent forms. I realized quickly that the people I met asked me to be open about myself, not only as a researcher, but as a whole person. Very different questions overlapped: what is research exactly? Are you still studying? Are you married? And then what do you do with your research? Do you have kids? Where are you from? And where does your mother live?

I was open, honest – present in the field. I decided to answer those questions, setting some boundaries, but mainly open to participants' curiosity and sometimes to their confused faces. Being with them for quite a long time, and in some cases with an active role, meant also being reachable and responsible. This involved sharing my research progress with participants and, with some, my thesis drafts. But being responsible meant also considering their questions, claims and demands, and trying to respond, both during the research period, by adjusting my research questions to

address issues that were relevant for them (see MacClancy & Fuentes, 2013), and after, by remaining engaged in the field in other roles.[40]

After some reflection, I decided to conduct open, unstructured interviews. These usually began as conversations and became a series of recorded interviews over a period of time. I aimed at investigating refugees' experiences of crisis, focusing on the relationship between mental distress and the social, political and historical context in which they live. My initial plan was to start with an open-ended question, to collect life stories, and continue with a semi-structured interview, to focus on the experience of illness. I wanted to employ the McGill Illness Narrative Interview (Groleau, Young, & Kirmayer, 2006) which is designed to elicit different types of reasoning about bodily experiences of distress through analogies, prototypes and cause-effects relationships. I aimed at letting participants talk freely, but also at having a guide to help me avoid getting lost in conversation. However, by discussing the issue with other researchers, I realized that the "disorder" of those conversations was valuable research material in itself, instead of background noise to get rid of. In particular, the importance of working with "coarse material" and roaming around the several threads of a spontaneous narrative, to keep the complexity of those experiences, was pointed out to me.[41]

My interviews thus became long conversations in which narratives about the migration trajectory and life in Europe intersected with descriptions of somatic symptoms, sensations and perceptions, memories of the past, aspirations for the future – and silences as well. While with some participants I was only able to conduct a single interview, others were willing to meet again and to continue talking about

[40] See next section.

[41] I am grateful to Roberto Beneduce for these considerations.

what had emerged. This dilated temporality allowed us to think about what had been said, or not, and gave us the opportunity to further elaborate on meanings and nuances. I then used the transcripts to track down the various narrative threads and to consider their entanglements. After a first try with a qualitative analysis software, I decided to use pen and paper as that allowed me to go back and forth between the different parts of the interview. As a result, I was able to follow the unfolding of the dialogue between me and the interviewee and to consider the construction of the narrative alongside its contents.

(Not) leaving the field. When I was writing my research proposal, the process of getting ethics approval made me well aware of the ethical concerns in carrying out research with "vulnerable" subjects. I paid a lot of attention to acceptable modes of recruiting participants, informed consent, the possibility of establishing "dependent relationships", potential risks to participants and so on. What I did not expect was that I was entering a highly contested field, in which I would be asked to take a stand. I noticed the tension for the first time at a conference at the University of Torino, a few days after I arrived to begin my fieldwork. The convenors had invited academics studying migrant families, professionals working in public services and NGO activists. I felt immediately that the atmosphere was strained, and that there was something important at stake. Almost all the academics expressed a political commitment, sometimes with a harsh tone, accusing state actors for adopting discriminatory and unequal social policies. In the audience there were some nervous comments: "This gives me stomach ache. It's easy for them to talk, they don't know the reality of our job. Why don't they give us some practical tools, instead of all these theories?" said a social worker.

The conflict was evident, and I felt that I had arrived into a site of struggle. A few days later I attended a seminar organized by Associazione Tela for World Refugee Day. A legal counsellor opened the seminar, describing the refugee situation in the Mediterranean and pointing to the several shortcomings of the European migration policy. After the presentation was over, the association's president gave a brief but firm talk. He started by saying: "We all have to choose where we stand." I felt that his plea concerned me, too. I was aware that I had to assume my responsibility, and I started considering what doing an "activist anthropology" means (MacClancy & Fuentes, 2013).

In the course of fieldwork, I came to understand ethnography as a potentially transformative process requiring an "ethical orientation to the other-than-oneself" (Scheper-Hughes, 1992, p. 24), that is, "responsibility, accountability, answerability to 'the other'" (Scheper-Hughes, 1995, p. 419). However, such an ethical orientation should not be interpreted as a respectful distance. Scheper-Hughes argues that the anthropologist should not be a spectator, but a witness, "practicing an anthropology-with-one's-feet-on-the-ground, a committed, grounded, even a 'barefoot anthropology'" (Ibid., p. 420): "Witnessing … is in the active voice, and it positions the anthropologist inside human events as a responsive, reflexive, and morally committed being, one who will 'take sides' and make judgments …" (Ibid., p. 419).

As described in the previous section, I decided to play an active role in the field and to contribute to developing projects supporting refugees. Other than the Refugee Students Programme mentioned above, I participated in the University's Refugee Law Clinic, a group of law students coordinated by two senior scholars and lawyers to work as legal advisors for asylum seekers. During my fieldwork, the clinic coordinators decided to involve a group of anthropology students to help in

understanding the “cultural elements” of asylum seekers’ depositions. I was asked to coordinate the anthropology students, helping them define their role at the clinic, discuss what it means to do an “applied anthropology” and decide how they can work with lawyers.

Finally, I confronted the issue of “letting go” and leaving the field – an issue that is often overlooked in the debate around ethics (Miller, 2013). Probably due to my background and the “double role” I had in the field, I decided not to leave it completely. While I believed it was necessary to close the research period, putting an end to the observation/interviewing phase to take the distance necessary for writing, I felt a responsibility to develop the projects I had been involved in. I decided to continue working with the refugee student support group, and started working at Centro Kalima as a clinical psychologist. In other words, I decided to stay in the field, transforming my role in the effort to keep a continuity between research and practice. Thus, I have worked on this thesis whilst remaining engaged in the field. Writing and clinical practice have informed one another: the work of research helped me making sense of my patients’ lifeworlds, while clinical encounters influenced my considerations. As Clifford puts it, the result cannot but be an “inherently partial – committed and incomplete” ethnographic writing (1986a, pp. 6–7).

3. Investigating vulnerability: Reflections on method

In Chapter 1 I examined several strands of literature about forced migration addressing the notion of crisis from different angles. In Chapter 2 I defined my own research questions and aims, identifying my object of study in migrants' experience of the encounter with the asylum system, describing where and how I have carried out my investigation. In this chapter, I clarify the reasons why I have chosen to focus in particular on personal experiences of crisis and failures to make sense of the asylum system's mechanisms and processes.

As discussed previously, the object "refugee" has come to represent a sort of historical figure embodying not only an "Otherness", as it has been for migrants, especially in post-colonizing societies – but also an idea of criticality. Indeed, the refugee has been construed both as an "Other in crisis" and as a "critical Other". The first image refers to refugees as violence survivors and trauma victims, represented as a dehistoricized, speechless, suffering mass of bodies (Malkki, 1996). By giving prominence to the idea of a wounded and vulnerable humanity in need of protection, this kind of narrative has contributed to engendering the mirror image of an invasion and a subsequent a state of emergency. The underlying assumption is a reference to an external collapse opposed to Europe's supposed internal stability (De Genova et al., 2016): the pacified European space, where free movement, human rights, and wealth are granted, is threatened at its boundaries by masses of people fleeing other spaces of conflict. As argued by Anderson (2017), this image of fleeing masses resonates with the metaphor of contagion: a strand of hostile media has been representing migrants as vermin or insects – swarms of parasites attacking an otherwise healthy organism. Those figures of speech give shape to discourses and

feelings of anxiety towards a perceived threat to domesticity and security. Such a discourse produces effects: a threat to integrity justifies measures of containment of pathogenic agents, such as the creation of a concrete protective "membrane" (De Genova et al., 2016), or hotspots to keep the plague out of our living space. Crisis is always originated elsewhere, and caused by others – debts, insecurity, the wars of others. The consequences are easy to picture: facing such emergencies, the expected response is an increasing need for control and securitization.

By contrast, the image of a "critical Other" refers to the refugee as a site of exposure of crises of others. In reflecting a "breakdown of a basic relationship between state and citizen" (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al., 2014), the figure of the refugee poses a challenge to the very foundations of our political system. As Malkki effectively puts it, the refugee acts as a "denaturalizing, questioning stance toward the national order of things" (1995b, p. 517). Scholars assuming this perspective have examined the forms of exclusion or differential inclusion deep-rooted in citizenship policies and practices (Fassin, 2001; Fresia, 2014; Malkki, 1996; Sassen, 2002a; Sigona, 2012), the ambivalences of the humanitarian responses (Agier, 2002; Fassin, 2005; Ticktin, 2011), and the productive dimensions of the political use of emergency (De Genova, 2013b). In addition, while being historicized as an event, the notion of crisis has been employed as a lens, a prism, through which are exposed the multiple contradictions of Europe when challenged by undesirable mobilities.

Together, the images evoked by the dual notion of crisis/criticality speak of the bond between individual and collective vulnerability. In this chapter, my aim is to outline a method to investigate ordinary suffering, to make use of its heuristic potential in the analysis of the relationship between the social and the psychological. Firstly, I review and compare two theoretical perspectives that will help me detail the notions of suffering and vulnerability, and secondly, I reflect on the use of

ethnography as a method to analyse uncertain, borderline experiences, to tackle the opaqueness of state policies and practices.

Misère *and dispossession*

In this section, my aim is to establish an imaginary dialogue between Pierre Bourdieu's reflections on *la misère*[42] and Judith Butler's analysis of dispossession, precarity, and vulnerability. The two authors evoke different but complementary attributes of a term that needs to be clearly outlined, not to risk being overused and thus emptied, becoming a sort of "catch all" category. The dialogue will eventually close on some considerations about the methodology and ethics of carrying out research in, with, and about vulnerability.

The first voice I want to follow appears to be that of a choir directed by Pierre Bourdieu and composed of all the investigators and respondents who together wrote *The Weight of the World* (2000b). Despite its almost fragmented appearance – a collection of interviews and conversations – the book stands in continuity with Bourdieu's previous writings, and is inscribed in the epistemological framework that the author described elsewhere as both a "structuralist constructivism" and a "constructivist structuralism" (Bourdieu, 1989), a "social phenomenology" or "social praxeology" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). In other words, the author has

[42] I will employ the French word *misère* as in the original work, instead of "suffering" as in the English translation. The reason of this choice lies in the multiplicity of meanings conveyed by the French word that are lost in the English text. The original term indeed suggests both an economic and moral poverty, and a sense of misery, unhappiness and misfortune.

pursued all through his work a sort of "double reading" of social phenomena, by focusing on the relation – the dialectical articulation – of objective positions and subjective dispositions, external limits and lived experiences. Therefore, the author argues for a theory of practice, a mode of knowledge that reflects both on the experience of the world in its making, and on the condition of its own possibility (Bourdieu, 1977).

To be precise, *The Weight of the World* interrogates the lack of the possible, which the author defines as *misère de position* ("positional suffering"). Usually hidden behind the *grande misère de condition*, the real suffering of material poverty, the *petite misère* is the small, ordinary suffering, experienced from the position in which possibility is unavailable, by citizens who enter, at least partially, the space of rights, but are then pushed to its margins. From the very beginning, Bourdieu's study makes a statement that is clearly political, other than epistemological, and that suggests a first direction to my own investigation: what does carrying out research in time of crisis entail? If we consider the paradigm of crisis/emergency[43] as one of the conditions of possibility of the very suffering we want to study, how can we break this double bond, and produce a form of knowledge not subjected to, and not reproducing, this condition?

This suggestion resonates with Slavoj Žižek's (2009) "sideways reflections" on violence, in which he argues that when confronted with explicit, and sometimes too explicit, violence, the researcher should take a step back and "disentangle from [its] fascinating lure". Visible violence does not happen in a vacuum: it works against a background of systemic, anonymous, objective violence – and can be comprehended only when considered against this horizon.

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[43] See Chapter 1.

> [Visible violence] is seen as a perturbation of the "normal", peaceful state of things. However, objective violence is precisely the violence inherent to this "normal" state of things. Objective violence is invisible since it sustains the very zero-level standard against which we perceive something as subjectively violent. Systemic violence is thus something like the notorious "dark matter" of physics, the counterpart to an all-too-visible subjective violence. It may be invisible, but it has to be taken into account if one is to make sense of what otherwise seem to be "irrational" explosions of subjective violence. (2009, pp. 1–2)

Žižek provides a standpoint on violence that can be employed also in the investigation of its consequences – oppression, suffering, *grande misère*. Specifically, when we turn to our object of study, we face a phenomenon that is apparently in plain sight, made visible, excessively visible, and present, almost immediate, by means of different kinds of representations. As I have argued in the previous chapter, the mainstream narrative about migration is that of a crisis. What does it mean, then, to leave aside the overarching crisis and to focus on a scene of ordinary, everyday crises?

According to Bourdieu, in dealing with these objects, an ethical and political position comes into play. When addressing *la misère*, researchers assume the responsibility of working toward an "understanding" (*comprendre*), defined as a "constant labor of construction" in which they are "capable of mentally putting themselves in [their interviewees'] place" (Bourdieu, 2000b, pp. 612–613). This work entails firstly an ethical commitment, linked to the choice of making public private discourses. It is a responsibility that often produces a sense of disquiet, an uneasiness, in the researcher. Researchers are accountable for exposing the words entrusted to them, and thus should protect them from misinterpretation, and from the risk of becoming a mere collection of oddities. They have to provide readers with

the means of understanding, by constructing a framework within which those conversations can be placed and juxtaposed, one to another, revealing their multiplicity, conflicts, and shades. This framework should disclose the "social conditions and conditionings" of the persons talking, what remains at once hidden and working in the conversation. Bourdieu thinks of research as a "realist construction" that allows us to read in the words of the interviewees the present and past objective relations between their trajectory and the encompassing structure:

> Contrary to what might be believed from a naively personalist view of the uniqueness of social persons, it is the uncovering of immanent structures contained in the contingent statements of a discrete interaction that alone allows one to grasp the essential of each [person's] idiosyncrasy and all the singular complexity of her actions and reactions. (Bourdieu, 2000b, p. 618)

The author also emphasizes an additional aspect. The interview itself takes place within the structure of objective relations, of conditions and conditioning, that it aims to reveal. As a consequence, the research and the interactions between the persons involved cannot be considered outside, and not subject to, those conditions. On the contrary, the objective structure acts on the very relation of investigation. Thus, Bourdieu argues for a "reflex reflexivity" (2000b, p. 608), a sort of meta-reflexivity that is capable of perceiving the effects of the social structure not only on the content of the interview (what the person is telling, his/her trajectory), but also on the interview process and relations.

The emphasis on the self-reflexive gaze leads to the second issue at stake when investigating suffering: the standpoint that the researcher is called to take is both ethical *and* political. In other words, by considering research as a process occurring within the same structure it looks at, we are immediately confronted with

the inherent asymmetry between the investigator and the investigated. We are then required to acknowledge this difference, its effects, and, most importantly, to reduce the symbolic violence exerted. In particular, we can impact on the asymmetry not only by negotiating the relational frame of the interview, but also by questioning the superordinate structure, its constructions and conditions.

To conclude, *The Weight of the World* can offer two significant methodological recommendations for the investigation of suffering. Firstly, it provides a framework for analysing the exceptional crisis, the one appearing in the foreground, against a background of ordinary, chronic miseries. And secondly, it practices a method that aims simultaneously at questioning and deconstructing the taken-for-granted conditions of possibility of those miseries. However, the method shows some limitations. One weakness relates to a basic assumption underlying all the essays and creating a contradiction. While referring to the interview as a realist construction, and to transcriptions as translations and rewritings, Bourdieu seems at once to understand research as an effort of unveiling a hidden, but existing, object. In particular, the sociologist is compared to a midwife who "bring[s] to light these things buried deep within the people who experience them – people who are both unaware of these things and, in another sense, know them better than anyone" (Bourdieu, 2000b, p. 621). The interview would thus offer an occasion to elicit and allow a discourse that could not have happened, but was already there. However, as we will see in the following chapters, discourses around the experience of mental distress question this assumption and expose its inconsistency. These are experiences that are never fully utterable, and can be expressed only partially through language.

Narratives on symptoms do not make explicit a concealed discourse; rather, they are dialectic constructions that happen in the moment of the interview, and are

inevitably partial, lacking, and bewildering. And yet, as I will argue, their potential – not only heuristic, but also political – lies precisely in their destabilizing character. As Devereux (1967)[44] points out, the disturbances engendered in the encounter between observer and observed provide the most fruitful research material. But the research encounter is only a "laboratory", a space and time in which to analyse an encounter happening in everyday life. Symptoms are usually stubborn and insistent. In the case studies presented in the following chapters, I will describe how symptoms reverberate in the social space, reaching into people, and exposing others' vulnerability. Accepting to be touched and challenged by those "unsettling presences" rather than building protective boundaries, has a transformative potential.

Furthermore, the inquiry into mental distress poses a second challenge to Bourdieu's theoretical framework. In *The Weight of the World*, it is argued that idiosyncrasies and singularities can be grasped only by bringing to light their immanent structures. This claim is linked with a fundamental assumption recurring all through Bourdieu's work: social structures precede, enable, and determine individual trajectories. Despite the emphasis on the dual dynamic of habitus and subjective dispositions, which are at once structured and structuring, the primacy is attributed ultimately to the objective structure. It is an argument that has been largely criticized for being too deterministic and for neglecting individual agency (Throop & Murphy, 2002). Indeed, Bourdieu seems to forget the inherent ambiguity underlying the encounter between dominant structures and subjected individuals. This ambiguity has been the focus of the work of scholars investigating the relations between mental illness and its social, political, and historical circumstances.

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[44] See previous chapter.

The ambiguity of power relationships. Frantz Fanon is perhaps one of the first and most influential thinkers to question this irreducible ambivalence (Beneduce, 2007), making himself at once subject and object of the interrogation. His work (Fanon, 1986, 1994, 2004) tackles the double logic of recognition and identification, analysing the relationship between colonizer and colonized, white and black, and the making of subjectivities in colonial and postcolonial settings. As a psychiatrist, Fanon is particularly interested in the "impossible encounter" between white doctor and black patient – between the colonial medical institution, and the opaque, resistant, ill body of the colonized. It is precisely through clinical practice that he is in contact with, and literally touches, suffering subjectivities demanding an analysis that is capable of combining political, cultural and psychopathological objects (Cherki, 2006). His writings centre around the body, which becomes an instrument to read politics – a prism reflecting power relations, and capturing the lies and contradictions of the colonial situation (Beneduce, 2012). Fanon does not just historicize mental illness, understanding it as an effect of structural violence. Rather, he employs the psychic idiosyncrasy, the opaqueness of psychopathological experience, as a device to unveil and explore the ambivalent knots inherent to the relation between oppressor and oppressed. Frantz Fanon's writings represent a sharp analysis of the world of the time, and are often anticipating our own contemporary circumstances – a postcolonial legacy "of violence and appropriation, carried into the present as traumatic memory, inherited institutional structures, and often unexamined assumptions", of power relationships and modes of knowledge (DelVecchio Good, Hyde, Pinto, & Good, 2008, p. 6), for which Fanon's words are still insightful.

Therefore, in assuming that the relationship between individual and society, structure and subjectivity, is more tangled than Bourdieu argued, we face a methodological challenge. Bourdieu identified a direction in the relationship between social structures and subjectivities, giving primacy to the first, and recognizing the mechanism of structure's reproduction in its "taken for grantedness". From this angle, the aim of research should be that of retracing the structure, bringing light to what is more ordinary and apparently natural, and that constitutes the background of conditions for individual experiences. However, by questioning that primacy, and focusing instead on the contradictions of power relationships, we need a different methodology. Instead of looking into the ordinary work of power structures, we have to focus on what remains hidden for it is not fully articulable – in other words, the inconsistencies, uncertainties and paradoxes within the structures.

A different methodology also transforms and deconstructs its object of study. Indeed, scholars of postcoloniality question radically the very idea of structure as something unitary and coherent, and emphasize instead the fragmented and ambivalent nature of state entities. No longer a rationally organized entity, if it was ever one, the state is understood as a multifaceted ensemble of practices and processes, not a thing or a system, but "a significantly unbounded terrain of powers and techniques … cohabiting in limiting, tension ridden, often contradictory relation to each other" (Brown, 1995, p. 174), experienced intimately and embodied in everyday life (Das & Poole, 2004). With a more radical approach, Begoña Aretxaga suggests we think of the state as a "fictional reality" (2000) and a "collective, reified

illusion" that can be recognized through its effects (2003).[45] By emphasizing the subjective structure of the state, the author provides an original framework to understand postcoloniality as a lived experience of politics in an "altered state":

> … a certain dislocation and often violent disarray of things. It is a state in which the logical order of Cartesian thinking doesn't quite work and yet doesn't quite not work either. It is a state in which things are a little off where they should be and sometimes very much off, so that the state of things seems crazy. (Aretxaga, 2008, p. 44)

At the core of this experience there is an "unbearable ambiguity" – an ambiguity both *of* and *toward* the state – that can be less impenetrable when we understand it as the presence of an absence, a haunting memory of a traumatic history (Aretxaga, 2008).

Other authors argue that in postcolonial settings the relationship between state and individual can provoke a sense of the "uncanny" when unacknowledged historical traces suddenly become present and "normal" in everyday life (Good, 2015; A. F. Gordon, 2004; Taussig, 1992; Weismantel, 2001). Such a perspective draws on Freud's notion of uncanny (*unheimlich*) as something that has been repressed and is then revived by some event, engendering a feeling of strangeness and familiarity at the same time (2003). However, this approach aims at extending the analysis beyond the psychological dimension, looking at historical and social memories that have been repressed and made "secret", but return in disguised forms. Particularly, in suggesting they practice an "ethnographic hauntology", Good

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[45] "… to talk of the state as a fiction does not necessarily mean falsity but rather, as Clifford Geertz said long ago, a certain genre of representation, a particularly powerful one. If the fictional reality of the state is socially powerful, then scholars must focus not only on those discourses and practices that produce this state form as real but also on the actual social and subjective life of this formation we call the state" (Aretxaga, 2003, p. 401).

(2015) argues that anthropologists should look at uncanny ghosts and spectres as realities that are at once political and psychological and reveal what remains unspeakable – secrets, often hidden in plain sight – in the societies they analyse.[46]

At the end of this first imaginary dialogue around the ordinariness of the effects of power, we are left with a puzzling thought and a question. When we consider the ambiguity of postcolonial mental illness, or of experiences of altered states, as Fanon and Aretxaga suggest, what we called a "structure", meant as rational organization, reveals its fictional character and uncertain, ambiguous nature. Hence we should ask, how can we carry out an investigation of an object that seems illusionary but whose effects are painfully real? In the following section, I will look closely at the notion of ambiguity, associating it with the idea of a simultaneity of opposite constructs. Drawing on Judith Butler's reflections, I will analyse the ambiguity inherent in human relationships and expressed with the idea of a shared vulnerability. Finally, I will discuss the use of ethnography as a method to investigate how vulnerability is experienced.

Dispossessed subjects. In her study of the non-sense of atrocity and reconstruction of language, Alexandra Pillen defines ambivalence as a continuous motion, a tension between opposite meanings (2015). According to the author, this tension is expressed in language through the use of "Janusian words", that is, terms conveying a "simultaneity of the opposites" (Pillen, 2017). A Janusian word is different from a polysemic one in that it creates an intermediate zone between

[46] Good refers to Derrida's notion of "hauntology" (1994), as the analysis of traces exceeding the formal structure of meaning and making appearance in language and social life.

antithetical terms – a sort of suspended betweenness where meanings and acts work simultaneously in opposite directions. Janusian words express paradoxes, irony, and ambiguity. Thus, they can be a site where to look at the relationality of signification in which sense, nonsense, and countersense work up against each other, producing a discourse.

This idea of ambiguity as an unresolved, active tension between opposites can help us understand Judith Butler's analysis of vulnerability. Whereas, following Bourdieu, we emphasized the ordinariness of precarity, Butler's reflections shed light on its paradoxical character. According to the author, human relations are based on a fundamental dependency that establishes our vulnerability to deprivation, and in consequence implies an ethical responsibility: "vulnerability seem[s] to follow our being socially constituted bodies, attached to others, at risk of losing those attachments, exposed to others, at risk of violence by virtue of that exposure" (Butler, 2004, p. 20). Therefore, relationality is not a possession (we do not have relationships); rather, it follows vulnerability and can be best understood as a form of *dispossession* – "a way of being *for* another, or *in virtue of* another … how we are not only constituted by our relations but also dispossessed by them as well" (Butler, 2004, p. 24).

Defined in these terms, the notion of dispossession challenges the idea of a unitary, sovereign subject, and follows the discussion around the concept of subject positions.[47] In addition, Butler and Athanasiou (2013) employ this angle also to

[47] Stuart Hall (1996) argues that postmodern social sciences have largely questioned the idea of a unified subject and the sovereignty of subjectivity. According to this perspective, individuals are not representatives of social groups or class; rather, they use, and identify with, different, sometimes conflicting, subject positions (see also Törrönen, 2001).

reveal a fundamental paradox of the social bond. Dispossession entails both a form of responsiveness, of being moved to/by the other into another scene; and a form of suffering, for it is a process of disownment and abjection. In the first sense, interdependency represents the "heteronomic condition for autonomy … a limit to the autonomous and impermeable self-sufficiency of the liberal subject" (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013 pos. 141). In the second meaning, which is bound to the first, dispossession is an imposed mode of subjugation, entailing "painful interpellations, occlusions and foreclosures". In other words, dispossession implies a simultaneous process of sustaining and appropriating, materializing and de-materializing the subject.

Specifically, this duality can be articulated more clearly through the concept of "presence". The process of becoming present to one another is an occasion for both subjugation and acknowledgment: for being dispossessed by others' presence or for being receptive to others. Yet, this condition of bodily exposure is differentially distributed. Vulnerability depends on pre-existing norms of recognition and social frames of intelligibility that establish legitimacy and define whose lives are more possible and thinkable than others.

Precarity is indeed a "politically induced condition" of vulnerability and exposure, characterised by a "differential allocation of recognizability" (Butler, 2009, pp. II–III).[48] Butler and Athanasiou define as an "injurious interpellation" (2013 pos. 298) the norms of intelligibility that make recognition possible. Subjects are at once acted upon by these norms and acting – adhering to them, but also

[48] Butler differentiates between precariousness and precarity: whereas the first expresses an existential condition of vulnerability equally shared, the latter represent a socially produced condition of inequality and destitution (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013).

opening up possibilities of non-normative re-signification. Hence, presence is always produced against its absences, misrecognized presences, and "inassimilable remains" (2013 pos. 319). Butler (2009) links recognisability to performativity and compliance, or non-compliance, to norms. Yet performativity is understood as a process of acting and being acted – a process involving a certain degree of openness and a risk of going adrift, or having effects that are not fully foreseen and possibly disruptive. Thus, the author suggests to address a fundamental question: who counts as subject and who does not? And what kind of performativity is exercised?

Finally, the logic of dispossession is also related to conditions of "situatedness", displacement and emplacement. Dispossession is inscribed onto particular "bodies-in-place", that is, bodies that can be put in their proper place. When the proper place corresponds to not-being and not-having, then precarity is produced: bodies that cannot take a place become displaceable and disposable. And yet, Butler and Athanasiou focus on acts of defiance, asking whether subjects can emerge from the "refusal to stay in, or to move to, one's assigned proper place" (2013 pos. 391).

> The intertwined bodily and territorial forces of dispossession play out in the exposure of bodies-in-place, which can become the occasion of subjugation, surveillance, and interpellation. It can also become the occasion of situated acts of resistance, resilience, and confrontation with the matrices of dispossession, through appropriating the ownership of one's body from these oppressive matrices. Acted upon, and yet acting, bodies-in-place and bodies-out-of-place at once embody and displace the conditions of intelligible embodiment and agency. (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013 pos. 398)

These considerations pose an ethical issue and have some consequences on the definition of a methodology of investigation. Butler and Athanasiou argue that

when looking at dispossessed, unaccountable and unaccounted for bodies, we should apply a "non-linear critique" of power formations. Non-linearity should indeed enable us to account for and engage with the co-occurring process of repression/production, subjectivation/desubjectivation. For this reason, the analysis should address the norms of intelligibility and the tension between what is recognisable, and the "disavowed losses and avowed excesses" challenging recognizability (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013 pos. 541). In other words, the authors suggest focusing the investigation on what is misrecognized rather than on what enters intelligibility. The acknowledged subject, the "I", represents only an interval, a provisional fixity, in the process of subject-making. Conversely, misrecognition can offer the possibility of a rupture, a discontinuity in proper iterability:

> It seems to me that when the "self" … who struggles for recognition and self-cognition has been violently misrecognized, constituted as radically or uncannily familiar by a recognizable self-same human, then the economy of recognition gets potentially and provisionally destabilized. (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013 pos. 1022)

Humans refusing to stay in their proper place offer a chance of destabilizing an otherwise working machine. Hence, our analysis should not aim at an assimilatory inclusion of the non-recognizable, that contributes to reproducing and reaffirming the oppressive frame. Rather, our critique should seek to "subvert those norms and open the human to radical rearticulations of humanness" (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013 pos. 556). All these considerations resonate with Paul B. Preciado's words on transition, understood as a process that supposedly leads to recognition, and that is common to different categories of dispossessed subjects:

> A person presents her/himself at the boarding gate of an airport, or at a border, or at a hotel reception, or at the counter of a car rental agency… S/he shows her/his passport and the hostess, the salesperson, the receptionist, the administrator or the

customs officer looks at the document, then looks at the body that is before her/him and declares: "This is not you!" A systemic rupture is thereby produced in all of the legal and administrative conventions that construct the living political fictions. The social apparatus of the construction of identity breaks down then, as if in slow motion, and its techniques (photographs, documents, enunciations…) fall one after the other, like the dazzling, blinking game over sign on the screen of a video game. In the space of an instant reigns a glacial silence, Wittgensteinian. The sense of being off-side in the language game: the terror of having exceeded the limits of social intelligibility; the fascination of being able to observe from the exterior, or more exactly from the threshold, even if only for an instant, the apparatus that constructs us as subject. … Transition is the name given to the process that supposedly allows one to pass from femininity to masculinity (or vice versa) via the legal-medical protocol of the re-assignment of gender identity. … However, the process of transition does not refer to the passage from femininity to masculinity (these two genders are not ontological entities, they are only biopolitical and performative), but rather to the passage from one apparatus of the production of truth to another. … In legal-political terms, the status of the trans person is comparable to that of the migrant, the exiled and the refugee. They all find themselves in a temporary process of suspension of their political condition. In the case of trans persons, as with that of the bodies of migrants, what is asked for is a biopolitical refuge: to be the subject of a system of semiotic assemblage that gives meaning to life. ... What is called the refugee "crisis", or the so called "problem" of trans people, will not be resolved by building refugee camps or clinics for sexual re-assignment. What is in crisis are the systems of the production of truth, of political citizenship and the technologies of

> the Nation State, as well as the epistemology of the sex-gender binary. Consequently, it is the political space as a whole that should enter into transition.[49]

As argued, dispossession is indeed a notion that links migrants to non-migrants, offering a theoretical framework to understand political subjectivities outside legal categories (Glick Schiller & Çağlar, 2015). The frame of dispossession has already a potential to unsettle the game of recognition, to move forward and take place. Following our imaginary dialogue with Bourdieu and Butler around *misère* and dispossession, we can start outlining our own methodological framework. Precarity, as a politically produced form of dispossession, provides a fruitful perspective to account for the ambiguity of the relationship between the subject and the power structure. Nonetheless, it requires the investigator to take an ethical and political position vis-à-vis her field and objects of study. Therefore, the investigation aims not only at describing an object, but at deconstructing and transforming it as well. In the following section, I will focus on a tradition of studies addressing ordinary and uncanny forms of precarity, developing a reflection on investigation techniques.

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[49] Paul B. Preciado is a philosopher and queer activist. This article was originally published in French on *Liberation* (http://www.liberation.fr/debats/2016/05/27/identite-en-transit_1455650, last visited on 2 November 2016). The English translation can be found here: http://autonomies.org/pt/2016/07/paul-b-preciado-identity-in-transit/, last visited on 2 November 2016.

Ethnographies of disordered states

Drawing on literature about subjectivity, postcolonialism and social suffering, DelVecchio Good and colleagues (2008) suggest to assume "postcolonial disorders" – contemporary disorderly and disordered states – as objects of ethnographic exploration. The authors argue that disorders provide a means to analyse "modalities of social life and subjectivities that reflect, ironically, the establishment of political, moral, and epistemic orders through state violence that reproduces disorder" (2008, p. 8). They provide a perspective in which mental disorder ceases to be considered exclusively as an unintended outcome. On the contrary, it becomes a mode of experiencing the world, with a potential of subverting the surrounding order. DelVecchio, Good and colleagues thus suggest conducting ethnography by juxtaposing two images, "disordered states" and ordering practices. Their work is an attempt to stimulate a reflection on the boundaries of ethnographic methodology, and deliberately leaves some crucial questions open: what do we mean by juxtaposition? How can we draw a comparison between two materials – psychological and socio-political objects – that are so divergent? And finally, what use can we make of it?

In recent decades, a rich body of literature exploring the notion of experience has been produced by anthropologists investigating private lifeworlds alongside social systems, their usual objects of research. This tradition of studies, which can be grouped under the label of anthropology of experience, is interested in "the dialectical structure and contingent flow" of human life (Kleinman & Kleinman, 1991). Lived experiences are explored ethnographically, by combining the conventional ethnographic perspective with phenomenology and psychoanalysis. According to Biehl, Good and Kleinman (2007), the relation between experience,

subjectivity, and social life can be considered as a work of refraction of individual processes through different political, technological, psychological, and linguistic registers. Individual experience thus appears as a sort of kaleidoscope effect capturing "the violence and dynamism of everyday life" and revealing "the concrete constellations in which people forge and foreclose their lives around what is most at stake" (Biehl et al., 2007, p. 5).

As Jason Throop (2010) points out, phenomenological approach and anthropological attitude intersects in the "thickness" of the ethnographic encounter which is, primarily, an encounter of corporeities. In the field, ethnographers establish through their bodies relationships with subjects embodying cultural worlds, concrete knowledges and practices (Csordas, 1990; Good, 1994; Stoller, 1995). Hence, ethnography is grounded in intersubjectivity (Jackson, 2005) and, at once, in the irreducibility of experiences: the ethnographer's reflexive gaze and self-estrangement are a form of *epoché*, of phenomenological bracketing revealing the taken-for-grantedness of the world (Throop, 2010). Thus, in the last decades, the aim of an anthropology of experience has been to engage with the uncertainties, inquietudes and opacities (Willen & Seeman, 2012a) too often overlooked in the effort of building coherent representations of cultural systems (Csordas, 1993, 1994; Jackson, 2012). Also, the very notion of experience has been transformed and problematized by the anthropological investigation. In proposing a "cultural phenomenology" (Throop, 2010), anthropologists have emphasized the situatedness and partiality of experience which are considered specific forms of social life in a particular setting (Biehl et al., 2007; Jackson, 2005). Therefore, anthropologists cannot help but draw attention to the historical, political and discursive forces crossing lifeworlds and establishing power relations within the setting. As Robert Desjarlais argues in *Shelter Blues* (1997), a foundational work for

this tradition of study, there is a need for a theoretical framework that links the phenomenal and the political while looking at the notion of experience itself as culturally and politically situated. Drawing on Foucault's genealogy of the subject, Desjarlais claims for a critical phenomenology that tries "to account for the constitution of subjects within a specific cultural setting". In approaching modes of perception, subjectivity, human agency, and morality, anthropology should consider experience as a process – *how* people feel and know – rather than a collection of discrete facts – *what* people feel and know:

> In my reckoning we need a critical phenomenology that can help us not only to describe what people feel, think, or experience but also to grasp how the *processes* of feeling or experiencing come about through multiple, interlocking interactions. Such an approach is phenomenological because it would entail a close, unassuming study of "phenomena," of "things themselves" – how, for instance, people tend to feel in a certain cultural situation. But the approach is also critical in that it tries to go beyond phenomenological description to understand why things are this way: to inquire, for instance, into what we mean by feeling, how it comes about, what it implies, and what broader cultural and political forces are involved. In addition, the phenomenology is a critical one because it tries to take into account the makings of its own perceptions. (Desjarlais, 1997, p. 25)

When situated against its own background, experience can provide a lens through which to make sense of the "local ecology" (Das & Das, 2007) of historical and political circumstances shaping it. Experience is the object of a constant movement of articulation, oscillating between ambiguous and chaotic impressions, to coherent and shareable meanings. Yet, the movement itself is tangled and unstable as some experiences defy comprehension, resisting a full disambiguation, and linger between communicability and incommunicability. As Throop (2010)

argues, these opaque experiences provide a privileged site for observing the work and predicaments of processes of articulation.

Looking back on the history of the discipline, a similar conclusion can be found in the work of Ernesto de Martino, who also approaches the theme of being-in-the-world – "presence", as he defines it – bridging phenomenology, ethnography, and historical analysis. For the author, inherent to all forms of presence is a constant risk of loss of presence, a dangerous proximity to a bare crisis (*rischiosa prossimità alla nuda crisi*). The notion of presence, and of the "crisis of presence" (*crisi della presenza*) in particular, underlies all the work of the Italian scholar regarding the relation between idiosyncratic, social and historical worlds (de Martino, 1958, 1959, 1961; Ferrari, 2014).

Ernesto de Martino approaches phenomenology critically, from a social perspective (Charuty, 2015): indeed, lived experiences are never essentialised, rather they are viewed as historical and cultural objects. Influenced by the philosophy of Martin Heidegger and the concept of being-there (*Dasein*, *esserci*), de Martino defines human existence as "presence" (*presenza*). Contrary to Heidegger, de Martino understands "presence" in its historical unfolding and within a dialogical perspective, describing it as the will to exist within a human history. Presence is never definitive; rather, a continuous risk of crisis, of a "loss of presence" (*perdita della presenza*), is emphasized. In fact, when exposed to the threatening events of existence (*vissuti di crisi*), presence shows its lability. It is only in relation with crisis, before the risk of "not being-there", that presence could be understood. Yet, psychological experience is not isolated, rather is considered in its relationship with social and historical dimensions. According to the author, cultural institutes are constantly called to prevent and contrast such risk of existential collapse through a

work of valorisation that reintegrates the alienated presence within the historical community.

Existence is never granted once and for all. Ernesto de Martino is interested in finding its margins, the edges where presence is frayed, and where the work of culture faces a radical challenge. During his career, the author chose as research material a broad range of events, such as magic, possession, exorcism, funeral rites and, eventually, psychopathology (1964, 1977). "Psychopathological apocalypses" represent a permanent instability, expressing the collapse of presence, a fall out of the intersubjective, communicable world. The ethnographer is interested in the relation between the collapsed presence and the intersubjective world left in the background: what is emphasized is the heuristic value of psychopathological experiences, that become an ethnographic document revealing a relation between one lifeworld in crisis, and the constant, intersubjective risk of loss of human presence, of not "being-in-the-world" (*esserci nel mondo*).

Thus, according to de Martino, psychopathological facts can be employed as ethnographic documents to investigate the work and limits of cultural institutes in their continuing effort to face the existential crisis and re-establish a collective, historical project. The author seems to claim that when we look at the "alien" (latin *alienus*, other – the "altered" mental state), we look at our relationship with the risk of alienating ourselves. Mental suffering cannot be properly understood outside our collective ability to confront our shared uncertainties and our own "phantoms".

Assuming crisis as object of study, firstly as an individual experience and finally as collective representations (Severi, 1999), de Martino proposes an analysis of the experience of limit by comparing individual and cultural apocalypses – experiences of the end of the world. The author emphasizes that "psychopathological documents" evoke a common human risk of radical crisis, of

not being in any possible world, and, at the same time, mirror the collective efforts of reintegration, whether effective or not. According to de Martino, culture is engaged in a struggle against the risk of not-being, whose most opaque expression is mental illness. The risk of psychic chaos is where individual afflictions encounter the fragile work of culture aimed at containing them – a sort of dam permanently opened to a risk of breach (Severi, 1999). Culture thus represents a sort of "existential therapy and prophylaxis" (de Martino, 1995) in a moment of crisis, when we risk of not being in the world (see also Beneduce, 2015a). By comparing psychopathological, ethnographical, cultural, and historical documents, de Martino aims at evaluating the culture's capability of overcoming the risk and recovering from bewilderment, or, on the contrary, its closeness to retracing the psychotic collapse.

By establishing a continuity uniting contemporary literature on cultural/critical phenomenology and de Martino's proposed methodology, my aim is to find new ways to investigate the relationship between mental health and migration. In the following chapters I will argue that migrants' mental disorders can be employed as ethnographic material to examine the work and limits of ordering migration policies, categories and practices. I will analyse narratives on symptoms in their subversive potential, as if they were images, "precipitate[s] of experience" that "can capture uncertainty and contradiction without having to resolve it" (Stevenson, 2014). I will employ the idea of a presence exposed constantly to its liminality to investigate contemporary forms of subjectivity inhabiting, and being inhabited by, the margins of the social space – men and women who experience the state from a borderline and subaltern standpoint.

Conclusions: Subverting methodology

This chapter began with a question: how can I grasp the dual position of the contemporary migrant, who is at once an Other in crisis, and a critical Other? From which point of view can I understand the simultaneity of a painful critique? By establishing an imaginary conversation between Pierre Bourdieu, Judith Butler, and Ernesto de Martino, I explored the notion of vulnerability, as a condition of both exposure and responsiveness, to others. With Bourdieu, I understood vulnerability as the *petite misère* of the lack of possibilities. I emphasized the heuristic value of singular complexities that are at once ordinary and unfamiliar, and that can provide a background for questioning more visible forms of oppression. Bourdieu's work also offered a first recommendation on method: I should not only analyse, but also deconstruct, the conditions of possibility of vulnerability. As Bourdieu puts it, the sociologist can be seen as a midwife who reveal, and at the same time unmake, the surrounding oppressive structure. However, I partially criticized those assumptions, looking at the nonsensical and opaque aspects of suffering. In comparing Bourdieu's considerations with the work of Fanon on postcolonial psychopathology, and of Aretxaga on state madness, I exposed the illusory, ambivalent nature of what Bourdieu supposed to be a structure.

Subsequently, I looked for theoretical tools for an investigation of this structural ambivalence. If Bourdieu brought to light the ordinariness of suffering, Judith Butler helped me reflect on its paradoxical nature. I employed the notion of dispossession to make sense of precarity as a co-occurrence of exposure and responsiveness. With Butler and Athanasiou, I considered the relation between dispossession and differential allocation of recognisability. I focused on its productive effects, describing them as disavowed losses and avowed excesses.

While the former relates to what gets abjected from intelligibility, the latter refers to what is considered superfluous, "forms of life that are conferred recognition as human according to the established norms of recognisability, on the condition of and at the cost of conforming to these norms" (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013 pos. 577).

Finally, I considered mental disorders as objects placed in between disavowed losses and avowed excesses, thus representing an experience of liminality. Ordinary mental distress can be seen as something that is neither completely excluded nor included; rather, it moves between the two poles, at times acquiring some degrees of legibility, and at times risking a radical foreclosure. By including into the conversation literature on the ethnography of experience and de Martino's work on apocalypses, I reflected on the ways in which disordered and disordering experiences can be employed as ethnographic material. By wavering between losses and excesses, mental disorders express a presence in crisis. As I will argue in the next chapters, disorders are blurred objects struggling against all the efforts of putting them in their proper place – a place that is, firstly, a linguistic one. Disorders push and exhaust the limit of intelligibility, engendering an unsettling movement that entails a potential for a momentary space of subversion.

4. Inarticulable residues: Temporal discrepancies in the asylum system

In the previous chapters I introduced the main objective of this work: to explore the ways in which migration policies are experienced subjectively and intersubjectively, thus shedding light on the relation between individual life stories and transnational forces. I critically reviewed the existing literature on the topic, finding two dominant approaches. A first strand of research examines the movement of people across the European territory employing the notions of mobility and immobility. Most of these studies focus on the ways in which national and supranational "border regimes" and "bordering practices" seek to control, manage, or hinder access to, and mobility within, the EU space. Overall, these studies bring to light the double mechanism of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion underlying asylum policies and practices. Conversely, a second line of research insists on the autonomy of migration. Scholars sharing this perspective suggest that migrants' agency has been largely neglected owing to the emphasis on top-down influences and large-scale determinants. This second approach aims at investigating the multiplicity of migration trajectories, dynamics, personal strategies, and coping resources.

Together, the perspectives provide new insights into refugee and forced migration studies, by showing how policies and interventions are practiced, but also contested, by local actors. They focus on what happens in the everyday experience of asylum, following migrants' routes through geographical, political, and legal territories. The effort is to deconstruct not only political categories such as

"refugee", "economic migrant", "undocumented", among others, but the very notion of "citizenship". The aim of this line of research thus shifts from an analysis of an indefinite, and indefinable, "object", to an investigation of the everyday process of "self-making and being made" of migrant subjects (Aihwa Ong et al., 1996). The focus shifts from categories as entities, to the "struggles" over and across categories.

However, most of these studies tend to position themselves on two apparently opposed poles, respectively emphasising the role of oppressive forces or of grassroots resistances. Indeed, such representations of the relation between migrants and European institutions risk being overly deterministic in applying a dichotomy of oppressor-oppressed (DelVecchio Good et al., 2008). As discussed in the previous chapter, few studies have so far defined a perspective crossing the different levels involved and looking at the ambiguities underlying the relations between macro forces and subjectivities. Indeed, there is a general lack of research employing multi-scalar approaches and considering subjectivities as processual and situated within a specific time and space (Glick Schiller, 2015; Glick Schiller & Çağlar, 2015). How can we carry out an analysis of "conjunctures", that is of the multiplicity of forces, relations, conflicts, and contradictions involved at different levels (Clarke, 2010)?

This second part of the study follows the overarching aim of my research, namely reflecting on the complex relation between the social and the psychological, and finding new ways of investigating it. My aim is to turn away from the distinction between individual and collective worlds, focusing instead on objects reflecting their intersection – or their collapse, as I will argue later. In this chapter, I examine how moments of crisis are experienced in a context of social exclusion and marginalization, and how they can offer a particular angle on that context. Specifically, this chapter employs the notion of conjunctures to think about

subjectivity within the context of large-scale forces. I look at critical conjunctures, as prisms refracting the productive effects of the asylum discourse and practices. Firstly, I provide a definition and a theoretical framework for the processes that are the object of this investigation. Secondly, I present a case-study of how these processes act in the life of a migrant man. My intent is to employ the methodological reflections described in Chapter 3 to put into dialogue two images: life in the margins of the social world, and the liminal experience of symptoms. The analysis will be articulated within the space produced by the overlapping of these two languages, by taking as object of inquiry a discourse defying reason and comprehension. Following the fine line between ordering and disordering, I will look at this dialogue as a means to investigate the ambivalences, the bewildering effects (Aretxaga, 2008), of the mentioned processes of subjectification. Having defined the object of my study as the "residual productions" of the asylum system, I open my reflections by defining, firstly, what I mean by productions and productive effects, and secondly why residues, as experiences on the limit of articulation, can provide a valuable point of view on subjectivity.

Residual productions

How can we fully grasp the multiplicity, simultaneity and materiality inherent in the different forms of power and shed light on what happens on the ground where policies and categories meet individuals? How can we account for the multiple levels constituting the relationship between individuals and political institutions? Within migration studies, one of the first and most significant attempt to provide an analytical framework for a multi-scalar analysis is the transnational

migration paradigm described by Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc in *Nations Unbound* (1994). In this seminal work, the authors insist that global economic restructuring requires a change of perspective on social and political relations: migration and the challenges it poses to the notion of citizenship are best understood from a global perspective, one that considers nation-states within a transnational field and links migratory pathways to global forces. Within this paradigm, the object of study is the "transnational social field": social relations should be traced through mutually constituting, multiple, intersecting networks of networks of (often unequal) power. More recently, Glick Schiller (2015) has reviewed the initial paradigm, expressing the need for more emphasis on reflexivity, change, and transformation. The author suggests to focus on the dynamics of "global historical conjunctures", looking at their transformations, the possibilities they offer, or the costs and challenges they imply. Glick Schiller details two processes operating in the current conjuncture: dispossession and displacement. The first is connected to various form of accumulation (of capital, land, raw material, labour force, human bodies) and leads to the second, "that range from the forcible removal of people from their land and neighborhoods, through urban restructuring and privatization, to the economic restructuring that strips people of their social positions and hopes for the future" (Glick Schiller, 2015, p. 2279).

When referring to power, the notion of "conjuncture" resonates with that of "assemblage" (Aihwa Ong & Collier, 2005), "articulation" (Holston, 1999; Isin, 2007), and "making" (Aihwa Ong et al., 1996), drawing attention to the intersection of the different levels of analysis. Within this perspective, the focus is on how global, national and supranational, local and even particular scales cross each other and intersect in specific situations. These sites of conjuncture are where the production and re-production of individual and collective forms of life are at stake, where knots,

or "anthropological problems" (Rabinow, 2005), may emerge. Again, the investigation moves from seeking to disentangle knots and specify categories to considering the entanglement in its entirety, both in its visible and in its less readable aspects.

Acts of citizenship. The perspective of conjunctures brings into focus another relevant issue. If the idea of "networks" may be inappropriately associated with a relatively stable and balanced condition, conjunctures evoke an inherent temporariness and variability. As Isin (2009) suggests, we should think of citizenship as an institution in flux, a changeable process. The author considers the three poles of this process: actors (subjectivities), sites (fields of contestation) and scales (scopes of applicability) of citizenship. To investigate the interactions of actors, scales and sites – what people do – "means to investigate acts of citizenship – those deeds by which actors constitute themselves (and others) as subjects of rights" (Isin, 2009, p. 371; Isin & Nielsen, 2008). The emphasis is on relationality, processes, and subjectivity:

> Citizenship understood as political subjectivity shifts our attention from fixed categories by which we have come to understand or inherit citizenship to the struggles through which these categories themselves have become stakes. It also shifts our attention from already defined actors to the acts that constitute them. Rather than asking "who is the citizen?" the question becomes "what makes the citizen?" (Isin, 2009, p. 383)

Acts imply, but cannot be reduced to, practice, habitus and action; acts "create a scene" of both performance and disturbance:

> Creating a scene means to call into question the script itself. Acts are ruptures or beginnings but are not impulsive and random reactions to a scene. Acts are always

> purposive though not always intentional. By theorizing acts, or attempting to constitute acts as an object of analysis, we must focus on rupture rather than order but a rupture that enables the actor (that the act creates) to create a scene rather than follow a script. (Isin, 2009, p. 379)

Acts "make a difference", introducing a breakdown and unsettling the established order in ways that are not always articulable by the subjects. Those breakdowns are then chosen as sites of investigation, because of their potential of unsettling not only the political order, but also our order of knowledge of the political. Indeed, it is the very notion of citizenship that explodes: flux, entanglements, ruptures are where the relation between individual and power institutions is enacted, and can be unfolded. If this relation is understood as a struggle, a process implying mutual construction, then we have to consider it within the most encompassing frame of subjectification and to look at the ways in which it intertwines with other sites (moral, psychological, bodily, material) and acts of subject formation. If the debate over citizenship has offered different, and sometimes divergent, angles on political recognition, a return to the notion of subjectivity may provide a lens to understand the dynamic character (such as inclusion/exclusion, opening/closure), make explicit the double process of claim making and being subjected, and encompasses the imaginary as well as the judicial-political dimensions of the relationship individual-power (Krause & Schramm, 2011). In other words, a focus on processes of subjectification may reveal the intersection of multiple citizenship position (as a status, but also as a practice, or a sentiment of belonging) and actors (beyond the nation-state) within a specific situation.

Subject formation: products and residues. All efforts to detail the person-state relations – as a contract implying rights and duties, or a sentiment of belonging; as a top-down authority, or a bottom-up struggle – seem to fail when it comes to understand the complexity of people's experiences and choices. How can we explain the detours within migration trajectories only by looking selectively at the legal frameworks or at personal agency? As researchers, we tend to oscillate between a need for specific definitions, and a desire for a view on complexity, opacity and hidden sides. However, those superordinate constructs, such as subjectivity and subjectification, may be burdened by overuse and risk becoming vague, and sometimes empty, terms. Some coordinates should be provided to find our position in relation to these fertile but "slippery"[50] concepts.

In this research, I start from a Foucauldian perspective in interrogating the mechanisms through which subjects are produced and re-produced. But I follow Judith Butler (1997) in her inquiry into the psychic mechanisms that often remain hidden, unspoken and unspeakable – the "psychic engagement" with subjection and subjectification. Butler's image of subject as a turning figure, "a turning back upon oneself or even a turning *on* oneself", is compelling in capturing the paradoxical and ambivalent nature of the process of *assujetissement.* Subjection is a double movement of being subordinated and being formed as a subject, and nonetheless cannot be fully comprehended within a dialectical frame. At once constituting and submitting, subordination not only implies its opposite, but produces an *excess*:

> In Foucault, the suppression of the body not only requires and produces the very body it seeks to suppress, it goes further by extending the bodily domain to be

[50] Nancy Scheper-Hughes refers to violence as "a slippery concept – nonlinear, productive, destructive, *and* reproductive" (2004).

> regulated, proliferating sites of control, discipline, and suppression. … In this sense, the restrictions placed *on* the body not only *require* and *produce* the body they seek to restrict, but *proliferate* the domain of the bodily beyond the domain targeted by the original restriction. … [T]his proliferation of the body by juridical regimes beyond the terms of dialectical reversal is also the site of possible resistance. (Butler, 1997, p. 59)

By employing at once a psychoanalytic reading of Foucault and a Foucauldian approach to psychoanalysis, the author follows up on the notion of proliferation, linking it to the Lacanian idea of an incommensurability between psyche and subject. The subject is not constituted once and for all, but is "repeatedly produced" – it is not an entity, but a process: the excess is produced in repetition, and is what enables the repetitive process.

> Indeed, I would add, a subject only remains a subject through a reiteration or rearticulation of itself as a subject, and this dependency of the subject on repetition for coherence may constitute that subject's incoherence, its incomplete character. (Butler, 1997, p. 99)

The iterability of the subjectification process is characterized by failure and partiality: the products emerging from the process are never wholly formed, there is always something missing – and here lies a possibility, a potential for action and resignification. The subject is inherently incomplete, and needs to be continually made and remade; this productive process creates a residue, something exceeding the subject and defying comprehension. But what is the relation between the two – the subject, as the intended product, and the unintended residues?

Deleuze and Guattari help us redefine the question. In *Anti-Oedipus* (1983), they argue that productive processes are not to be interpreted or explained but need to be observed in their unfolding and intersecting. Subjects are not understood as

objects but as movements: desiring-machines and flows. According to the authors, the analysis should follow these flows, learn how they work, how they cross, join, or cut each other. Flows intersect, producing coupling and discontinuities, movement and partial objects. These fragments are simultaneously separated and coupled with the flow – connective syntheses and disjunctive syntheses. The subject is therefore irreducible to a unity, and it is best understood as a multiplicity, a polyvocality, of objects and leftovers: "it is a whole *of* these particular parts but does not totalize them; it is a unity *of* all of these particular parts but does not unify them" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, p. 42). There is no whole subject, just chains of fragments, partial syntheses, crossed by flows, social and historical cuts. Thus, according to the authors, our task is to look at these cuts, considering movement together with breakdowns, the machine's "burst of energy" with its "constituent misfires" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, p. 338). "Misfires" are not residues separated from a supposed core subjectivity, but are the place where the machines get stuck, their courses questioned, and where the intersection between flows becomes visible.

Temporalities. In sum, I consider subjectivity as a repetitive movement, productive and proliferating, constituting and fragmenting; a process crossing, and crossed by, other (and Others') processes. In the following section, I employ the construct, or the image, of residues to describe the excessive, misfired productions of those processes – what remains at the margins of articulable experiences. I focus on fragments, looking at the entanglements in conjunctures, their unspoken, and sometimes unspeakable, excesses. I intend to present a scene where I cross, briefly, another person's lifeworld in its intersection with other worlds. We produce an encounter, a dialogue and a narrative, but also a misunderstanding. We create a new

discourse, but we are also "undone by each other" in the dialogue (Butler, 2004, p. 23). I look closely at the residues of the encounter, the objects remaining on the scene, and their relations with the surrounding environment – their social life. I consider those residues as the neglected, implicit, nonsensical parts of our dialogue, questioning the role they play in the scene. In particular, the following section focuses on a case study, an individual, intimate, "experience of state" (Aretxaga, 2003, 2008). The aim is to explore how the European asylum system is experienced, and what are the residual productions of the encounter.

More specifically, the analysis employs temporality, and fragmented temporal trajectories, as a heuristic device to investigate the productive effects of arbitrariness on migrant precarious lives. While the governmentality of migrants' struggles over spatial mobility has been largely explored (De Genova & Peutz, 2010; Griffiths, Rogers, & Anderson, 2013; Sigona, Gamlen, Liberatore, & Kringelbach, 2015), there has been very little analysis of how control is enacted through the manipulation of time (Khosravi, 2010, 2014). Following Bourdieu's reflections on waiting as a way of experiencing the effects of power, Khosravi (2014) defines undetermined and prolonged waiting as a condition of liminality, in which arbitrariness produces dependency and subordination. As Hage (2009) puts it, a particular form of waiting – that of "waiting out" – has been greatly celebrated as an appropriate reaction to crisis. For the author, however, this act of patiently enduring in crisis involves both a subjection to a certain condition, and, at the same time, a brave opposition to this condition. Indeed, "waiting out" reflects an "ambivalent passivity", revealing a moral dimension underlying temporality. This ambivalence makes the act of waiting an individualized and internalized mode of governing – "a deep form of governmentality" – that valorises restraint and self-control. In the current permanent state of crisis, the "good citizen" is the one who waits "in an

orderly fashion" while migrants express a lack of will to endure a sense of immobility, of "stuckedness" (Hage, 2009, p. 99).

So far, however, little attention has been paid to the multiple forms of temporality, and of "time capital" (Andersson, 2014) related to migration. Research on time and migration has mainly addressed journey trajectories, moments of arrival and the process of status determination. There has been little discussion about the ways in which migrants experience different formations of time in the long term, such as cycles of permanence and temporariness, acceleration and sudden changes, or deceleration, stasis and suspension (Griffiths et al., 2013). In particular, my aim is to explore temporal discontinuities, ruptures in the imagined flow of future and memory, in order to look at the collective time of the asylum system from the angle of subjective, fractured temporalities. Drawing on de Martino's analysis of psychopathological facts as ethnographic documents,[51] my analysis employs mental "disorders" as a way to explore ordering practices. Following a refugee's experience of mental distress, the next section focuses on embodied relations between migrants and state, investigating the work, and the ambiguities in particular, of citizenship. By looking at disruptions and other fractures resisting language, the aim is to put into dialogue idiosyncratic and collective experiences of liminality, asking, what are the psychic products of bordering categories, procedures and regulations? And, as historical events, what can those products tell about the marginal spaces they inhabit – and are inhabited by?

[51] See Chapter 3.

Baran's fracture

Baran is a 28-year-old man from Turkish Kurdistan. He is married to Beritan and they have two daughters: Arin, who is five years old, and Rojda, who was born five months ago. We first met seven months ago at Centro Kalima. He had approached the centre a few months previously to ask for help in understanding his health issue. He was suffering from dermatitis and from recurrent episodes of headache, nausea, vomiting and fainting whose causes were unknown. He had undergone a few tests during the previous months without getting a conclusive medical diagnosis: an allergy to cornflour, gastritis, and suspected coeliac disease were all suggested. While medical treatments were partially reducing his gastrointestinal symptoms, both doctors and Baran started thinking about the psychological origins of the problem. At the centre, he was counselled both by a psychotherapist and a physician. The latter helped him read medical reports, understand the dietary recommendations and complete the required check-ups. When I first met him, Baran had undergone all the necessary tests but one, and I helped him get the appointment and collect the results.

During the time we spent together, we came to know each other. He told me about his job as a journalist in Turkey, and I told him about my research work. On one occasion, while speaking about the strain in defining a precise diagnosis, he mentioned that he was thinking that his health condition was related to the stress and the worries caused by the difficulties he experienced in Italy. As a Kurdish journalist in Turkey, he had been threatened, beaten, arrested and beaten again. Why, he asked, had the health problems started only after a few years he was living

in Italy? After asking the two clinicians for advice, I proposed that he get involved in my research and be interviewed.

The frame of the interview. From the very beginning, we had some trouble scheduling our interviews. His lack of time first came up when we spoke about his sharp, yet hesitant and uncertain, desire to start writing again. He had stopped working as journalist after he left Turkey; since then, the only jobs he had found in Italy were in kebab restaurants owned by Turks. He had been asked for articles from journalist friends and he often said he would have liked to write them and had the material for them. Simply, he did not have the time to do it. Baran was working every day, for about twelve hours a day, leaving early in the morning and coming home late when his family was asleep. Monday was his one day off, and usually he spent it resting, doing paperwork and running around various offices, or going to the doctor. Only rarely did he manage to find spare hours to spend with his family. He made very clear that he had no truly free time. His job and all the worries about housing, bills, health, and documents occupied his days and weeks.

Yet, he also made it clear that, despite this lack of time, he wanted to be interviewed and talk about his story. I proposed to split the interview in two or three shorter sessions, and we decided to meet on every second Monday. Since Baran did not speak fluent Italian or English, I decided to work with an interpreter. After discussing the issue, we decided to ask Murat, a Turkish cultural mediator he had met at the centre. However, and despite our efforts, we could not manage to match our arrangements with the schedule of Murat, who was also busy all week with his several jobs. We postponed interviews, trying to find a time suiting everybody. Yet, my own deadlines were approaching, and I decided to start anyway. We were going

to speak Italian, hoping to make the best out of it, and planned to elaborate later with the help of the interpreter.

At first, I was not comfortable at all. I felt we had a significant limitation. I knew that Baran would not be able to tell me everything he wanted to, and that we would drop nuances and details. I was afraid that, other than lacking time, we lacked words as well. Yet, after the first interview, this faulty language we were using produced some unexpected, and favourable, outcomes. Firstly, Baran told me he was enjoying it, because he did not have many chances of practicing a language that even after six years was still deeply unknown. Also, he felt a sort of relief after our conversation:

> When last week I talked to you, for two days I haven't thought. I talked, it came out, and for two-three days I haven't thought. For me it's good, when I talk to somebody like you, then I'm happy. […] I like speaking Italian.[52] (Baran, 18/4/2016)

Gradually, I started noticing that he was choosing words carefully and very sharply, deciding what to articulate and how, what needed to be left off the records, and what required a degree of indefiniteness**.** As another refugee whom I interviewed later made me realize, without the interpreter, "even if I don't know the language, I pick the words I need and put it together … There is no filter." We were inventing a partial, incomplete language, that while leaving a lot unsaid, allowed somehow Baran to master what was said.

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[52] All translations from Italian into English are mine, while Turkish has been translated into Italian by Murat Cinar, to whom I express my gratitude. Since, in the interviews held in Italian, we were effectively "creating" a shared language, I have reported the original transcriptions in footnotes.

Secondly, this tentative conversation required me not to take anything for granted. Ethnography is never a one-way collection of information, and this sense of precariousness made explicit and visible both my presence in the dialogue, and our intersubjective process of meaning making. For instance, he named his condition an "illness" (*malattia* in Italian, and *hastalık* in Turkish), and, despite my annoying attempts to make him define it more precisely, he never abandoned this unresolved word. In this way, we were allowed to talk about an indefinite object – his health condition – using an indefinite language, together construing a sense that was inherently volatile, but, at the same time, capable of comprehending the openness of his experience. What follows is my way of narrating it.

A long trajectory. Our interviews started with the account of his journey through the Italian asylum system. Baran came to Italy in May 2010 with his wife Beritan who was one month pregnant. They arrived through the Balkan route, travelling for three days closed in the back of a truck, without knowing their exact destination. The truck stopped in Udine, a small city in north-eastern Italy, close to the Slovenian border. After a few days, they realized they were in Italy. They stayed in Udine for a week, sleeping in the train station. Then they applied for asylum at the local *Questura* (police station), and were transferred to Napoli, where they were accommodated in a refugee shelter. After five months, Baran was called for the asylum interview at the *Commissione Territoriale* (Local Asylum Board) in Caserta. After a year, he was at last given a decision: he had been granted international protection, and received five-year permission to stay as a refugee. In the meanwhile, Arin was born.

Baran described the life in Napoli as particularly hard:

> Udine then gone Napoli and Napoli there's a life not like Turkey, a life like… Eh… Don't know how you say Italian… [smiling]. Eh… When… As a [homeless shelter], there is a [homeless shelter]… Ten people together, then my wife pregnant, no money, no money, no around, no, always home. Me too, and my wife too, psychology, not good. But always thinking, thinking mother, thinking father, other things. Eh… Here there is not… When come Napoli there's no friend, there's not going out with wife, always inside our home. When little Arin came, all the three of us… Like… Whatever [smiling].[53] (Baran, 28/03/2016)

He explained that they ended up in a reception project where their basic rights as asylum seekers were disregarded. They had a tiny private room, while bathroom and kitchen were shared with fifteen other guests with whom there were daily arguments over the use of common areas. They were not given any food or clothes, nor were they given the money they were entitled to. On several occasions, they were forced to sign receipts for money that was withheld by project workers. They suspected that the mafia was behind the cooperative running the shelter.[54]

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[53] *Udine dopo andato a Napoli e Napoli c'è una vita no come Turchia, una vita come... Eh... Non lo so come dice italiano... [sorride]. Eh... Quando come una Sermig, c'è una Sermig... Dieci persone insieme, poi mia moglie incinta, senza soldi, senza soldi, senza gira, senza sempre casa. Un po' anche io, anche mia moglie psicologi, non va bene. Però sempre pensi, mamma pensi, papà pensi, altra cosa. Eh... Qua non c'è... Quando arriva a Napoli non c'è amico, non c'è quello, giriamo sempre con moglie, sempre dentro casa. Quando arriva piccola Arin, tutti e tre... Come... Va bè [ride].*

[54] In the last few years there have been several investigations of criminal organizations infiltrating asylum centres across the country to make profits (see https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/feb/01/migrants-more-profitable-than-drugs-how-mafia-infiltrated-italy-asylum-system, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/17/world/europe/italy-migrants-mafia-edoardo-scordio.html, https://www.ilpost.it/2015/06/05/mafia-capitale-indagati-tangenti-appalti/, last visited on 28 February 2019)

Also, they felt extremely isolated. The neighbourhood was dangerous and they avoided going out, spending a lot of time alone in their room. Time passed, and they became progressively more nervous and frustrated.

> And so my wife was always crying. Suddenly, I had tachycardia, I felt my heart stopping, I went to the hospital many times. It was terrifying. My wife cried all the times, she wanted to go back to Turkey, she didn't want to stay there anymore. Why did we come here?, she asked me. I tried to give her hope, someday all would have been in the past, today or tomorrow. First, we should get our permission to stay, I said, and then we can go elsewhere. I always gave her hope. Most of all, I was worried about our baby. My wife was pregnant, I know life here was difficult, life conditions were difficult, I was worried she'd been able to deal with all this, while she was pregnant. I hoped she didn't have a miscarriage. So, I tried to support her psychologically, but I wasn't feeling well myself. In Turkey I didn't have such health issues. In Napoli, I was full of thoughts. Sometimes, without saying anything to her, I cried alone. In that period, Napoli was very dirty. There was a lot of fear of mafia, and of garbage in the streets. I wanted to go out, have a walk, but we couldn't. We were all closed in the reception centre. The city was very dirty, so we didn't want to go out of the centre. For a year and a half, we had those problems. (Baran, 25/04/2016)

Afterwards, with the help of a lawyer, they managed to leave Napoli, and move firstly to Rome, and eventually to Alessandria, a small city in the north-west, where they lived for about a year. There, they were accommodated in better conditions, in a small house. At the end of 2012, with the help of a friend, Baran found a job in a kebab restaurant in Torino. He moved there while Beritan and Arin stayed in Alessandria. After a while he was able to save money and rent a small apartment to live with his family. About seven months later, he lost the job at the restaurant. He and Beritan asked Social Services for support and thus managed to

keep the apartment for a while. Eventually they were evicted and ended up sleeping in separate shelters or being hosted by friends. At the beginning of 2015, Social Services agreed to pay the rent for a small studio apartment in social housing run by an NGO, where they are currently living. In the meanwhile, Baran has been employed in different kebab restaurants. After almost two years, they were allocated a council house.

There is a thread underlying Baran's narrative about the life in Italy, a sense of injustice and dispossession. Firstly, he was not granted full rights as an asylum seeker – housing and financial support, language classes, job training programme. Then, after being (partially) admitted into the Italian society as a refugee, he has been exploited as worker. In his position, he cannot but accept a form of semi-illegal labour very common among migrant workers. He holds a part-time contract but is forced to accept different, and underpaid, employment conditions: twelve hours a day, six days a week, for 600 Euro a month. And lastly, about a year ago, he and his wife were notified of two fines totalling about 11,000 Euro that followed a charge of clandestine immigration pressed against them by the police in Udine during the few days they spent trying to understand where they were before applying for asylum. This is something that has no precedent, according to his lawyer, who has asked them to put together all the documents they have as he tries to figure out what can be done. As five years have passed since he first received permission to stay as refugee, Baran is now eligible to apply for Italian citizenship. This would mean not only having full citizenship rights in Italy, at least on paper, but also losing his Turkish citizenship and, later, his police record and jail sentence as well. However, as long as these fines are pending, both Baran and Beritan are prevented from going forward with the application.

Estranged encounters. From time to time, Baran's experience of suffering emerged vividly between the lines, intertwined with the chronicle of his journey through the asylum system. His symptoms were what engaged me when we first met. His question stayed with me: *Why now, right now?* Thus, I suggested we could explore his experience of suffering. My first concern was about the method: how would I going to explore his symptoms ethnographically? Looking into literature on illness narratives, I gathered questionnaires and interview scripts that might help me choose the right questions to ask. I felt I needed a guide not to get lost in the conversation and to get the information I wanted: what was the link between Baran's symptoms and the context in which they emerged?

While preparing for the interviews, the discussions with other clinicians at the centre were of great help, as they urged me to challenge my theoretical considerations with clinical practice and patients in the flesh. Right when I thought I had a good plan, I was given the same warning from two different clinicians, on two different occasions: be careful, because despite your efforts to order the conversation, you are going to deal with some coarse material – to what use will you put it? At first, this term – "coarse material" – puzzled me. Slowly, as I became more familiar with narratives on symptoms, I understood it as a hint towards the inherent plurality of the material I was approaching. I had chosen to investigate experiences of distress as a lens on often neglected contradictions and ambiguities, and because of their disordering potential – a disorder that, with my efforts in finding the right questionnaire, I was trying to avoid. I remembered Foucault, his considerations of the fear related to the possibility of madness and subsequent efforts to disentangle sense from nonsense, reason from non-reason. While discussing my doubts with another clinician, I further realized that I was falling in the very dynamic I was trying to problematize. I was not accepting Baran's narrative in its entirety, rather I was

searching for an instrument that could help me untwine all the threads in the story. I was looking for causal explanations, determinants, and, in the end, for a diagnosis explaining what was hidden behind the manifest signs – resolution instead of acknowledgement (Das, 2007).

Hence, I turned to my clinical background to find a useful perspective on the nonsensical objects emerging in Baran's account of his crises. If, according to Lacan (2006), signs do not merely manifest meaning, but produce meaning, the object of study is not what is veiled by the visible sign – the signified behind the signifier – but the effects of meaning exceeding signification and appearing between the lines, in the elision or overlapping of signifiers. In the course of fieldwork, this portion of meaning, always escaping the unstable, slipping relationship between signifier and signified, is the uncertain ground where ethnographer and informant encounter and share an experience of mutual estrangement and inquietude (Corin, 2012). Following Stevenson, we can approach this uncanny material by imagining a way of expressing without formulating:

> a mode of anthropological listening that makes room for hesitation – a way of listening for that which persistently disrupts the security of what is known for sure. This entails taking the uncertain, the confused–that which is not clearly understood – as a legitimate ethnographic object. … Fieldwork in anthropology often occurs in the shadow of discursive certainties–ways of knowing and acting in the world that keep doubt or uncertainty from emerging. … Ethnography, as I have come to practice it, entails being attentive to – even opening oneself to – those moments when the facts falter and when things (and selves) become, even just slightly, unhinged. (Stevenson, 2014, pos. 163)

With Das (2007), therefore, I consider the experience of illness as an experience of movement between registers – normal/abnormal,

ordinary/extraordinary. Looking at symptoms as assemblages, as allegorical archives bridging debris of past events and traces of present dispossession (Beneduce, 2016), I ask what emerges through them and through their unfinished narratives. I will follow a thread, that of temporality, for how it intertwines, overlaps, or collapses into, other dimensions, to evoke a resonance between different states of marginality, asking what are their productive effects, and costs (Beneduce, 2015b), and what is at stake in our political and moral order (Kleinman & Kleinman, 1991).

Critical times. In Baran's account of illness, individual experience is embedded in the background of social processes and context. However, the relationship between the two figures is far from that of a theatrical play, in which a subject is acting against a scene of objects. Rather, it is much closer to Vincent Crapanzano's descriptions of imaginative processes as "fuzzy horizons … that always accompany experience and resist full articulation", constantly emerging in a "dialectic between openness and closure" (2004). In Baran's narrative, a personal crisis is articulated amidst its surrounding, and also critical, circumstances. His body, as an ever-present horizon of life events, is the place where his personal time entangles itself, while cultural, intersubjective, communicable time (de Martino, 1977) keeps flowing.

I asked Baran on several occasions to describe his moments of crisis, recalling past episodes. In his accounts, he moved through different modes of reasoning, from causal attributions to analogies and implicit contrasts. He associated the onset of his crises with an overburden of thoughts, describing a sequence made up of headaches, a burning sensation on his face, followed by nausea, vomiting and, eventually, fainting.

I don't have any fellows here, don't… What can we do? That's why I always think. Arin arrived, Arin was born, no home, no money. I think of family… And what can I do? What can we do? A life… I don't know. Life, sorry… Life shit. I always think that. And when I think, headache… This… When… Ehm… I arrived here, there are problems, rent, this… I always want go Turkey, I want go. But there are problems there. Because of these problems, I ran. Me too I want to go Turkey, there's mom, dad, brother. There's two houses… There's job too, there's money too… What can I do? Twice my dad sent money here, my dad told me: I always send money… We have a lot of problems too. I said: don't send, I look for a job. Because of that, I always think… Now when I sleep at night, always… At night, always cry. When I sleep, I always cry. When there's problem, I headache, always headache. Perhaps this is how illness came. Then, don't eat nothing, no vitamins, no… Just eat bread. Now, when I eat an apple, a… Other kind, always ill. … Yes, Turkey more… Don't think that. Ehm… We Turkish citizenship. But there's a problem, problem of Kurds. Language. The other place, there's job… But there's a problem of politics. I don't think that, don't think permission, don't think… That, this problem. Arrived here, what can we do to get a permission? What can we do? This, I go there, I don't understand nothing, there's no language… Don't understand reading, this culture, writing… I always think that. When I go hospital or I go… This I don't understand nothing. Because of that, I always think think, ehm… There's a lot of problems…. Always think those… I go to apply for permission of stay, a week, every day there's problem.[55] (Baran, 28/3/2016)

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[55] *Non c'è mio paesano qua, non… Cosa facciamo. Per quello io sempre pensa. Arriva H., nata H., senza casa, senza soldi. Pensa famiglia… E come fa? Come facciamo? Una vita… Non lo so. Vita, scusa… Vita merda. Io sempre penso questo. E quando pensa, mal di testa, mal di… Questo. Quando… Ehm… Arrivato qua, c'è problemi, affitto, questo… Io voglio sempre va Turchia, io voglio va. Ma lì c'è problemi. Per questo problemi, io scappato. Anche io voglio va, c'è Turchia mamma, papà, fratello. C'è due casa… C'è anche lavoro, c'è anche soldi… Cosa*

> When I have headache, I vomit, I close my eyes and can't open them again. Once it happened at work, I was talking to clients, and I closed my eyes. They asked me: why are you closing your eyes? I said: I don't know, an illness, I don't understand it either. After ten minutes, I fell down. […] Last time it happened when I asked my boss to go home, after I finished my shift. The boss told me to go, but one of my colleagues told me: where are you going? Work another three hours, there is a lot to do. I told him I live far from there and I would have come back next morning. He got angry, we argued, I called our boss. He told it wasn't my fault, and told him to go back to work. He left the job. When he left, I got nervous. When I got home, my face was all red. Beritan asked me: why is your face all red? I talked to her, then my eyes closed and I fell down. (Baran, 2/5/2016)

One afternoon, I was called by Beritan, telling me that Baran was at the hospital. He had suffered one of his crises, and she asked me to go there and stay with him until she came back from picking Arin up from school. After a few days, we met again and he recounted the episode.

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faccio? Due volta mio papà mandato soldi qua, anche mio papà detto: sempre io manda soldi… Per noi anche c'è tanto problemi. Io detto: no manda, io cerca lavoro. Per quello io sempre pensa… Quando adesso io notte dorme, sempre… Notte, sempre piange. Quando io dorme, io sempre piange. Quando c'è problema, io mal di testa, sempre mal di testa. Forse questa malattia arriva così. Poi, no mangia niente, senza vitamine, senza… Solo, mangio pane. Adesso quando io mangia una mela, una… Altro tipo, sempre male. … Sì, Turchia più… No pensa questo. Ehm… Noi, cittadinanza turchi. Però c'è un problema, problema di curdi. Lingua. Dall'altra parte, c'è lavoro… Però c'è un problema di politica. Io non pensa questo, non pensa permesso, non pensa… Quello, questo problema. Arriva qua, cosa facciamo per prendere permesso? Cosa facciamo? Questo, va di qua, non capisce niente, non c'è lingua… Non capisce leggere, questa cultura, scrive… Io sempre pensa questo. Quando va ospedale o va… Questo non capisce niente. Per quello sempre pensa pensa, ehm… C'è tanti problemi… Sempre pensa questi… Io va per fare domanda per permesso di soggiorno, un settimana, tutti i giorni c'è problema.

Baran: In the morning, I want go work. When I wake up, first headache, then how when I want go toilet. When I wake up, I like drunk. Headache. Then I… I fell down. My head… Floor. After five, five ten minutes, I want to vomit. When vomited, close eye. I don't know what I have done until… Morning… Close eye until three. Eh… No open, no hear, no… No how I went to hospital, what they did, no. Not heard, not seen. After when I hospital, I wake up at three. Eh… Three, three and a half. And when night… When I think… When there is a problem, I think, and because of that… Perhaps… There's that problem. […] Up to now… I forgot how to laugh. Really, I forgot how to laugh. Always there's… When there's problem I think. And when I go work, my friends joke with me, I can't laugh. I don't know how to laugh, how… For this reason, when there's problems I always think. I want to laugh, [hanging] around, [hanging] around with friend. When there is family problem… I only see job, I think do this, do that. Other… I haven't understood what I do.

Francesca: What do you mean, you don't understand?

B.: Ehm… When there's problem, I do a… a… a small thing, I don't understand what I do. What I do. But I do, I don't understand what, how I do.

F.: [Remembering that in a previous interview he told me that when he's working, sometimes he starts thinking, and then he makes mistakes, without realising what he's doing] Alright. That is, you, for instance, when you're at work, you do something and don't understand what you're doing?

B.: Yes.

F.: As if your mind were elsewhere?

B.: Yes. But that thing I always do… Yes [moving his hands like he was making something].

F.: Alright. So, hands are working…

B.: Yes, it works, that works! [Laughing]. But head… Eh, out of order! [Laughing].

[…]

B.: [The doctors have told me] When pay attention eat this, eat this, then you do check-up, this goes away, this illness goes away. And I now, I have told them, three years always there's this illness. I did a lot of tests, did, a lot of doctors, went many times hospital, never gone away. I told them, I told I wait now.[56] (Baran, 23/05/2016)

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[56] Baran: *Alle mattina io voglio va lavoro. Quando io sveglia, prima mal di testa, dopo come quando io voglio va bagno. Quando io sveglia come un ubriaco. Mal di testa. Dopo io... Io caduto. Mia testa... Pavimento. Dopo cinque minu..., cinque dieci minuti, voglio vomitare. Quando vomitato, chiude occhio. Non lo so io cosa fatto fino alle... Alle mattina alle... Chiude occhio fino alle sera tre. Eh... No aperto, no sentito, no... No mai come andato ospedale, come cosa fatto loro, no. Non sentito, mai visto. Dopo quando io ospedale, alle tre sveglia. Eh... Tre, tre mezza. E quando sera... Quando io pensa... Quando c'è un problema, io pensa, per quello... Forse... Quello problema c'è. […] Fino adesso... Io dimenticato per ridere. Veramente, io dimenticato come ridere. Sempre c'è... Quando c'è problema pensa. E quando io va lavoro, mio amici fa scherzo per me, no posso ridere. Io non lo so come ridere, come... Per quello quando c'è problemi io sempre pensa. Io voglio ridere, gira, gira con amica. Quando c'è problema di famiglia di... Io solo guarda lavoro, pensa fai questo fai questo. Altra... Io no capito cosa fai io.*

Francesca: *Cosa vuol dire che non hai capito?*

B.: *Ehm... Quando c'è problema, io fa una... Una, una... Una cosa piccola, io no capito cosa faccio io. Cosa fatto io. Cosa fatto. Però io fa, io no capito cosa, come fatto io.*

F.: *[Ricordo che in una intervista precedente mi ha detto che al lavoro a volte, quando gli vengono i pensieri, gli capita di sbagliare, di non accorgersi di cosa sta facendo] Ok. Cioè, vuoi dire che tu, ad esempio quando sei al lavoro, tu fai una cosa e non capisci cosa stai facendo?*

B.: *Sì.*

F.: *Come se la tua testa fosse da un'altra parte?*

B.: *Sì. Però quella cosa io fa sempre.... Sì. [Fa un gesto, mimando di lavorare con le mani].*

F.: *Ok. Quindi le mani funzionano...*

B.: *Sì, funziona, quello funziona! [ride]. Però testa... Eh, fuori service! [ride].*

[…]

Zooming in on this recent scene of crisis, Baran described his experience of a breakdown in the flow of time. When thoughts accumulate in his head, he loses consciousness and later wakes up experiencing a brief discontinuation in his memory. While the external time continues in its rhythm, psychic time halts, and Baran perceives a misalignment between his temporal practice – his own subjective dispositions and production of time – and the ungovernable logics of the social world. As Pierre Bourdieu (2000a) argues, time is experienced in this discrepancy, when the coincidence between expectations and chances is broken, when we feel "a breaking of the tacit collusion between the course of the world – astronomical movements (such as the cycle of the seasons) or biological processes (as ageing), or social processes (such as family life cycles or bureaucratic careers), over which we have less than full power or no power at all – and the internal movements which relate to them [...]" (p. 208). In Baran's account, however, this breach does not remain as a vacuum, but allows for a process of gradual, and tentative, re-articulation between past and present, internal and external, private and public, time.

> This illness, in my opinion, is related with the suffering I lived in the past. What was it? For instance, if think what I experienced in Turkey, I think of my work as journalist, it's related with being in jail, I faced torture. They abused me, I was battered, I still have signs on my body: I lived those things. And then I have been in Italy for six years. First time I arrived in Italy we went to Napoli, we experienced several problems. […] All this together, a period of six years, all the problems I had

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B.: *[I dottori mi hanno detto] Quando fa attenzione mangi questo, mangi questo, dopo fa controllo, questa passa, questa malattia passa. E io adesso, io ho detto loro, tre anni sempre questa malattia c'è. Io fatto tanti esami, fatto, tanti dottori, andato tanto ospedale, no passato mai. Ha detto loro, ha detto aspetto adesso.*

in this period now are beginning to bear fruits. The cause of my illness is this difficult time. I have been to several hospitals, I have seen several doctors, I took several medications, but it didn't pass. Headache, red face, I get nausea, I vomit, I fell down, I faint and I find myself at the hospital. And I live this at least once a month. Now I'm working, but I work a lot, and they pay me not much. Working in a kebab, I don't want to do it. It's a difficult job, filthy, hard, and I think I have skin rash because of the meat's grease. I'd like to do another job, for instance for the City Council, or for a private firm, or in any firm, a shop. Maybe getting a decent salary, maybe I could be better, this problem might pass. In this way, my illness might pass. Back then, I was unemployed, back then I had these faintings once a week. Now it happens less frequently, like once or twice a month. But I'd like to find another job. I'd like to stay away from this job I'm doing now. It's a very stressful, exhausting job, and I'm disgusted. It's a filthy job. It's a stressful, and boring, job. Maybe if I had found another place, I'd been better. I'm looking right now, I applied for different positions, and I'm waiting for an answer. (Baran, 25/4/2016)

And when… Ehm, always work, this work work, ehm… How say? Twelve or thirteen hours of work, a bit of tired, always I want, I don't want this job. And when I think of this jo… That thing, always headache. I quit job, and then what I do? When don't quit job, always job problem. There's two… I quit job, there's four people hunger. And when I don't quit job, my job… My head… [touching his head].

[…]

A lot of time I've spoken to my boss, I want seven hours. Seven hours, eight hours, for me enough. He says, you don't want, quit, go. There's a lot of people coming without a job, without… Two days, yes, came… An Afghan. I want to learn the job, he doesn't pay me money, twelve hours. […] Want to learn. He says, there's a lot, if you quit, tomorrow I have other five, six people.

[…]

For that arrived 12,000 Euro [notification of fine], I spoke to a lawyer, with Beritan together talked, he said, take those documents, everything you got up to now. […] For that, I think, what, what do I do with it, what we do with it? […] And when I erase this fine… A bit of… Calm, calm. […] And now I can't apply for citizenship, for long-term permission to stay. […] And now, six years here, must apply for citizenship. […] And when you get citizenship, that Turkey, that all problems gone. […] Ehm… When I get here documents, Turkey my documents all erase. And… Also, a lot of friends Italy got documents… Turkey erases all that documents, all. And when get document, a bit of calm, there's no problem. After fifteen years go Turkey. Fifteen year, twenty years later… Now Turkey there's… When I now nine years this, when go Turkey, nine years you must go jail… […] Nine years. And when new… […] Twenty years later, they erase it. They say, no found this, erase. […] Because of this, I want to get Italian documents.[57] (Baran, 23/05/2016)

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[57] *E quando... Ehm, sempre lavoro, quel lavoro lavoro, ehm... Come dice? 12 o 13 ore al lavoro, un po' di stanco, sempre io voglio, no voglio questo lavoro. E quando io pensa questo lav... Quello cosa, sempre mal testa. Lascia lavoro, e dopo cosa fa? Quando no lascia lavoro, sempre lavoro così problema. C'è due... Io lascia lavoro, c'è quattro persone fame. Io quando io no lascia lavoro, lavoro... Mia testa... [si tocca la testa].*

[…]

Tante volte io parlato con capo, io voglio sette ore. Sette ore, otto ore, per me basta. Lui dice, non vuoi, lascia, vai. C'è tante persone viene senza lavoro, senza... Due giorni, sì, è arrivato un... Un afghano. Io voglio imparare lavoro, lui no paga me per soldi, 12 ore. […] Per vuoi imparare. Lui dice, c'è tanti, se lascia, arriva domani cinque, sei persone.

[…]

Per quello arriva 12.000 euro Equitalia, io parlato con un avvocato, con Beritan insieme parlato, lui ha detto, prendi quello documenti, tutto quello arrivato fino adesso. […] Per quello, io pensa, cosa, cosa faccio con questo, cosa facciamo questo? […] E quando cancello questa multa... Un po' di... Tranquillo, tranquillo. […] E adesso non posso far domanda per cittadinanza, per carta soggiorno. […] E adesso, sei anni di qua, deve far domanda per cittadinanza. […] E quando prendi cittadinanza, quello Turchia, quello tutto problema è finito. […] Ehm... Quando io prende qua documenti, Turchia mio documenti tutto cancella. E... Anche

Conclusions. Temporal fractures, disordered worlds

In this chapter, citizenship was considered a trajectory crossing sites and registers. Initially outlined as a relationship between the person and the state, the construct of citizenship was unfolded, thus inscribing the different angles entailed (as status, category, project, practice, belonging, recognition) in a broader perspective. Hence, the analysis addressed the relation of the individual with different forms of power as being incorporated in the process of subject formation, and as one of register of subjectivity. Furthermore, two particular traits of subjectification were evoked. Firstly, I considered its repetitive nature, as a process producing and proliferating at once, thus creating an excess. Secondly, I described it as an intersection of flows, a moving machine encountering other machines, crossing each other, and generating cuts, fragments and misfires.

Subsequently, I employed this theoretical framework to reframe the notion of "conjunctures" as intersections of dimensions ranging from the social and the political, to the subjective and psychological. By assuming this as an object of study, I looked at conjunctures not as knots to be disentangled, but as unstable scenes reflecting the dialogue between the different threads. A dialogue that is not always

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tanti amici Italia prende tutto documenti, fa... Turchia cancella tutto quello documenti, tutto. E quando prende documenti, un po' di tranquillo, non c'è problema. Dopo 15 anni va Turchia. 15 anni, 20 anni dopo... Adesso Turchia c'è uno cosa... Quando io adesso 9 anni così c'è, quando va Turchia, 9 anni devi entra garella [galera]… […] Nove anni. E quando nuova... 20 anni dopo, quello cancella. […] 20 anni dopo, cancella questo. Loro dice, no trovato questo, cancella. […] Sì, per quello io voglio prendere documenti italiani.

utterable, and includes silences and opacities. Moreover, this framework provided a starting point for the investigation – that of excess, of the residues lying at the margins of the articulable.

Finally, I presented a case study, entering the world of a refugee man and co-constructing with him a story. Following the narrative of his experience of a fractured time, I examined the overlapping, crossing and contrasting of different forms of power. I came across macro forces, such as national and supranational migration laws, bureaucracies and policies, that are also fields of conflicts between different political factions. I considered the ways in which those laws are practiced at a micro level, with different degrees of discretion, and how they can, or cannot, be negotiated. Besides, I observed powerful non-state actors: NGOs running reception facilities, organized crime groups profiting from mismanagement and corruption, and local, informal economies of exploitation. The result is a discourse: a faulty, uncertain and sometimes obscure account of the blend of sense and nonsense, acts and slips, present in the asylum system. Yet, something exceeds this discourse, obstructing and unsettling it. Symptoms emerge as misfires, residues of the discourse slipping through words, but continuing to be productive. Symptoms are not confined in private experience; rather, they create echoes, generating other misfires in the machine.

Thus, the analysis employed symptoms as a heuristic device – a lens refracting the effects of arbitrariness on the life of a refugee. I followed a fragmented temporality to investigate the asylum system through its processes of production of precarious subjectivities. Disordered states allowed me to trace the work of ordering mechanisms, bordering and marginalizing practices. I saw that, only for an instant, Baran's crisis disturbs the social flow of time, allowing the observer to discern the processes through which individual experiences articulate with social

worlds. An ordering system producing disordering effects gets entangled in a psychic disorder, thus generating a moment of potential reordering.

Baran presents me with the scene of a collapse, where different temporalities precipitate, falling onto each other. The past struggles of a young Kurdish journalist in Turkey are echoed in the disillusioned expectations of life in a Europe of rights and wealth flowing into a dispossessed present. Baran's social time is evoked through the materiality of his world: a repulsive but inevitable job and a pile of undone, ever lacking, documents. It is a time of production, working by means of productive, but still, citizens. It is a restricted motion, a stuck temporality, which is spinning around, but is not really moving on – turning around, but not turning over. Baran's own time is embroiled in this collective dynamic, and he follows the rhythm. When they are synchronized, social time contains personal time. At some point, however, when Baran cannot keep pace and stumble, lagging behind, his psychic time comes to a halt, turning into a time of unproductiveness. In this suspension, the machine's gears get stuck, and psychic time exceeds the borders of social time, opening a breach and triggering a momentary change of tempo.

5. An empty room: Feeling breathless in a disorienting space

In the previous chapter I analysed the effects of the encounter with the asylum system by looking at Baran's experience of suffering as a critical conjuncture of social, political, historical dimensions, and individual trajectories. I considered the interplay between ordering intents, disordering consequences, and moments of tentative re-articulation. Baran's experience of a fractured time reflected a discrepancy between a collective, unbearable temporality, and his efforts in re-possessing a more personal time: "*Nós não precisamos de mais tempo. Nós precisamos de um tempo que seja nosso*", in the words of the Mozambican writer Mia Couto.[58]

The previous chapter has examined the work of restrictive policies, by considering how they affect the everyday experience of time. Following these reflections, this chapter employs the experience of space as a lens through which analyse migrants' efforts towards place-making in a condition of precarity. This chapter analyses a process of transition, focusing on how a foreign space is experienced. I will follow Lily, a refugee woman, in her effort to find a place in a new world and to acquaint herself with it. When I meet her, she is about to leave the asylum system, moving from being a dependent user of the SPRAR project[59] to becoming an autonomous, self-supporting citizen. According to the guidelines

[58] I am grateful to Simona Taliani for suggesting this quote.

[59] SPRAR is the acronym for *Sistema di Protezione per Richiedenti Asilo e Rifugiati* (Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees). See Chapter 2 for a description of the Italian network of reception projects for asylum seekers and refugees.

(*SPRAR. Manuale operativo*, 2015), the main goal of SPRAR is to be "emancipatory"[60] – it works toward promoting migrants' social inclusion through personal independence and empowerment. As Rose (1999) puts it, under neoliberalism the welfare system governs through freedom, by shifting away from the state the responsibility of providing, and placing it on the individual, through the language of empowerment. All the project recipients have "individual programmes" or "paths" aimed at developing their well-being, and eventually to "re-acquire their personal autonomy". In other words, the project is temporary. It is framed as a phase of transition during which a transformation occurs or is supposed to occur. The project is a device – or a manifold, sometimes incoherent, set of devices – aimed at producing productive and independent subjects fit for the new environment. This is the end goal, when transition can be considered complete.

However, in some cases, this transitional phase can last for years, itself becoming a world to which one must adjust, with its own cultures, values and practices. Also, it can entail a series of additional, fractal transitions. In other words, the trajectory in the asylum system can take the shape of a chain or a cyclical sequence, of passages from one temporary state to another. Integration, as the key objective of the reception system, becomes more a horizon than a reachable intent. All those passages entail a form of precarity: a precarious citizenship status, a precarious accommodation, a precarious job. And even when transition seems to lead up to a more durable temporality, the sense of belonging, of having finally found a place, is always revocable (Meloni, 2019). Thus, precarity changes its shape but is rarely overcome.

[60] See also Chapter 2.

Following the considerations discussed in Chapter 3, I look at the ways in which precarity is produced through dispossession by combining two perspectives. Firstly, with Butler (2004, 2009), I look at dispossession as inherent to human relationships and, still, differentially allocated. From this perspective dispossession can be defined as a form of disownment and abjection: pre-existing norms of intelligibility define who counts as subject and who does not, who can be recognized as fully human and allocated rights, and who is superfluous, and foreclosed from the human. Following Butler and Athanasiou (2013), I consider displacement as a form of dispossession. Migration policies aim at producing "bodies-in-place", that is, bodies that can be put in their proper place. When the proper place corresponds to subjugation (not-being, and not-having) precarity is produced. "Bodies-out-of-place" represent acts of defiance, emerging from the "refusal to stay in, or to move to, one's assigned proper place" (ivi, pos. 398).

Secondly, I look at dispossession as a psychic loss. In his unfinished work on apocalypses, Ernesto de Martino (1964, 1977) argues that human beings are constantly confronted with a risk of radical crisis. According to the author, we are exposed to a permanent risk of loss of presence, of not being in any possible world, or in any communicable intersubjectivity. Our lifeworlds are on the edge of a collapse that we strive, by any means, to prevent or to redeem. De Martino describes psychic crisis as a lived experience of radical alterity. Crisis begins with a world that is changing, because it is losing its "givenness". From being something that is taken for granted, the physical world ceases to be perceived as familiar – domestic or domesticable (*domestico e addomesticabile*), in de Martino's words. Therefore, crisis is related to the perception of being-acted-by, and of being dispossessed. The author emphasizes how the relationship between human beings and world requires continuous investment, for it needs to be constantly re-established against the

permanent threat of dissolution. This work of construction and re-construction is a work of signification and symbolization, through which the anxiety of crisis is contained.

Drawing on those considerations, I will analyse Lily's experience of suffering, and of struggle, through the lens of dispossession, thus investigating the relationship between political and psychic forms of destitution, between disownment, misrecognition, and the risk of radical crisis. I will begin my considerations by describing how I was affected by the encounter with Lily and how I saw affects circulate as I followed her around. I will then elaborate on the ways in which affects contribute to orient people toward, or away from, each other, describing the process through which the relational space around Lily is thus constituted, inhabited, and shaped. Finally, I will analyse Lily's crisis as a twofold discourse: a narrative exposing and capturing the paradoxes of the asylum system, and a potential critical space within that system – a tentative, momentary space of movement, imagination, and even subversion.

My encounter with Lily

I meet Lily in December 2015. I am conducting fieldwork in Torino, and I have been involved in the new university programme for refugee students. I participate in the programme both as part of my fieldwork and as a volunteer. My role is to coordinate the study group, facilitating senior students in helping refugee first-year students to adjust to the new environment. I am introduced to Lily during one of the first meetings of the group. We are talking about the first part of the semester and the impact of the university. Lily talks about her difficulties with the new language:

she cannot follow classes or figure out how to use her student page on the university website. We begin to meet regularly, in the library, or for a coffee. I help her find her bearings in the new environment and I start to know her. Lily is an Iranian woman in her mid-forties. She enrolled at the university a few months before her time in the reception centre ended. Her caseworker helped her choose and enrol in an undergraduate course in foreign languages and cultures. Lily has benefitted from a recent university policy[61] allowing refugees a tuition fee waiver. In addition, she has successfully applied for a scholarship[62] which provides a monetary contribution for living costs.

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[61] Following other European higher education institutions (see https://www.eua.eu/101-projects/541-refugees-welcome-map.html, last visited on 7 March 2019), since 2015, some universities in Italy have been developing programmes to promote integration of refugees. In addition to existing resources for international students (such as language classes, international student's office, etc.), the principal measures introduced are tuition fee waivers, and information services.

For refugees wanting to access higher education, the main issue is the recognition of previous qualifications, such as secondary school diploma or university degree. This is mandatory and can significantly delay, and even prevent, enrolment. Each university is competent to admit students but the evaluation process of foreign qualifications is allocated to a national centre – CIMEA (*Centro di Informazione sulla Mobilità e le Equivalenze Accademiche – Information Centre on Academic Mobility and Equivalence*). To apply, students are required to submit their diplomas with the certified translations of the detail of their programme of studies (courses syllabi, hours, etc.). This process can be particularly difficult for students coming from countries at war, or, more generally, who cannot access their school's office and database. For more information on the evaluation process, see http://www.cimea.it/en/index.aspx and http://qualifyme.it/, last visited on 7 March 2019.

[62] After enrolling at the University of Torino, refugees, as other international students, can apply for scholarships from EDISU (*Ente Regionale per il Diritto allo Studio Universitario – Regional Agency for the Right to Higher Education*). This is a government agency providing services (financial contributions towards living costs, free accommodation in student halls, and free or discounted access to university canteens) to university students. To apply for scholarships first year students must meet only economic

From the very beginning, she has made clear that she does not like the course she had chosen. She has an Iranian degree in chemistry and worked for many years as manager of a chemical plant. At the time of enrolment, Lily's first choice was a master's degree in chemistry. She attended a few classes but it was too difficult because of the language. She asked for advice and then changed to foreign languages, thinking it would be easier. But it was not. She is not fluent in Italian, and thus cannot follow the classes or textbooks. She is afraid of not being able to pass exams: she risks losing the scholarship for the next year, but also having to return the scholarship of the current year. If this happens she will have a debt of around 7,000 Euros to EDISU, the Regional Agency for the Right to Higher Education.

When I talk to Lily, I am slightly bewildered. I cannot understand her choices. My first reaction would be to ask why she has put herself in this position. To me, it looks like an irrational decision or a mistake. She is about to leave the reception centre that provides her accommodation, food, healthcare, and pocket money: what will happen afterward? Why did she enter a course she is not interested in, and which is too difficult, instead of finding a job and a house? I am not completely naïve. I know that it is not easy to find a job, especially a high-skilled job, for a mature immigrant woman. Most likely, she could start with a low-wage job in a restaurant or as a cleaner. In the meantime, she could apply for the validation of her non-European degree.[63] It is a long process and the outcome is uncertain, but it is an

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requirements; from their second year on, qualification criteria are also based on GPA and credits.

[63] There are two different procedures for validating a foreign degree to enrol in a university course, for both of which universities are competent, or validating a foreign degree for practicing a regulated profession (such as chemist), for which the ministry is competent.

option. The choice of enrolling in this course may have a detrimental effect and can worsen her condition. Perhaps her dignity and her sense of self are at stake, and she is choosing what allows her to preserve it? While I acknowledge this, I am also impressed by the costs she is paying in terms of frustration, anxiety and of possibly worsening her situation.

In Italian, my mother tongue, I describe my feeling as *spaesamento,* a word composed of *paese* (country, or village – an inhabited land) and the privative suffix *s-*. *Spaesamento* expresses the feeling of being out of a familiar place, and, more generally, of feeling uneasy, confused, for having lost the habitual reference points. *Bewildered*, the English word I chose as a translation, involves the idea of wilderness, a place not inhabited by humans. With Lily, I feel that I cannot rely on my usual coordinates, on that which I take for granted, and I am disoriented. As has happened before during my fieldwork, I am touched by this encounter.

As Sara Ahmed (2004) argues emotions leave marks on people. We are impressed by others, others impress upon us, and the traces are shaped by the histories of past contacts. Ahmed employs the term "affect" to emphasize the relationality of emotions. According to the author, affects are not psychological (inside the person), nor social (outside the person), and neither psychological *and* social. In other words, emotions do not originate in the individual and then circulate socially. They are not *in* the body. Rather, they are crucial to the very constitution of bodies: "emotions work to shape the 'surfaces' of individual and collective bodies" (p. 1), creating "the very effect of the surfaces and boundaries that allow us to distinguish an inside and an outside in the first place" (p. 10). Our skins are porous and vulnerable. Vulnerability implies a bodily relation to the world: it is not inherent to some bodies (such as the feminine, the racialized, etc.); rather, it is an effect of those relations. We are shaped by, and take the shape of, contact with others,

through the repetition of actions, and through orientations towards and away from others.

These two points need to be clarified further. Firstly, in arguing that emotions work through repetition, Ahmed draws on Butler's notion of performativity, as the "power of discourse to produce effects through reiteration" (1993, p. 20). By emphasizing the performative nature of discourse, Butler shows how a signifier does not simply name an existing object, but produces a set of effects, and therefore "makes" what it names. Reiteration refers to the temporality of this process: signifiers materialize what is "not yet" depending upon what has already been said, that is, previous norms and conventions. Performativity works by repeating existing conventions – but in repetition there is always a (structural) possibility for a difference, and thus for resignification (Butler, 1993).[64] Drawing on Lacan's theory of the chain of signifiers (1977), Ahmed employs the term "stickiness" to refer to "the attachments that implicitly govern ways in which signs work with other signs" (2004, p. 93), and that are related to the historicity of signification.

Secondly, Ahmed argues that affects[65] are relational and intentional. They depend upon touch and proximity, and involve "(re)actions or relations of 'towardness' or 'awayness' in relation to […] objects" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 8). The author employs the image of a double movement also to show how emotions are deeply ambivalent. Ambivalence is often concealed, and rarely made explicit. When we move toward an object, for love, attraction, or desire, and then feel a negative affect, we pull back, forgetting the previous intention. It is as if the object moved

[64] See also Chapter 4.

[65] Ahmed employs the word "affect" to refer to emotions and feelings, for it conveys also the sense of leaving a mark, having an effect (affecting).

toward us, and not the contrary. Therefore, we identify the object as the cause of the feeling; for instance, I feel disgusted because you are disgusting, I feel afraid because you are fearsome, etc.. In this respect, encounters imply an emotional orientation and re-orientation towards others.

In orienting myself toward Lily, I feel slightly disoriented. The mark left on me by this encounter is the feeling I name *spaesamento*, bewilderment. I cannot identify just one emotion, and this is perhaps the reason why I feel disoriented. The impression she has left on me is complex, multiple, and, ultimately, ambivalent. I feel empathy and respect, while, at once, I feel defied by her attitude, that I perceive as firmly illogical, and possibly self-harmful. I cannot even choose a coherent reaction. Should I help her to get what she wants? Or should I persuade her to change her mind? In other words, I feel torn between re-orienting myself in her direction, or trying to re-orient her toward mine. All in all, it is the lack of sense, of a shared sense, that puzzles me.

The circulation of affects

However, while following Lily around, I start noticing that I am not the only one who feels a sense of bewilderment before her. As a volunteer for the refugee students' project, I help her with all the issues related to university life, such as documentation, exams, accommodation. At the end of the first semester, we go together to a small association supporting migrants for the validation of non-European degrees and offering career guidance. We meet with Laura, a case worker who is very kind, and seems experienced. Despite this, the meeting is a failure, ending in misunderstanding and mutual bother. The circumstances do not help:

there is a linguistic gap between Lily and Laura, and since it is the first time I have met Laura and her association, we probably have different expectations about each other's role. But the misunderstanding does not stem from a lack of language. Rather, it is precisely when we clarify Lily's intentions that Laura begins to look confused and somewhat annoyed. There is a bureaucratic knot. The validation of her degree is not compatible with being a university student. If she wants to apply for the validation, she should drop out of the university, and renounce the scholarship for the current academic year. She would still be able to enrol again for the next academic year. While this is reasonable and convenient for Laura, it is not an option for Lily. In trying to help, I back Lily's position, probably worsening the misunderstanding. In Laura's eyes, I should be the one who shares her same orientation, and perhaps this is the reason why my illogical position is even more disorienting. At one point, when Laura asks Lily to show her Iranian university certificates, Lily starts crying. Pointing to a paper's header with the court's symbol of the scales of justice, Lily begins remembering things from her past. We try to reassure her, and she calms down. We leave the office with nothing done and in a bad mood. Laura looks exasperated, I am frustrated, and Lily looks very upset. She is nervous, agitated, and asks me several times what she should do.

On another occasion, I see a similar reaction. When Lily is about to leave the reception centre, I help her get in touch with a religious association offering cheap (and in some cases, free) accommodation for foreign students who cannot afford to pay the high rents of a university city. We meet with Giovanni, a volunteer. He begins asking Lily some personal questions that are necessary for him to find the right kind of accommodation. Where are you from? How old are you? Do you have a job? But Lily's answers confuse him. She is a university student in her forties, living on a scholarship. Gradually, it looks like Giovanni's questions start to stem from personal

curiosity rather than from the professional task of finding a suitable solution, and end up being inappropriate. He seems engaged in trying to make sense of an unfamiliar "object" that escapes his system of classification. After the meeting, Giovanni raises some doubts about the situation, and tells us that he will need some time to think about Lily's request. Lily looks tired and upset. She asks me if I think that this is "good for her" and I do not know what to answer. After a few days, Giovanni calls me. He makes clear that he needs some more "assurances" about Lily, and asks me some other (and definitely out of line) questions: how does she support herself without a job, only with a scholarship? Does she have a partner? What is her background? Is she in treatment with a psychologist? After about two months, we call the association. Lily is worried because she has to leave the project in a month. Carla, the new case worker, tells us that they have not found suitable accommodation for Lily yet because she is "unusual". But she also tells us not to worry, they will find something. Indeed, after a few weeks, Carla calls Lily, offering her a place in the *Rifugio Diffuso* project. This is a small-scale project within the SPRAR system, aimed at promoting more effective forms of social inclusion of refugees while encouraging active citizenship. Volunteer families offer a room in their house to a refugee for six months (up to a year), receiving a monthly allowance of about 300 Euros to cover their expenses. The project also involves associations already working in the SPRAR system, with the task of putting into contact families and refugees, offering support with possible issues, and enabling all the services provided by SPRAR (language classes, job training, legal support, psychological counselling).

Lily is relieved to have found a place but also discouraged. After almost three years, she was hoping to leave the project and to find a "real" home. After a few months, she is offered a three-month paid internship as part of the project. She is

going to work for 30 hours a week in a chemical plant producing the same products as her former job site. Since she is an intern, her monthly salary amounts to approximately 400 Euros, less than a third of a factory worker's salary. Her contract does not include the usual standards, such as overtime compensation, paid annual leave, paid sick leave, and other means of social protection. She feels that this is a good opportunity, but expresses the desire to continue also with her university course in order to keep the scholarship. Carla calls me, asking for help in persuading Lily to "invest" her energies in this internship. She had imagined that this offer would have induced Lily to choose rationally. She expresses clearly her orientation – an orientation she shares with her community – and the coordinates of her "local moral world" (Kleinman & Kleinman, 1991): "Lily should picture herself either as a student, but with no real chances, or as an independent worker. She has to settle for what she gets. She can't afford to make a mistake," Carla says.

In the meantime, we have made things a little clearer with Laura. She and Lily have met a few times to prepare the documents for the validation of her degree. But when Lily goes to the university office for the application, she chooses not to apply for the validation of her Iranian degree, but to enrol again for a master's degree in chemistry. I get a call from Laura, who tells me what happened. She sounds very annoyed. She has worked a lot with Lily to clarify all the options, and to "guide" her toward the best choice: leaving the university course she is not interested in, applying for the validation of her Iranian degree, in order to find (or hoping to find) a job for which she has the experience. Now that Lily seems to be so obstinately attached to her irrational choices, Laura feels she has been fooled. My first thought is: we are back to square one. I am concerned, because I do not know what consequences this choice will have. I picture Lily as walking around in a very small circle without being able to take a lateral step. I call her and we decide to go back to

the office together. With the help of the office worker, we try to understand the situation, but we cannot evade the misunderstanding. There are several language gaps, from Lily's lack of fluency in Italian or English, to the impenetrability of the Italian bureaucracy. She gets more and more agitated, and in the end, we decide to withdraw the application and leave things as they are. We leave the office. Lily has an appointment with a professor and I go with her. She looks distressed, and wants to sit down. She feels out of breath, and dizzy. She tells me it is her "asthma": it happens to her sometimes, when she is upset. We wait in the hall, and slowly she calms down.

I think about these failed encounters and how we are all reluctant to settle, to re-orient ourselves. How did we come to this incapability of understanding each other? According to Ahmed (2004), emotions are produced as effects of circulation. The author draws on Freud's considerations of the unconscious, and psychoanalytical understandings of the economy of emotions, involving processes of movement, association, and displacement (Freud, 1964; Lacan, 1977). Ahmed underlines how affects do not have a fixed referent: they are detached from particular objects or bodies; rather, emotions are produced as effects of their circulation across a social, as well psychic, field. However, whereas Freud locates those affective economies in the intra-psychic and in the history of the individual, Ahmed follows Frantz Fanon in claiming that the movement of affects between signs shows how past collective histories are alive in the present. Ahmed analyses Fanon's description of his encounter with a white child (see Fanon, 1986), whose fear of the black man is produced by past histories of association (Negro, animal, bad, mean, ugly). Emotions are generated by contact between objects, and therefore are not inherent to objects (despite our perception), but are dependent upon a certain

history of contacts. Ahmed elaborates on Fanon's considerations by looking at the moment when the black body passes by.

> Fanon's encounter allows us to explore the links between the displacement of objects of fear and the passing by of the object. In this encounter, fear does become contained in an object: the black body. And yet the containment of fear in an object remains provisional: insofar as the black man is the object of fear, then he may pass by. Indeed, the physicality of this "passing by" can be associated with the passing of fear between signs: *it is the movement that intensifies the affect*. The black man becomes even more threatening if he passes by: his proximity is imagined then as the possibility of future injury. As such, the economy of fear works to contain the bodies of others, *a containment whose "success" relies on its failure, as it must keep open the very grounds of fear.* (Ahmed, 2004, p. 67, emphasis in original)

This example clarifies what the author means when claiming an analysis of the circulation of emotions, or, in her words, "the cultural politics of emotions". By following the displacement of fear and the movements towards, and away from, objects of fear, Ahmed shows how fear does not involve already existing objects; rather, the economy of fear establishes objects from which the subject can flee. The author continues the analysis by asking what particular shape is taken by the surfaces of those objects. For instance, in fear "the world presses against the body" and "the body shrinks back from the world" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 69), while other bodies expand. Fear acts by enabling some bodies to dwell, and move in, public spaces, while restricting the mobility of other bodies: "fear works to contain some bodies such that they take up less space. In this way, emotions work to *align* bodily space with social space" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 70, emphasis added). Indeed, emotions generate not only a subject and an object, but also a community sharing similar orientation toward the same objects. By sharing the movement toward/away from the object,

the individual aligns himself/herself with the collective. Ahmed argues that it is precisely through this alignment that both the subject and the collective come into being.

Therefore, her question is: how do alignments work? The relation between an event (such as the encounter with an affecting other) and the emotion of fear or anxiety is not cause-effect. Rather, the affective economy, through a process of alignment, transforms the event into a "fetish object" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 77) that acquires a life of its own – a threat to "what is", namely, to social norms. Fear becomes a justification for protecting those social norms.

> [T]he fear of degeneration, decline and disintegration as mechanisms for preserving "what is", becomes associated more with some bodies than others. The threat of such others to social forms (which are the materialisation of norms) is represented as *the threat of turning and being turned away from the values that will guarantee survival*. These various others come to embody the failure of the norm to take form; it is the proximity of such other bodies that "causes" the fear that forms of civilisation (the family, the community, the nation, international civil society) have degenerated. What is important, then, is that the narratives that seek to preserve the present, through working on anxieties of death as the necessary consequence of the demise of traditional forms, also seek to locate that anxiety in some bodies, which then take on fetish qualities as objects of fear. ... Insofar as we do not know what forms other others may take, those who fail to materialise in the forms that are lived as norms, *the policies of continual surveillance of emergent forms is sustained as an ongoing project of survival.* (Ahmed, 2004, pp. 78–79, emphasis in original)

In my encounter with Lily, I can trace the work of emotions described by Ahmed. We are both affected by each other, and I see how affects circulate between us and among the people she encounters: I am bewildered, Laura is exasperated, Giovanni and Carla are sceptical, and Lily feels upset and breathless. Our surfaces

take shape through contact – through the historicity of past contacts with "unusual", mature, well-educated, Middle Eastern, immigrant women, and through our orientation toward, and away, from them. The economy of emotions works to align bodily spaces with social spaces. However, emotions are never fully contained into objects, and bodies cannot be perfectly aligned: Lily opposes a divergent direction while I remain slightly disoriented. Emotions, as well as the perpetual work of "surveillance of emergent forms", continue to circulate.

An empty space

Month after month, I get to know Lily better. We spend time together, usually starting with her asking for help in dealing with an issue, and then ending up chatting over a coffee. I keep my confusion and my doubts to myself for a while. But after a few months during which I have seen Lily struggling with a lot of difficulties, I ask her directly: "What would you like to do in your future?" She gives me an equally direct answer: "I'd like to work." But she cannot work as a maid or a waitress. She makes me understand that these are not respectable jobs for her. She used to be a woman with a career. She does not want to be a student, but she cannot drop out of the university because she needs the scholarship money. I am still confused but I see her point.

As time goes by, my confusion slowly dissolves and is transformed into something else. She describes her experience of migration in terms of loss. "My whole world has changed," she says. After having fled Iran, she finds herself deprived of material and social capital: her violent husband has taken her savings and her other possessions, she has lost her job and the socioeconomic status that

comes with it. In Italy, her status depends on her history of persecution. Her degree and her job experience do not hold much value. She does not have a house, "a good place" to dwell in. But Lily's world has also been deprived of communicability.

> In Iran, I've had an education, I've had a job, I've had a nice, peaceful life. When I got here, my whole world has changed. I couldn't imagine what to do. Another life. When life changes, it's difficult. I had troubles thinking, talking, dealing with people. I didn't understand, I couldn't talk. I didn't have a good place to stay. These are the worst things. I had changed my life. Before, I used to have a good job, I used to spend time with my family, my parents, I was fine, I used to talk to people, peacefully. When I came here, a lot changed. (Lily, 27/9/2016)[66]

By telling her migration trajectory, Lily explains how her world changed radically. She arrived in Italy from Sweden about three years ago, under the Dublin Regulation.[67] She describes vividly her arrival at the airport:

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[66] The interview recorded on 27/9/2016 was originally held in Farsi, with the help of an interpreter, and then translated into English by myself. In the following interview (28/3/2017), Lily preferred to speak Italian. All the transcripts in this chapter are my translation.

[67] The Dublin III Regulation (Regulation 604/2013) frames the criteria and the mechanisms of determination of the member State in charge of examining the request of international protection. It defines which State has the obligation to evaluate the asylum request presented by people who arrive in Europe, who are not allowed to choose the State where they are to present their asylum requests. Briefly, the asylum request by a third country national is to be presented in the first European country the person arrives in, and where he or she was identified by local authorities.

There is a central data bank – Eurodac – where data and fingerprints of all people entering European states and presenting asylum requests are registered. This data bank allows to easily trace back the State to which the first entrance of each person took place; the person is then identified and can present an asylum request.

In all the cases where there are doubts on which State is competent for a given request of international protection, the proceedings are suspended by a so-called "Dublin

Lily: Ok, let's start… When… The day I arrived in Italy, with Swedish police. Very scared. Very scared because I heard Italy bad, Italy people not good. […] Perhaps, I arrived in Italy, I have to live in the streets, there's no food… When I was on the plane, for five hours, I think, always. […] Lily, what happens? What happens? I arrived at the airport at 10, in the morning. Two Italian policemen came to me, to talk. Then they took my baggage. They told you have to go to this room. It was about 20 metres, with other people… Very hard, because when […] I get there, I saw a lot of African people, a lot of Arab people, a lot of people without a visa. But I was the only woman. […] At night, I couldn't sleep. […] I was afraid of a lot of things. Afraid of… All the people… I didn't know. They were all men. Perhaps they can make troubles with me. […] I went into a corner, and sat there. I was very tired, but I couldn't sleep because I was scared. I was afraid that people would come to me, touch me… After ten hours, a policeman, he was very kind, he understood I was scared. He told me, come here, close to me, you stay here, I check. I look. […] Then he called his boss: this woman is alone, this is not good, scared. […] Then I left the room, and stayed in the transit area. […] For about two days, I slept at the airport. I was waiting for SPRAR. After two days, two people from SPRAR […], they came and talked to me […]. I cried. [The girl] told me: don't worry, you're with us, now we go into a SPRAR, it's new, good. When she talked to me, my heart… I felt my heart, how to say it… My heart very big, very… Not scared. Before, my heart was very… I don't know… [she makes a fist]

Francesca: Tight?

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phase" of assessment. Once the State of first entrance is determined, the authorities of the State where the request was presented ask the authorities of the competent State to take charge of the situation and proceed to transfer the concerned individual to their hands. The member State who is defined as competent is obliged to take into account the request of protection presented in another State. See also Chapter 2.

L.: Tight. But when she talked to me… I felt that what scared me before, now was over. (Lily, 28/3/2017)

Lily then entered a SPRAR reception centre for vulnerable people, located in a small town in northern Italy, where she stayed for about six months. The conditions there were very difficult.

When I got there, after two weeks, then my hair, I lost fifty percent of my hair. […] Have you seen my hair? […] Here, without hair. Also, sick, I went to hospital. Doctor said my head… My body… Very poor. But… For six months, step by step, I think this is my country. I can't go back to Iran. What can I do? (Lily, 28/3/2017)

During the first period in Italy, Lily was not able to speak Italian or English fluently and therefore to communicate with others. Even now, after three years, she is often misunderstood, and cannot understand others properly. She feels lonely, isolated from others. Moreover, she thinks that she has lost her credibility. People around do not believe her words:

There's something else. People don't believe us, because we are foreigners. When we go to a doctor, and we say "my eye hurts", "my teeth hurt", we have to prove it. If we say it, they don't believe us. We have to prove it, bring evidence. There [in Iran], it wasn't like that. Here, it's changed. […] Something else bothered me. People used to think badly of us. They used to say: you refugees, why don't you go back to your country? Why don't you leave our country? They were thinking badly of refugees. Some of them, not everybody. And I was bothered. […] When I arrived [in the first reception centre], I had troubles breathing. But they didn't believe me, and they didn't buy me the inhaler. They couldn't believe I had troubles breathing. They didn't trust what we said, they were always thinking badly. (Lily, 27/9/2016)

After six months, she was interviewed by *Commissione Territoriale* (Local Asylum Board). She showed signs of depression, and was referred to a psychologist.

After the interview, she was transferred to another reception centre located in the outskirts of Torino.

> I explained a lot of things, and [the commissioner] said: I'm sorry. You are a very sad person. Because […] for six months, I always had troubles […]. Slowly, with the troubles, my asthma started. (Lily, 28/3/2017)

She describes her first day in the new reception centre, after months traveling across Europe and Italy:

> *Lily:* When I was in Iran, traveling was easy. Always by car, or plane. [This journey] was hard, because of the heavy baggage. […] I am always alone, and for this reason I'm always very tired. […] When I arrived, I saw the room, with just three beds. In the room, there were only three beds, nothing else. … I felt that… Lily, it's over. Lily, it's over. How long do you want to go on with this life? It's over, you want, you have to die, so all the problems will be over. […] But in that moment, an African girl saw me crying, and she told me that there was another Iranian woman. Let's go, so that you can talk. […] This house was a problem. Because, a room with nothing, just, as I told you, three beds. […] A room that is… Empty?
>
> *Francesca:* Empty.
>
> *L.:* Empty. When a person speaks… Echo. Understand?
>
> *F.:* Uhm uhm.
>
> *L.:* With this, ehm, my problem began. (Lily, 28/3/2017)

Lily's experience of dispossession is condensed in the image of the empty room. She finds herself in a space without objects, and she feels lost. She has left a world of familiar relationships, languages, objects, and places, coming to an unfamiliar, uninhabitable space. How will she occupy, and move around, that space? How will she orient herself?

Re-orientations, or failed orientations

In *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (2006), Sara Ahmed elaborates further on the notion of orientation, to define the relation between body and space. By putting queer studies in dialogue with a phenomenological perspective, the author addresses the question of "how bodies take shape through tending toward objects that are reachable" (pos. 51). Drawing on Husserl's (1983) considerations of the intentionality of consciousness, that is always directed toward objects (see also Brentano, 2015), and Merleau-Ponty's (1945) definition of perception as a direction, a way of facing something, the author argues that when we are oriented toward objects we also take a position toward them: "Orientations involve directions toward objects that affect what we do, and how we inhabit space" (p. 3).

Specifically, Ahmed is interested in forms of social orientation, that is, in the background sustaining certain directions and not others. But backgrounds are often neglected, or only "co-perceived", in Ahmed's words. Thus, the author is applying a "queer phenomenology" to consider the ways in which certain bodies arrive to certain objects. Ahmed is critical towards the well-known method of bracketing the taken-for-granted (Husserl, 1983):

> What does it mean to assume that bracketing can "transcend" the familiar world of experience? Perhaps to bracket does not mean to transcend, even if we put something aside. We remain reliant on what we put in brackets; indeed, the activity of bracketing may sustain the fantasy that "what we put aside" can be transcended in the first place. (Ahmed, 2006, p. 31)

According to Ahmed, the point is not to transcend, or put aside, what is familiar. Rather, the aim is to consider precisely what we overlook when we are kept within the familiar. Ahmed understands the background, the domestic, as the condition of possibility, "that which must take place in order for something to appear" (2006, p. 13):

> … we need to face the background of an object, redefined as the conditions for the emergence not only of the object (we might ask: How did it arrive?), as well as the act of perceiving the object, which depends on the arrival of the body that perceives. (Ahmed, 2006, p. 14)

Moreover, Ahmed suggests to combine phenomenology and ethnography, to "follow things around", and thus look at the "co-incidence" of things:

> To "co-incide" suggests how different things happen at the same moment, a happening that brings things near to other things, whereby the nearness shapes the shape of each thing. Simultaneous arrivals are not necessarily a matter of chance; arrivals are determined, at least in a certain way, as a determination that might determine what gets near, even if it does not decide what happens *once we are near.* (2006, p. 15, emphasis in original)

Backgrounds do not have only a spatiality but also a temporality. Following a Marxist approach, Ahmed claims that objects are effects of history: "[Objects] take the shape of a social action, which is forgotten in the givenness of the object. The temporality of 'what comes before' is erased in the experience of the object as 'what is before' in the spatial sense" (2006, p. 17). Histories are, therefore, spectral, for they "shape 'what' surfaces: they are behind the arrival of 'the what' that surfaces" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 20).

Therefore, Ahmed's work is valuable for understanding the relation between orientation and familiarity, and the intimacy of bodies and their dwelling places.

> Bodies may become orientated in this responsiveness to the world around them, given this capacity to be affected. In turn, given the histories of such responses, which accumulate as impressions on the skin, bodies do not dwell in spaces that are exterior but rather are shaped by their dwellings and take shape by dwelling. (Ahmed, 2006, pos. 182)

Migration involves a process of disorientation and subsequent orientation, of re-inhabiting a second social skin (Ahmed, 2000). Bodies "out of place" strive to become intimate with the new landscape. "If orientation is about making the strange familiar through the extension of bodies into space, then disorientation occurs when that extension fails" (Ahmed, 2006, pos. 236). The process is mutual. The social has its skin as well, and social spaces are shaped, and oriented, by the bodies inhabiting them. Thus, directions can be understood as relationships between bodies and space. Indeed, space is not a container for the body. Rather, bodies take up space, becoming the space they inhabit. Drawing on Husserl's (1983) consideration of the "intimacy of touch", Ahmed claims that "neither the object nor the body have integrity in the sense of being 'the same thing' with and without others. Bodies as well as objects take shape through being orientated toward each other, as an orientation that may be experienced as the co-habitation or sharing of space" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 30).

The efforts to find a place, to become part of a social space, can be understood as a work of alignment, of being "in line" with others. As described above, collective directions are performative, that is, they depend on the repetition of norms and conventions. They are "well-trodden paths", routes created by the traces of past journeys: "what is reachable is determined precisely by orientations that we have already taken" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 31). Following Bourdieu and Butler, Ahmed looks at history as a "bodily sedimentation", both happening, and at the same time

disappearing, in the work of repetition. This work impresses upon, and orientates, the body in some directions rather than others: "Our body takes the shape of this repetition; *we get stuck in certain alignments as an effect of this work*" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 33, emphasis in original).

"The point is simple: what we 'do do' affects what we 'can do'" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 35). However, as argued by Ahmed, there is still a possibility to take a different direction, a "queer" or "failed" orientation, or to use an object differently, thus transforming it in a "re-orientation device."

> So, yes, we can remember that some spaces are already occupied. … And yet sometimes we reach what is not expected. A space, however occupied, is taken up by somebody else. When bodies take up spaces that they were not intended to inhabit, something other than the reproduction of the facts of the matter happens. The hope that the reproduction fails is the hope for new impressions, for new lines to emerge, new objects, or even new bodies … The "new" would not involve the loss of the background. Indeed, for bodies to arrive in spaces where they are not already at home, where they are not "in place," involves hard work; indeed, it involves painstaking labor for bodies to inhabit spaces that do not extend their shape. Having arrived, such bodies in turn might acquire new shapes. And spaces in turn acquire new bodies. (Ahmed, 2006, p. 38)

The "hard and painstaking" labour of affects

Lily's effort to dwell an uninhabitable place, her "hard labour", has a cost. The space around her is poor, unsignified and unsignifiable. Her lifeworld has come to the threshold of a crisis. Here, Lily is deprived also of her capacity to act on the

world, to make domestic the space around her. Instead, she feels the world is beginning to act upon her. Her narrative of the empty room continues, becoming entangled with that of her crisis.

> *Lily:* With this, ehm, my problem began. Because, ehm, I was living with two Africans. They talked very loud. My head, always problem, at night. They were singing at two, three in the night. A lot. Slowly, it begins. Ehm… In Sweden, I had asthma. Not for these things, for other things. […] But this got me angry, and my asthma began, I couldn't control it. [One night, Lily comes back home, finding the living room full of people. Her flatmates have invited some friends. According to the house regulation, night silence starts at midnight] At twelve, everybody has to sleep. They go on talking loud, drinking alcohol, chatting, chatting. At one, I told them: please, I want to sleep. But for two more hours… […]. But then, a Nigerian girl told me: no, you've problems, you're crazy, ehm, and blah blah blah. I said: ok, tomorrow I go to the office and talk. [They start quarrelling, and the other guests come near] I felt my asthma begins. I couldn't… Ehm… [Lily puts her hand on the chest] How do you say that?
>
> *Francesca:* Breathing?
>
> *L.:* Breathing. Ehm, because I didn't have my inhaler. Slowly, at four in the night, I went to the hospital. […] The doctor asked me: what happens? Why you have this? [Lily explains she has suffered from asthma in the past] I had asthma, for this reason. The doctor said no, this is not for… You have problems for other things. This, a depressed, nervous person. (Lily, 28/3/2017)

The next day, the hospital calls the project to inform it about Lily's condition. The project manager meets her with an interpreter. Lily explains what happened the night before, and that this asthma is different from the kind she had suffered in the past. But, while talking, she starts feeling disquieted. The project manager makes

a request to the SPRAR central office in Rome to have Lily transferred to a reception project for vulnerable refugees where she can have better support.

After the meeting, Lily goes back to her apartment. One of her flatmates blames her for fooling people and for being a liar. She has another crisis and goes again to the hospital. When she comes home, the project manager moves her into another apartment. During that time, Lily also starts seeing a psychiatrist. One night, she and her new roommate have a fight over keeping the light on. They wake the other flatmates, who then report the fight to the project workers.

> *Lily:* [My roommate] thought that I snitched on her. When I came home, she was angry at me. I, ehm, had two, three, pills for sleeping. I have to take one pill for sleeping, but I was very… Very sad. I took three, four, to sleep, ehm, five, six hours…
>
> *Francesca:* You took more pills?
>
> *L.:* Yes, so I can sleep. And for this, when I was, ehm, asleep… My asthma began when I was sleeping. [Her friend lives in the room next to hers, and notices that she is not feeling well] She heard that I was sleeping, but… I couldn't… [Lily puts her hand on her chest]
>
> *F.:* Breathe.
>
> *L.:* Breathe, ehm… They called the ambulance, but I don't… I have forgotten a lot of things. I don't remember. I went to the hospital, they did a lot of tests. Doctor angry, ehm, when he sees the blood test and understands that I took medicines. They thought I wanted to die… […] For two days, I stayed at the hospital. After two days, I talked to [the project manager]: please, I want to leave this project. She told me: no, no, don't worry, you can stay, we can change [your roommate's] room. (Lily, 28/3/2017)

Lily tells that when "she thinks too much," she feels stressed and everything looks very heavy, then she starts having difficulty in breathing. She feels sad, not able to enjoy anything.

> Now, it's been three years since I'm out of Iran. […] My story is very heavy. Because, it's still… [Asthma] is still there. But I have to, I know, I have to control it. [She starts crying] I'm not… I'm not sad. But I'm not happy, never. […] It's still heavy, always. […] For me, it's difficult. My life changed a lot. […] My colleague, always says, "Lily, your eyes are always… You're very… You're very sad". […] Ah, I'm sorry [her voice shakes, and she cries]. […] Because in Iran, I was a very proud person. Now, not anymore. […] Because all things are mandatory. You must [say] yes, yes, yes, to everybody. You can't say no. You can't choose, because this isn't your country. […] For three years, I can't say no. This was difficult for me to understand. […] I don't have a family here. No family, no friends. […] During [the celebration of] Persian New Year, I didn't go inside, to the party. I stayed outside, like, checking tickets. But this is not right. […] Because… I don't enjoy it. I don't know, I'm sad, I don't know… Just, it's a good thing now I have a job I like. Because when I'm at work… I can remember a lot of things from before. […] For this, I'm lucky. […] But for three years, always, always, to get things… I… You know? [She uses her mobile phone to translate] I've fought. This wasn't easy for me. Because I'm tired. […] Always, always, I think, think, think. Also, when I'm at work, when I have a break, I'm always quiet, looking at things. [My colleague] always asks: Lily, where are you? […] Last time I had my asthma, I was at [the hosting family]'s house. I was alone, because they were on holidays. […] One day I woke up early, and I saw the house. I thought Lily, why are you here? You have to go back to your country. Why are you here? You are alone, with nothing. And then slowly, it began. Also because I'm more afraid of this, when I'm alone. But I got my inhaler, and ok, Lily, stop. One two three four. But I couldn't control it. One two three, I couldn't control. But… Ehm… Alone, and then, I looked at

> my parents' faces. My… My mother's face… [She starts crying, and we end the interview]. (Lily, 28/3/2017)

Lily employs a term she knows well, "asthma", to refer to an uncanny feeling, something familiar and at the same time disquieting. Different temporalities are compressed in a past experience that comes back to the present in an altered, but recognizable, form. Asthma is a medical term that helps her give shape to a disordered experience, associating it with something she is acquainted with and that she has already endured and overcome. Also, it gives a kind of legitimacy and makes her experience somehow communicable to others. It is a word acting as a foothold, a provisional reference point from which to start finding an orientation. Hers is an experience of radical loss: she feels she has been deprived of everything, even of air. She feels she is about to lose her life, and sometimes she even thinks of putting an end to all this. On the edge, she holds onto a steady object – a medical condition that is known and thus, perhaps, more manageable. She does what she was used to doing: she uses her inhaler and counts to calm down. But it does not work. Her experience does not fit entirely in this object. She acknowledges that this breathlessness is something different, more unsettling. Still, even if inadequate, calling it "asthma" offers a familiar landmark in an empty room, something to cling on to when crisis approaches.

A critical discourse

I suggest that Lily's crisis is a twofold discourse. Firstly, it is a narrative of the paradoxes inherent to the asylum system and its work of "refugee making". Lily

describes how she experiences differential inclusion.[68] Her "heaviness" and hopelessness are caused by the perception of being admitted only partially to the new society:

> They think we're foreigners. We can't enter your life. We can't be friends with Italians. You can't let me into your life. Because they say: you're a different category. And that's why we can't enter your life. […] There is no place for me now. Not here, not in Iran. I'm confused. They can't host me here, we can't live here, happy, or talk to people. You don't let me into your life. And I can't neither go back to my country. (Lily, 27/9/2016)

In this marginal position, as she repeats often, she feels that she cannot choose. She feels not only left out of a collective life, but also dispossessed of her capacity to make decisions, and to act upon the world. Her discourse is a narrative of the costs of the asylum social project and of her particular position and trajectory within it. Lily speaks of the ambiguities of an exclusion within inclusion, when she feels that she cannot fully enter, but nor does she have a way out. She has endured in the margin for years, trying to make some more room, extending her bodily space against a narrow background. Lily talks about the violence of this process of non-citizen making, in which migrants must be willing to be stripped of their familiar objects and orientations in order to be construed as properly aligned citizens. Her narrative shows the limitations and contradiction of the neoliberal rhetoric informing transformative and success oriented programmes.

Following the classic literature in medical anthropology, and particularly a critical-interpretive approach (Lock & Scheper-Hughes, 1990), Lily's narrative can be seen as the expression of her own combination of varying idioms of distress

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[68] See Chapter 1.

(Good, 1994; Kleinman, 1988; Nichter, 1981). Lily's use of the word "asthma" reveals the relationship between the "three bodies" described by Scheper-Hughes and Lock (1987): the individual body, or the "phenomenological sense of the lived experience of the body-self" (p. 7); the social body, or the body that is "good to think with" for it offers a terrain where social relationships are played out; and the body politic, site of control and regulation. Lily's body becomes "the most immediate, the proximate terrain where social truths and social contradictions are played out, as well as a locus of personal and social resistance, creativity, and struggle" (Scheper-Hughes & Lock, 1987, p. 31). The bond between the social and political orders, and individual body, is articulated into a polysemic idiom of distress.

The traces of different languages are condensed, and concealed, in her asthma. This word establishes a continuity with her past experience of feeling breathless. Lily appropriates a biomedical language she encountered in the past to frame and give meaning to a disturbing event. She is also making an appeal to a community familiar with this language. Her experience of crisis, and her sensations of breathlessness, oppression, and powerlessness, are then translated, and transformed, by a medical institution into a psychiatric category – depression, panic attacks, anxiety. Shaped into a recognized, shareable, and productive label, her experience acquires legitimacy, thus becoming visible, and acting, in the social field.

Lily's embodiment of the paradoxical logics of exclusion within inclusion is the cost of a hard labour for being admitted into a new space. As she says frequently, asthma comes back, even when she thinks it is over. Even if, so far, her strategy has worked somewhat. Since she passed the required exams, she has received the second year's scholarship. She has also applied for accommodation in a student hall because her time in the *Rifugio Diffuso* project is almost over. She is now sharing an apartment with other undergrads, patiently enduring student life. The paid

internship has been extended for another three months. Lily is making a contribution in developing new chemical formulae and improving the plant's production. Practically, she works as a laboratory technician and quality controller, but her contract and her salary are still for an internship. At the end of the second period, the company makes clear that they greatly value Lily's work, and that they "need" her, as Lily says. But the manager makes also clear that the company does not have the resources to hire Lily on a regular contract. As happens often, he suggests a compromise in the grey area of the Italian labour legislation, suggesting that Lily continue as an intern for another six months, with the same salary and terms. Again, she feels that she does not have much choice. She accepts the contract and continues her studies. Her salary is not enough to pay rent; she will need to apply again for a scholarship and accommodation in the next academic year.

As I follow Lily in her everyday life, I look at her crisis from a different angle. She describes as a "fight" her efforts to find a house, some money, and, recently, a job through which she begins to recognize herself again. Not a fight to re-possess what she has been deprived of, but a struggle to re-articulate a liveable world. She endures in a stubborn effort to keep open a space for imagination, before settling into a world decided by others. In her fight, I see the "painstaking labour" described by Ahmed, and aimed at impressing upon the surfaces of the social, even if only with a wrinkle. It is a costly labour and an uneven fight, but still produces a different genre of discourse. Not only a comment, a description of her experience of dispossession, but also a critical discourse. Lily's crisis, and her struggles around it, are unsettling.

Incommensurable discourses

As argued by Elizabeth Povinelli (Turcot DiFruscia & Povinelli, 2014), the Foucauldian approach has shaped the analysis of power in terms of object-effects, subject-effects, state-effects, and so forth, focusing on the process of production, rather than the essence of object. According to the author, as a consequence, the different "modalities of materiality" are neglected, made disappear, or irrelevant. Povinelli's analytical framework seeks to account for the "dual materiality" without falling back into the "metaphysics of substance" and the quest for authenticity (Butler, 1990). Povinelli suggests to look at both "corporeality" as "the way in which dominant forms of power shape and reshape materiality, how discourses produce categories and divisions between categories," and "carnality", as "the material manifestations of that discourse which are neither discursive nor pre-discursive" (Turcot DiFruscia & Povinelli, 2014). In her book *The Empire of Love: Toward a Theory of Intimacy, Genealogy, and Carnality* (2006), Povinelli analyses a sore on her shoulder, that she acquired during fieldwork, asking how it has been shaped by "multiple, and often incommensurate" discourses. The author looks also to the carnality of her sore, that is, to what goes beyond the discourse that produced it, sickening and corroding her body.

Povinelli's considerations of what is left in the encounter between incommensurable discourses help clarify my argument of Lily's crisis as an unsettling, critical discourse. However, to understand incommensurability, it is necessary to firstly take into consideration Povinelli's definition of the relationship with power and social difference. In *Economies of Abandonment: Social Belonging and Endurance in Late Liberalism* (2011), she focuses on "quasi-events" of ordinary, almost indistinct, and dispersed suffering, to analyse how "alternative worlds" and

"spaces of otherwise" endure, or decay, in late liberalism. Povinelli is interested in what she calls "radical worlds", that is, on alternative, subaltern, and countering forms of social life. For the author, radical worlds are not necessarily organized forms of social action; rather, they oscillate between being partially organized and partially disorganized, and between being something or nothing.

Those radical worlds are defined as "alternative social projects". If "social projects are the aggregated result of a set of practices coming into commonality", then "[a]lternative social projects are those social projects that begin by merely more or less deviating from the explicitly given categories of life and world but slowly, through aggregating activities, come to have a content, being and enunciation" (Haritaworn, Kuntsman, Posocco, & Povinelli, 2013). The potentiality of alternative social projects lies in their liminality. Drawing on Turner's seminal work on the possibilities of transformation, but also disruption, within liminal states,[69] Povinelli understands alternative social projects as produced by social formations initially as a "noise" that can afterwards enacts its potentiality to reformulate, and threaten, the social order. The author's question therefore is: "How does the social order react to a potential otherwise – and perhaps especially a potential otherwise it itself has constituted?" (Haritaworn et al., 2013, p. 557), how does it respond to the challenge of social difference? And on the other hand: how do these alternative forms of social life endure in specific social orders?

> The social projects […] may not have the force to act in the sense of making anything like a definitive event occur in the world (becoming a counterpublic is an achievement), but they exist, nevertheless, in the Spinozan sense of persisting in

[69] Turner elaborates on Mary Douglas's analysis of transitional beings as particularly polluting (1967).

> their being. And insofar as they do, these alternative worlds maintain *the otherwise that stares back at us without perhaps being able to speak to us.* (Povinelli, 2011, p. 10, emphasis added)

The "parts that have no part" persist, as an "unrepentant alterity", creating an internal dissonance, and making ordinary social, political, and economic logics tremble. Povinelli looks at these moments of collision between semantic fields, focusing on the violent work of enervation, that is, the process of weakening, and exhaustion of alternative social projects.

Povinelli (2001) describes this dissonance employing also the notion of incommensurability, imagining the tension between the ordinary and the alternative as an effort to conceive the inconceivable. Drawing on literature of philosophy of language about translation (Davidson, 2001), the author focuses on linguistic indeterminacy, distortion, and the process of interpretation in the context of radical alterity, emphasizing that they are produced by social interaction. Specifically, Povinelli's point of departure is Davidson's argument that if we cannot find in alternative languages a common ground of beliefs and standards, we solve the dissonance by considering them as irrational, and as a noise. In other words, we commensurate alterity by "making radical worlds unremarkable" (Povinelli, 2001, p. 320).

Therefore, power is understood as a practice of commensuration of emergent new, various and variant forms. Power implies a work of standardization, that reduces the relevance of differences: "[...] put crudely, the liberal national form seems continually to reconstitute some nominal, and normative, we-horizon out of these publicly celebrated or scorned, but in any case seemingly economically vital, flows of people, images, and things" (Povinelli, 2001, p. 326). Divergent forces are commensurated to the we-horizon without the use of repressive force, but with

"processes of self-correction" and the "peaceful public use of reason." Radical worlds that "turn inward or away or refuse to dilate to the sympathy of the Same" (Povinelli, 2001, p. 329) are treated as no longer human in the full sense.

From this angle, Lily's discourse is unintelligible because it cannot be translated. Both her crisis, and her moral horizon guiding her choices represent an alterity – sometimes a radical alterity. It confuses us because we cannot make it commensurate with our own vocabulary. And how do we react to this confusion? Povinelli argues that divergent and diverging trajectories are tolerable insofar that the we-horizon is not threatened: we can conceive an otherwise as long as we are not "undone" by it. Lily's discourse is bewildering, and thus critical. In other words, the crisis of her lifeworld, and her opaque efforts to reconstruct a liveable world, pose a risk of crisis for our own horizon. We are challenged by an imaginary that, even if it is not, or at least not fully, commensurable, represents a possibility of action – instead of being acted upon.

Conclusions

I opened this chapter by describing my encounter with Lily, and how I was affected by her. I employed the mark she left on me – a slight sense of bewilderment – as a thread for outlining the background of her experience, the conditions that made it possible. I walked with her for a while, trying to understand the path she was following. I was disoriented, for I could not rely on predictable, familiar reference points. I saw a similar disorientation in some of the actors of the asylum system who crossed her trajectory. Lily and I saw emotions circulating and witnessed how we all were affected by frustration, sometimes resentment, or

distrust. With Sara Ahmed, I looked at the relationality of affects, defining them firstly as repetitive, for they produce effects through reiteration, and depend upon previous forms of signification; and, secondly, as intentional, for they imply an orientation toward, or away from, others. Ahmed's work provided also a framework to understand how we were all mutually constituted in the encounter, by how we affected each other.

Subsequently, I focused on Lily's narrative of her experience within the asylum system. She told of the marks left on her, her grief, and the struggles to find a place for herself. In her discourse, she described an experience of loss and dispossession. She explained how her world changed completely, when she found herself deprived not only of her material resources, her relationships, her status, but also of communicability and credibility. Lily condensed her experience in the image of the empty room, as a place that is new and unfamiliar, and that cannot be made familiar, for it has no objects toward which she can orient. I followed her efforts to inhabit such space, and the ways in which the surfaces of the empty room shaped, and were shaped by, Lily. I looked at her body extending in space, being impressed on the skin, and leaving traces on the space's surface. With Ahmed, I understood this process as a work of alignment, orientation and re-orientation, imagining Lily's trajectory as a divergent, opposing direction.

Finally, I thought of Lily's narrative as a twofold discourse. Not only a way of expressing her experience, to give voice to her grief, but also a possibility for opening different discourses and for unsettling existing ones. Drawing on Elizabeth Povinelli's work, I concluded the chapter by emphasizing the critical potential of what is not fully comprehensible and commensurable, looking at Lily's stubborn and unreasonable discourse as an effort to keep open a momentary, tentative space for articulating an alternative world. Lily's discourse is multiple, resulting from the

combination and entanglement of diverse languages. Some of these languages are more understandable and communicable, while others are opaque and unintelligible. Asthma, the frame she finds for her crisis, moves us both toward and away from her. We are affected, and then left disoriented. We are not ready to let go our coordinates. Therefore, we react thinking that Lily is lost, in need for help to find the well-trodden path. But she resists on her divergent trajectory – a trajectory that is neither completely other, nor completely accessible. Her discourse is not fully commensurable in our terms, and this is the reason why it remains visible. Since it is unresolved, it cannot be exhausted – and here lies its critical potential. It is a discourse that speaks to us, even if we do not fully understand it.

6. On the verge of yielding: Spaces of imagination within the asylum prison

We all move, or, as Jackson puts it, we all "oscillate between transitive and intransitive extremes" (2013, p. 1). We move through life, migrating, and changing, to actively create the condition for living, between what is given and what can be shaped. We try to escape limits, searching for the unknown and foreign, "[b]ut as much as one yearns for pastures new, one also yearns, in an alien land, to be at home again – or, at least, to recover a balance between being an actor and being acted upon" (Jackson, 2013, p. 4). We leave what is familiar, and then we try to feel at home again, to belong to the new place, by getting in touch, merging with others, "being integrated and integral" (Jackson, 2013, p. 5). However, even though we can think of mobility as a global, deeply human, phenomenon, we cannot assume that we all experience or imagine movement, familiarity and belonging in the same way. "You don't understand, only who lived this can understand", I have often heard.

Sometimes, to communicate what seemed uncommunicable, the people I met had to invent language. Often, they turned to images – metaphors, and bodily metaphors in particular. In their narratives, images are not only a vehicular language, or a form of translation through a figurative speech. Metaphors cannot be understood as just a way of saying something in terms of something else. Rather, especially when related to the body, metaphors produce effects, transforming both the speaker and the listener – creating, and not only expressing, meaning. In the previous chapters I have analysed how, through images, we utter our experiences, establishing a relationship with others. I have considered how images allow us to

make sense of our unarticulated perceptions, while at once rearticulating, even slightly, what surrounds us. With Baran, I have explored how temporality is shaped by an interrupted and interrupting body, while with Lily, I have looked at the space outlined by a disoriented and disorienting body. Together, the previous chapters analysed different experiences of crisis, in the relationship with their social and political circumstances. I examined how macro forces enter individual lives and give shape to suffering. Throughout this thesis, I have considered how personal experiences of crisis offer a critical understanding of those macro forces, and may have also a transformative potential. In this final chapter, I focus on the effects of crisis in the social space, by asking if, and how, suffering can kindle social change.

As Jackson (1983) writes, images and metaphors are a "mode of praxis" and establish a continuity between language, knowledge, and body. They act as "synthesisers" of the body and the world. Not only do images make sense of, and mediate, experience; they also alter the relationship between persons, and between persons and environment. Metaphors can produce change, opening fractures and recomposing crises, through a dialectical movement between internal and external worlds: "They can 'make over' the person to the social world, and reciprocally 'imprint' the social world upon the person's body. […] Since metaphors coalesce social, personal and natural aspects of Being, as well as unifying ideas and practices, it is only to be expected that metaphors should often be called upon […] in making people whole again" (Jackson, 1983, pp. 137–138).

Jackson's considerations will help me understanding the use of metaphors in the interviews that follow. Two refugees with different experiences and backgrounds speak of the asylum policies and practices as a "prison". In their experience, the prison is not only a figure of speech; rather, it is a real space, with real effects both on their bodies and on the relationships that they establish with

project workers and other refugees. In the following pages, I juxtapose the experiences of two persons walking on the verge of a fall – two bodies that are about to yield. With them, I investigate the threat of failing in the struggle for being with others in the world. In their narratives, I analyse their experience of risking losing possession of their body – an experience that seems "unassimilable" but that has also a generative potential, asking: How is it possible that a life that is no more continuable, continues (Taliani, 2011)? What makes us recoil from the verge and not fall?

The open prison

It is a Monday morning in early January. I am walking, the air is cold. I am going to Gaia,[70] a women's centre offering a wide range of activities (job training, career counselling, legal counselling, psychological support, art laboratories, cultural activities and language classes), and sometimes just a place where to stay when it is too cold outside. Some of the activities are funded by the SPRAR system and are aimed at supporting the social inclusion of refugee women, by promoting their empowerment, improving the awareness of their rights and duties, and their knowledge of the history and laws of the receiving country. The centre offers Italian language classes to prepare refugee women to access a CPIA, *Centro Provinciale per l'Istruzione degli Adulti* (a public adult learning centre), where they can attend Italian language classes to get a certificate, or enrol in the first cycle of secondary school and get a diploma (*licenza media*, in Italian).

[70] See Chapter 2.

Since the beginning of the school year in September, I have come to Gaia each week to participate in the Monday class. The class had been suspended for two weeks during the Christmas holidays but today we are all back. When I arrive, I notice a lively atmosphere. As usual, before the class I go to the kitchen to help make tea and have a chat with one of the volunteers. A lot of things have happened during the break and she fills me in. When the tea is ready, we go downstairs. The class is full, with the women sitting around a big table. Sara, one of the teachers, is also there. We chat while we wait for Matilde, the other teacher. During the holidays, Sara has been thinking about topics she would like to discuss with the class. She would like to do some "civic education", talking about men and women as "social beings", and asking what society and state are. She knows it will not be easy, but she is positive that addressing those questions is important.

Sara welcomes the new students, asking their names and countries of origin. In the meanwhile, Matilde comes in. As usual, they begin the class by asking questions, trying to stimulate a conversation. Unlike other classes, the Monday group is quite unconventional. Sara and Matilde do not teach Italian; rather, they try to create a debate, encouraging women to express themselves using the Italian language. After a while, Asha, a Somali woman in her late thirties, asks a question, interrupting the conversation: "Who's the boss here?" She repeats the question a few times. She wants to know who is in charge because she has some questions to ask about enrolment in CPIA. She completed the minimum hours required two years ago, but then found a job and was not able to continue the courses. Now she would like to go back to school and get the diploma. Sara and Matilde explain that there are no bosses at Gaia, only supervisors for the different areas, and suggest Asha refer to two persons in particular. Then they ask her how long she has been working, and where. Asha says that she has been employed for nine months and twenty days as a

caregiver, *badante,*[71] in Italian, for an old lady who eventually moved to a nursing home. Then she worked for about two months, standing in for a friend with the same duties. Now she would like to continue working as a *badante*, but only with ladies. She needs to work to help her children in Addis Ababa.

Sara follows the discourse, asking Asha how long she has been living in Italy. She arrived in 2011. She was living in Libya at the time and left when the war begun. Asha continues her account and we all listen to her. When she had arrived in Libya, she was put into prison: Europe had "closed" the Mediterranean Sea, the "presidents" had met in Libya "to make their agreements" and all the illegal immigrants had been put into prison. Somebody asks what the prison was like. It was difficult: she ate badly and was short of water, only ten litres every three days for drinking and washing. Her period was always an issue. She did not have tampons so she used a piece of cloth, washing it each day with the little water she had. Asha is speaking Italian, combining words from different languages and hand gestures, looking right in front of her, where Sara and Matilde sit. It is a direct speech that does not need any translation. We all listen quietly.

Then Sara asks Asha if she was abused in prison. Matilde translates into Somali, and Asha answers that no, the guards did not beat her because they were Muslims and cannot touch women. With women, they used an electric shock device. Asha continues, saying that after a while, she managed to leave the prison by making

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[71] *Badanti* is a term used both in formal and informal contexts to refer to (mostly migrant and female) domestic workers looking after old people. As Scrinzi (2004) notes, the term belittles a form of reproductive work that is necessary to the infrastructure of the global economy (see also Parreñas, 2000; Sassen, 1994). Indeed, *badante* derives from the verb *badare*, that means, literally, to keep an eye on something. The term and its extensive use in everyday and legal language reflects the ambivalent relationship with reproductive labour which is, at the same time, needed and unrecognized.

an agreement with a general. Since she had studied and learned the Quran, the general employed her as a teacher for his daughter. Asha started to work half a day cleaning the house, and half a day teaching the Quran. She endured this for a week but then wanted to leave. “They treated me like an animal” she says. One night, while the general’s family was having a party, she managed to escape. She walked around the streets of Tripoli for about four hours, without knowing her bearings, praying for someone to stop. Finally, she found a taxi. She had some dollars sewn into her dress, but the driver did not take them. She asked the driver to call one of her relatives, who explained to him where to take her, promising to pay the fee. Then, with the help of her relative, Asha found a place in a room with eight other women. “Prison was better!” she says ironically. Then, she started looking for a job. After a while, at a job centre in Tripoli, she met a Sudanese woman who offered to find her a job in return for money. Asha agreed, and the lady provided her a job as housekeeper with an old man and his wife. One day, while she was in the kitchen, the man approached and molested her. She screamed, throwing at him the first thing she had at hand, a blender. She went out of the house, into the street, screaming. A neighbour came, asking what had happened and telling her not to scream, for her own good. Asha was extremely upset, angry, and her reaction was amplified because of the stress. The neighbour suggested Asha tell the old man’s son what happened. She followed the advice, and the man’s son apologized for his father, offering Asha some money to make amends.

Once again, Asha was unemployed: “I wanted to do something. I’m not a person who looks back a lot, I want to go forward.” She decided to invest her money in a small restaurant, splitting the costs with an Ethiopian woman who left, leaving Asha her share. It was an illegal restaurant, neither had the documents required for a legitimate business. But, within ten days, the restaurant was up and running. Sara

and Matilde break for a moment the tension of the story, joking about the Italian bureaucracy: "Here, to open a restaurant you need ten months, or ten years!" Asha replies that there are illegal shops here as well. Where she lives – the ex-Moi, the 2006 Winter Olympic village now squatted by migrants and refugees[72] – there are several such small stores run by the inhabitants.

Asha's story continues with the outbreak of the war in Libya. She was forced to close the restaurant and leave. Some of her friends moved to Tunis, but she did not, because there were already too many refugees there. "So, I came to Italy, but this is a prison open on the top." Sara asks what she means and Asha answers, quite directly, that she experienced prison in Libya, and that she feels like she is in prison here as well. Asha continues in a firm tone, telling why she speaks of an open-air prison. The first issue is housing. She lives in a squat, sharing a room with another woman in an overcrowded apartment. The living conditions are not what she had hoped for, but she was fine until she started having backaches after an accident. Her apartment is on the sixth floor, without a lift, and she cannot climb the stairs without pain. She wants a new home, without all those stairs. Then, she says, the Immigration Office gave her food stamps for 50 Euros, "but why didn't they give me

[72] See https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2016/mar/02/turin-refugees-italy-abandoned-olympic-village, last visited on 10 March 2019. The ex-Moi buildings were first squatted in 2013 by a group of refugees; within four years, the village hosted around 1,200 persons. In the last months of 2017, the Torino City Council started evictions as part of a project financed by the Intesa-San Paolo banking group, with the aim of clearing the site entirely by 2020. The project, in which several local associations are involved, aims at offering evicted refugees temporary housing, training opportunities and help finding jobs. The project has been harshly criticized by activists (see http://www.meltingpot.org/IMG/pdf/testo-critico_exmoi.pdf, last visited on 10 March 2019).

the money so that I can do my grocery shopping where I want?" Those food stamps are valid only in two supermarket chains where she can buy just a few items: the rest are too expensive or are not halal. She would like to shop at the market where she can find all she needs, and "for just one Euro they give you a bag of vegetables that big!"

So far, all the other women have listened silently, but now Jeannette steps in, saying that she got the same food stamps, and that they are also accepted at a low-cost supermarket. The class starts a discussion which is quickly closed down by Matilde: "If the Immigration Office gives you those food stamps, they have no choice but that." Asha continues, saying that another reason why she feels like in an open-air prison is "Dublin" – the Dublin Regulations[73] that forced her to come back to Italy, her first country of arrival, from Norway, where she had a house and a job. "It's not fair that they got my fingers [fingerprints] here. Now they don't take fingers anymore, everybody passes. Why they took mine?" She adds that she likes Italy because she has not found people like that anywhere else: "I want to stay here, I'm Italian, but I want a house, school, job, money." She wants to stay, but she wants also a decent life.

I am particularly struck by Asha's narratives, both because of her clarity and resolution in describing the asylum system as an open-air prison, and because she chooses that particular occasion – the Monday class – to articulate her claim. The Monday class is different from the other Italian language classes held during the week. Sara and Matilde have named it *Educazione alla cittadinanza* (citizenship education). They aim at stimulating a discussion about the participants' rights and duties, but also their doubts, questions and difficulties as members of society. The

[73] See Chapters 2 and 4.

class starts always with tea, biscuits and chitchat to warm up the group as the women arrive and take their seats. Sometimes, the chat becomes a discussion when somebody asks a question about an issue that is bothering them: "How can I fill in this form?", "What does 'collection by proxy' mean?", "Why was that old lady rude to me when I asked her for directions?" From such cues the lesson unfolds. A woman gives an opinion, another asks a question, or shares her own experience, while Matilde and Sara help them to read and understand the texture of everyday life. Occasionally, the two teachers suggest a topic to discuss, which may be related to current events or politics: "What is happening in Somalia, or Nigeria, at this moment?", "What do you think about the sexual assault in Cologne during New Year's Eve?"[74] More often, Sara and Matilde propose the women learn some basic phrases and useful expressions and roleplay real-life situations: a job interview, a meeting with your son's school teachers, a doctor's appointment. When they want to address specific needs or questions, they invite "experts", a dietitian, a midwife, a dentist, to provide information and teach the right health behaviours.

Sara and Matilde are well-educated women in their mid-sixties who have been volunteers at the Gaia centre for a long time. They have been teaching the Monday class for some years. They represent a continuity between past and present histories of migration in Italy. "We're all Africans," Sara says, as she introduced me to the class the first time we met, thus describing their involvement, commitment, and intimacy with the participants. Matilde was born in Somalia, Sara in Ethiopia: their dark skins and Italian surnames disclose their *métis* background, evoking an often ignored or repressed part of the history of the Italian nation (see Del Boca,

[74] See https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/08/ive-never-experienced-anything-like-that-cologne-in-deep-shock-over-attacks, last visited on 10 March 2019.

2005). They seem to identify, at least partially, with the refugee women attending their classes. Matilde and Sara try to establish a familiar environment by engaging personally in the discussion and encouraging women to share their experiences. They are both present, with their bodies and their stories, in the class, and thus challenge the common and more or less explicit assumption underlying the relationship between providers and users in the reception system: the self-disclosure of the refugee and the nondisclosure of the system's workers. As Fassin and Memmi (2004) argue, the moral economy of asylum requires refugees' bodies to be exposed, and refugees' stories to be fully disclosed. Their privacy is questioned, interrogated, inspected: the "introspective discourse" that refugees are required to produce about themselves has become one of the fundamental devices of contemporary governmentality (Fassin & Memmi, 2004). Refugees are not only required to tell their stories, but also to narrate with an excessive, almost "indecent" (Taliani, 2011) introspection.

Sara and Matilde, by contrast, try to reclaim the intimacy and commonality that follows exposure by asking participants to tell something about themselves, and by reciprocally opening to them and thus becoming known or at least knowable. Sara and Matilde are both present in the class, showing and questioning their bodies, with their shapes, colours, wounds and afflictions. They participate in discussions about eating, ageing, sexuality and maternity. They share bits of their own life stories when the women talk about their knowledges and practices as wives, mothers and grandmothers, or the differences in preparing food between Italy and their countries, and how this has affected their bodies and health, or their illnesses and pains. The two teachers laugh at jokes about marriage and sex, and share the misery, and anger, about past and present sufferings. Slowly, I become part of the group too. At first, I am a new presence, with an unclear role. Women ask me

questions ("Are you a lawyer?", "What is a research?", "Then what? You only write?"), becoming curious about what I do, why I am interested in them. Also, they are interested in who I am, and what kind of femininity I represent ("Are you married?", "Why don't you have kids at your age?"). They include me in the discussions, somebody asks me for advice ("What can I do to lose weight?") or for help in translating a new word. Somebody asks me to listen and to write "the truth" because nobody else does.

Gradually, I feel that I start to move with the group, becoming part of its rhythm. I see the group as a river, with its floods and shallows. The talking starts, little by little, or swiftly. Then it becomes a torrent, opening up space for expression, sharing and even imagination. The group offers the possibility for speaking up and for being visible and hearable. Sara and Matilde strive to create a space for a *prise de parole* (De Certeau, 1994), where women can take up language, holding it for a moment, trying to possess it. With those acts of language the torrent rises and the movement accelerates. I notice this movement for the first time early in my fieldwork. As always, I join the class on a Monday morning. Today, Sara is alone because Matilde had an emergency. After serving the tea, and a short exchange about Hani's appointment with the gynaecologist, Sara introduces "a new friend" to the group: Dehab, from Eritrea. Sara asks how long she has been living in Italy, if she is married and has children. "I have a 25-year-old son, but I don't know where he is." He left some time ago and Dehab has not seen him since. Dehab's words open up a crisis in the group, which Sara struggles to contain. The Somali women reply with empathy, and Dehab's exhaustion and grief start to circulate.

At first, I cannot understand precisely what is happening. There has been a tear in the class, but it is not yet a break: the women express their sorrows, but they are also shaping it through language. In Lacan's terms, as the "Real" (chaos and

helplessness) irrupts, we try to talk in circles to symbolize at least something of it (Bailly, 2009). One of the Somali women is speaking in Arabic with Dehab and then translating into Somali, while another one is translating into Italian. Two, three discourses overlap and intertwine. “She doesn’t even know if he’s dead or alive, and we all know what it means not to know where your children are,” says one of the women. Another one tells about her son: she looked for him for about a year before learning that he was in jail in Libya and paying a ransom to free him. “How old was he?” asks Sara. “Seventeen.” “Then how old was he when he was sent to jail? God help us…” answers Sara, lifting up her eyes. I notice that she is struggling. She has kindled the conversation, and she is participating, but after a while she tries to bring the discussion back to less private and intense topics, resuming a more educational approach. But her efforts are almost in vain. When a woman starts crying, tears and painful thoughts circulate in the group. Dehab is not talking any more, just nodding her head, misty-eyed. A woman sitting next to me says that her five children are far away; she is trying to make them come to Italy, but without a job and a proper house, it is impossible.

Sara appears more and more tired. It seems like she wants to make the class a familiar place where women can express themselves freely. We have tea, we chat, Sara herself asks personal questions, encouraging women to speak openly. But, at the same time, it seems like she does not want for the conversation to exceed a certain threshold. I look at the group, and from my silent and semi-external position, I feel the burden of words and gazes, but I am not overwhelmed. It looks like the women, and particularly Hani and Fawzia, who are the oldest in the group, propel the grief around the class and back and forth among them. This movement gives the grief a certain shape, legitimacy, and acknowledgement: it is our grief too: we understand you. It is not just about finding words to utter, and possibly heal, pain –

to deal with the "Real" through the "Symbolic", in Lacan's terms; rather, the group recognizes the very existence of this grief, bearing witness.

After a while, the movement slows, and Sara begins a lighter conversation. We talk about my research, and I share some things with them about my experiences in the United Kingdom. Sara suggests the group ask me what it is like to live in the UK, but nobody seems to have questions. Sara continues, and asks directly each woman if they want to live in Italy or move abroad. The discussion is rapidly rekindled. Women start talking about "projects", referring to the reception projects they enter after their asylum applications: "You receive a house for a year or so, and then when the project is over, you are out." Fawzia says that she is used to moving around Europe: "When I finish [my project] here, I go to Sweden. When I finish there, I come back to Italy." Another woman talks about uncertainty: "Here the project lasts for a year, and then? What happens?"

The discussion then takes the shape of a claim. Hani looks directly at me, talking about difficulties in the asylum system and the frustration of living in, and depending on, projects. She shows Sara a picture of a man on her mobile phone, saying: "He's fine, they found him a house, a job. Why don't we?" "We want to rent an apartment, and you have to help us!" Fawzia says, standing up. She reaches for her purse and takes out her Italian ID card. She hands it to Sara, stating firmly: "This is fake." Sara says that the ID card is a valid document; it only does not allow crossing state borders in Europe because refugees need an additional travel document. Fawzia replies with a harsh tone, cursing, "Italy *haram*!": Italy is evil, impure. Again, the discussion becomes heavy, and hard for Sara to control. She tries to step in, asking to stop talking about such painful things, but she cannot contain the flow. It is not easy, and today she is alone. She tries to change the topic, talking about Italian vocabulary and expressions, and slowly the tension decreases. It is 12pm and the

class is over. Sara says goodbye and leaves. I chat for a moment with some women and then I go to meet her in the corridor. She briefly mentions her difficulty in dealing with the group when strong emotions are expressed, and her efforts to bring it back to a more ordinary language class. She walks away, looking exhausted.

This twofold movement repeats often in the Monday class. Matilde and Sara stimulate a discussion, that begins to grow, expand, and accelerate. The flow then reaches a peak, passing an implicit boundary, and risking overwhelming the two teachers. When the river is in flood, the group takes a voice – polyphonic, unclear, but shared. Women appropriate an imperfect and hybrid language, overlapping Italian, Somali, Arabic, English and French: a choral discourse that is not completely intelligible but is extremely meaningful. The discussion rises and the group simmers, expressing anger and conflict. Words start slipping away, becoming less governable, defiant, and escaping the limits of a language class. Here, Sara and Matilde feel the need, or the obligation, to intervene, preventing a possible outburst. They strive to contain the torrent, bringing it back into its banks. The flow slows down, taking a more manageable rhythm. As described in the previous chapter, it is a process of disorientation through which insubordinate, misaligned bodies try to shape the social space, re-orienting it, while the two teachers feel the risk of space disintegration and seek to bring those bodies back in line.

I find a resonance between this double movement in the class, and the duplicity of the surrounding system. The alternation of giving and containing voices mirrors the double mandate of the asylum system. We respect and grant human rights, we care for victims of violence, but only insofar as the contact with those others does not compromise our presumed stability and safety. We struggle between our moral horizon and our fears: we cannot practice compassion without repression, humanitarian actions without measures of securitization, inclusion

without spaces of exception. The Monday class, as the other activities at the Gaia centre addressed to refugee women, are part of this larger system. Micro-practices are linked to macro-structures in a relation of interdependency: national and supranational legal frameworks and policymaking have an impact on, but are also affected by, what happens on the ground, where they are implemented, transformed, questioned, and resisted. The Monday class, like the other sites of my ethnographic field, expresses a historical conjuncture (Glick Schiller, 2015). The encounter between Asha, Sara, Matilde and the other women reveals its background, that is, the entanglement of multiple historical formations (Clarke, 2010), and the accumulation of different forces and contradictions (Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, & Roberts, 1978).

And yet, Sara and Matilde choose to take a particular positioning within that entanglement. They are a margin. They have a part in the system – a part that appears most likely to be minimal when compared to the larger asylum machine, almost residual. They try to stretch the margin, even if just a little, to create a momentary space for an unexpected speech. They accept, and probably seek, to be shaken by what is not expected – but at the same time, they cannot let the shaking crack the machine. Sara and Matilde want to make room for what usually remains unheard, thus trying to be critical and contest the machine, but the marginal space they create is slippery. They want to change a system they belong to, and to which they are committed. Sara and Matilde depend on, and therefore contribute to reproducing, a machine that enables them to exist in their role of volunteers, teachers, activists. While they experience first hand the contradictions and the inequalities of the machine, they can neither bear it nor renounce it.

When Asha decides to start talking about the "prison open on the top" she takes that room in the margin, occupying it. She calls into question the machine from

the inside, addressing Sara and Matilde as both constituting and undermining parts of the system. Beyond her words, her speech is made of the position and the time she chooses to utter it. Asha speaks from within the open prison, leaning against its hard, invisible walls. She calls into question Sara and Matilde themselves as actors of the prison. When pointing to the smooth and subtle violence of the open prison, she is also silently stating that the Monday group is part of that prison. Her speech is literally an act – a performance producing effects – in which Sara and Matilde find themselves in an in-between position, playing contradictory roles. In Althusserian terms (see Butler, 1997), Asha's speech could be understood as a sort of counter-interpellation. Not just a general claim, but a call addressed to Sara and Matilde. As an interpellation, it would require them to turn – not only towards who is calling, but also *away from* who called them initially. The counter-interpellation would require them to renounce and resist the machine's interpellation, and to expose the machine itself. Therefore, it cannot be easily answered. For Sara and Matilde, turning towards Asha and away from the original interpellation would imply jeopardizing their very condition of emergence, the possibility of being subjects, thus demanding "a willingness *not* to be – a critical desubjectivation" (Butler, 1997, p. 130).

They risk being *undone.* Sara and Matilde occupy an uncomfortable position since they are involved in the system while, at the same time, acknowledging its inherent violence. They are volunteers, driven by the belief that the system can provide opportunities to migrant women, but also aware of the costs of these opportunities: having been granted asylum, Asha was able to escape violence in Somalia but is now confined in a condition of marginality, for she does not have full access to social rights and is thus not able to find a fair job, have a decent home, receive proper health care, or reunite with her family. Sara and Matilde embody a

contradiction that sometimes becomes intolerable. In Asha's act of speech, the ambiguities are unveiled: whoever participates in the prison, even who tries to bend its boundaries, is inevitably compromised, for having a part in reproducing the prison. Sara and Matilde offer Asha the opportunity to utter the claim but hesitate when they feel that the call is directed at them and the group as well. Some of the women turn towards Asha, but for the two teachers the call is ultimately unbearable. Sara and Matilde choose to take a step back, turning towards their constituting background. They contain the flow by bringing back the class to a calm movement.

Walking on the threshold

I feel I am also called into question by Asha's speech, for I am a witness to her interpellation. The image of the prison open on the top is impressed in my mind, but I cannot fully grasp it. What kind of image is it? A metaphor, a figure of speech? Or something else? I ask her if we can talk more, because I am interested in her story. She answers firmly that she is willing to tell me her story, and I feel that she is looking for a witness, for somebody to record her words. We agree to meet with the interpreter, but we postpone a few times because of her health issues. Then, I do not hear from her for a while. I start thinking that I misunderstood, and probably this is her way to politely refuse, as often happens. After a few weeks, the project manager at the Gaia centre tells me that Asha has been admitted to hospital, asking if I can go visit her and talk to the doctor. All the volunteers are very busy and they need some help.

At the hospital, I meet, firstly, the doctor. He explains briefly but clearly that Asha is suffering from anaemia, probably related to her menstrual cycle, but that

"there is nothing to be alarmed about." They have run some tests and scans, that showed only some pre-existing, and known, conditions, and nothing more. This kind of anaemia can be easily treated with a healthy diet, vitamins and an iron supplement. I go into Asha's room, she smiles at me. I put a chair next to her bed, and sit – a movement that suddenly reminds me of other hospital visits, it is almost familiar. Asha tells me that she feels better now, but that during the past days she felt very sick. She vomited repeatedly, she could not eat anything, and then she was admitted to the hospital. She explains that she has much on her mind, a lot of worries. She got all the papers for the family reunification but her children are still stuck in Ethiopia. "They are with him [Asha's father-in-law], and I am very scared." The embassy has informed her that there is no impediment, confirming the *nulla osta* to the family reunification. Only a tax stamp is missing, and this is the reason the procedure is blocked. Asha gets upset while talking: "I've paid all the tax stamps, but first they tell me one thing, then they tell me another thing… I'm worried," she says touching her head. "I have a lot on my mind, and so the blood goes down," she says lowering her hand: "With all this thinking, I forgot to eat, to drink, and I feel sick."

Asha tells me about the days spent at the hospital, how she slowly got better. She lists all the tests – CAT scan, ultrasound, gastroscopy, colonoscopy – and then all her medical conditions – hiatal hernia, gallstones, back pain, abdominal swelling. She is not fluent in Italian, but she is familiar with the medical language, because she used to work as a nurse. In her narrative, vernacular and specialist language mingle, and so do explanatory models: anaemia is related to a loss of blood and a lack of nutrients, but blood movements and eating habits are not independent of what happens around her. When I visit the next day, she is about to be discharged. She tells me that she wants to go to the Gaia centre to ask for help with the family

reunification, and with claiming a proper house and monthly allowance. She wants to go back to the Immigration Office and ask them how she can get better while living in a squat and with food stamps that do not allow her to buy the food she needs. I help her with the discharge papers and prescriptions. She will be busy in the next weeks with other tests, because doctors want to further examine her pre-existing medical conditions.

We meet again a few weeks later, in her room in the "Somali house", one of the occupied buildings in the ex-Moi village. The room is very small. There is a large bed, a dresser with a mirror, and a cupboard with a small fridge on top. "In this room, we make everything! Clothes, shoes, cooking…". There is a small terrace with a view of the hills. They use it for storage to free up space inside. The room is packed but well organized. Everything has its proper place. Asha shares the room with another woman, who is the "owner". In the last days, they have been hosting a sick woman, who does not have a house. I ask Asha how she is doing. She feels better, but she has pain in her leg joints and feels weak. She is only 39 years old, but her body is already very strained. Also, she is severely overweight, and this condition worsens her health problems. A few days ago, she stumbled and fell down. It happens to her sometimes, when she lacks strength. "The illness comes quickly, but then goes away very slowly," she comments. We become ill suddenly and then we need time to heal and recover. She has had all the prescribed tests and now is waiting for the results. She is eating better, but she does not eat much. The Immigration Office did not convert the food stamps into money. She shops at the only supermarket nearby that accepts the stamps, where she cannot find the meat she wants. While talking, she shows me a binder with all the medical documents well ordered, and a bag with a lot of medicines. She points to the vitamin supplement prescribed for anaemia. She has taken them for a while but has started thinking that they are not good for her.

She does not feel well, she feels weak and her joints hurt. The doctors also prescribed some injections which altered her mood. “The day after [the injection], I was in a bad mood. Very angry, my face was all burning. I talked back to everybody, I was rude. I didn’t want to talk to anybody. I felt this way for a few days, and it’s very strange, because I’m usually very kind to everybody, and everybody loves me. Since the medicines are bad for me, I decided to stop taking them.” She then continues talking about their children, and the family reunification. To prove the family relation, the procedure for the reunification requires a DNA test for each child. The test is very expensive: Asha had to borrow around 1,000 Euros, that now she should give back.

I ask Asha if we can talk more, and we meet again after about a month, with the interpreter. I want to look into the two images Asha has used so far to describe her experience in the asylum system, and her struggles to find a proper place in the new world. I begin asking about her migration trajectory, to understand what is behind the prison, how she arrived, and what happened before. Asha tells me she decided to leave Somalia because she had been threatened by her husband’s family. After her husband had been missing for about two years, his family assumed he was dead. They asked Asha to return all his belongings and, according to the custom, arranged her marriage with her brother-in-law. Initially, she managed to win time by appealing to the fact that in the absence of her husband’s corpse, she was not sure about his death. After some time, her father-in-law, an Al-Shabaab commander, formalized the divorce and began sending his men to bring Asha to him. She was kidnapped and beaten. She consented to the wedding but managed to postpone it for a while. In response, her father-in-law took her six children away, asserting that they did not belong to her anymore. She was free to leave, go wherever she wanted,

but she would never see her children again. She decided to leave the country and, after a long journey, arrived in Italy in March 2011.

Francesca: Did you arrive directly from Somalia to Italy, or did you travel across other countries?

Asha: I travelled across different countries … When I left Mogadishu, I went to Nairobi. From Nairobi to Kampala, Uganda, and from Kampala to South Sudan, and then Khartoum, and Libya. But when I got to Juba [South Sudan], I ran out of money, and I started working as a housekeeper. After I saved some money, I left again to continue my journey. I got to Sudan and there I found those smugglers, who took me to Libya. In Libya, they put me in jail. After a few months, I left. Then the war broke out in Libya, and I left. I managed to leave. … [In Italy,] I arrived in Linosa. Then they brought us to Lampedusa, and then to Crotone. … After Crotone, I was transferred to Torino, in the camp run by the Red Cross. Then, they divided us. My group was transferred to Asti.

[…]

F.: What kind of reception project did you find there [in Asti]? I mean, was it a big camp? Or a small centre, an apartment?

A.: It was an apartment, but pretty large. At the beginning, everything was fine, but it ended badly. At the beginning, the reception programme worked fine, they gave me everything [I needed]. I had mentioned my problems, the fact that my children were in Somalia. The project was giving me 25 Euros a month as pocket money for my personal expenses, the phone card, tampons, things like that. I had also got a job on Saturdays and Sundays, with a family, for 400 Euros a month. But when I started getting those money, the project took the pocket money away. I used to spend those 25 Euros for the things I needed, while sending the 400 Euros to my children, who needed them. He [the project coordinator] then told me that since I was working, I had to leave the project. I asked him, if I have to leave the project, then give me at

least the paper in which you declare I have left. But he didn't. When I arrived in Torino, asking the Immigration Office for help, they told me I already was in a project. When they checked on the computer, they saw that I was in the project. … He just told me that I couldn't stay any longer in the project, that for me it was over. At that point I arrived in Torino, to ask for help, to see if there were any other chances. … I came here because Torino was close by, and because the lady I was working for lived here. … But they told me that since the previous project wasn't formally closed, they couldn't help me. I couldn't get into other projects.

F.: And then, what happened?

A.: I had also some health issues, I wasn't feeling well. I had saved some of the money I earned working, and then I thought, what am I doing here? I didn't have any other income, or help. How could I support my children? I didn't even have a place to sleep. So, I thought it was better if I tried to go to another country in Europe. And I went to Norway.[75]

In Asha's experience, the invisible walls of the open prison become tangible when she attempts to negotiate her own space. She says that the project does not address all her primary needs. She is provided food, shelter and pocket money, but her priority is the safety of her children, with whom she has finally made contact. She tries to adjust the space around her, to build a world which is more liveable, by finding a way to earn money, and trying to move to a city where she sees more opportunities. But when she bumps into the prison wall, she employs an ordinary, well-known tactic: she moves on. Following De Certeau (1984), I here employ the distinction between "strategies" and "tactics". Whereas strategies belong to a

[75] All the excerpts are from the interview recorded on 24 May 2016. The interview was originally held in Somali with the help of a Somali-Italian interpreter. All the transcripts in this chapter are my translation.

"subject of will and power", and determine politic, economic, and scientific rationality, tactics are the everyday practices and temporary victories of the "weak" over the "strong." In particular, the author discriminates between strategies and tactics, comparing the city as a geometrical, rational organization of a proper space (*un espace propre*) based on strategic discourses and panoptic power, and urban practices as the plural, indeterminable, and stubborn tactics employed by those who live and walk in the city. Those spatial practices are creative, often illegitimate, modes of reappropriation, attempted productions of other spatialities:

> They are myriad, but do not compose a series. They cannot be counted because each unit has a qualitative character: a style of tactile apprehension and kinesthetic appropriation. Their swarming mass is an innumerable collection of singularities. Their intertwined paths give their shape to spaces. They weave places together (De Certeau, 1984, p. 97).

Therefore, spatial practices can be understood as a space of enunciation. "The act of walking", De Certeau continues, "is to the urban system what the speech act is to language or to the statements uttered" (De Certeau, 1984, p. 97), for it is a process of appropriation of topographies, a spatial acting-out (whereas a speech act is an acoustic acting-out), and it implies relations among different positions. From this perspective, mobility can be understood as a tactic for it does not refer to a progressive journey aimed at achieving step-by-step previously defined goals. Rather, migrants' mobility within Europe can be seen as a wandering. Indeed, the wanderer can actualize some of the possibilities – the well-trodden paths – offered by the spatial order, but also disturb those trajectories by moving around, or away, or by inventing alternatives.

In the past Asha has moved, and will continue moving, when facing a wall. In the context of forced migration, mobility, or rather the different degrees and

opportunities of mobility, is often employed as a tactic and opposed to the strategies of migration control and the production of precarious forms of citizenship. As previously discussed,[76] mobility, even when only imagined, represents a space or a moment of autonomy. In other words illegal, or not fully legal, forms of mobility exceed the asylum regime and, I argue, disturb the permanence of its walls by generating undisciplined, accidental and, therefore, defiant possibilities of action. Although mobility can shake and even breach the walls, the open prison stands and continues to operate. Asha describes clearly its working mechanisms, while explaining the effects and, particularly, the marks and the scars left on her already strained body by this paradoxical form of detention. Her account becomes a thick weave in which the thread of the prison's working process and its effects entwine with the plot of her efforts to escape the prison, or at least find a more habitable corner within its walls.

> *F.:* And what happened in Norway?
>
> *A.:* When I arrived, I began working for a Somali family. One day, I vomited blood. The lady I was working for told me: you are sick, but here nobody takes care of you if you don't apply for asylum. Then, I applied. They took care of me for about a year. I had all the tests and the treatments. After having taken care of me, one night, they came and took me to Italy without saying nothing. When I got at the airport in Rome, they gave me a piece of cardboard and told me: go sleeping there. I had some money with me. So, not to sleep on the streets, I decided to go to my cousin, the daughter of my aunt, who lives in France. She told me, here I can't help you much, I can't provide for your needs, you have to apply for asylum. … I decided to leave France when, one night, I saw some people sleeping hiding under a garbage can, not to catch cold.

[76] See Chapter 1.

> Some of them spoke Somali. In France, life is like that. Until you have your papers, you suffer. I understood that if I wanted to have a future, first I had to suffer like those people. *If you can't, you just go*. I thought, before I lose my mind, I go to Sweden. I couldn't stand. (emphasis added)

After the project regulations, Asha bumps into another, likely thicker, wall. Under the Dublin Regulations Asha has the right to apply for asylum only once and only in the first country of arrival, that is, in practice, in the first country where a migrant is identified and his or her fingerprints are recorded into the EURODAC database. The Dublin wall is firm but, as with every piece of the asylum machine, it admits a few exceptions. In certain cases, a sick and vulnerable body – or, more precisely, a body clearly showing its sickness and vulnerability – can temporarily bend the wall. Asha can rest, for a moment, until she ceases being an exceptional case. Then, she is forced to move, or she chooses to move when the walls do not allow for any bearable settlement: "If you can't, you just go."

> *A.:* I went to Sweden, I stayed with some acquaintances of mine. To let me live with them, they used me as a slave. I couldn't bear that, and I applied again for asylum. They sent me in a camp. There, I met with a lady, through some mutual acquaintances. We agreed I could move to her place. After a while, she introduced me to a man. She told me, here life is very difficult, if you want to get your papers, if you want to have a better life, you have to marry this man. But he was 60, I refused.

Asha takes a moment, and tells me that she was already in a relationship with a man she knew when they were both kids. At that time the man was living in Norway without papers after being denied asylum. She was in love and initially renounced the arranged marriage. But at one point, it looked like the only viable option.

A.: He told me: I will save you, I give you a better life, you don't have anything now. I support your family, your children, in Somalia. I buy you jewellery, I give you a house. I wasn't happy, I couldn't be. But I was forced to accept. This man was a widower, he had four children. We married and I became the wife and the servant. I had to clean, cook, take care of his children. This was one of the most difficult things. … It's been hard for me, I had to sell me out, giving up my love, to be with this man. It's the most incredible thing I've lived in Europe, since I came. The wedding didn't work, I couldn't stand it. We got divorced, and after a while, I found my love again and we got married.

Asha came back to Italy and, after some time, her husband arrived too. He applied for asylum in Bari, but the response was negative. In the meantime, Asha's first asylum application received a positive answer.

A.: Now he's getting sick, for the stress. I'm not sleeping, because I can't leave him like that. I want to help him, get him out of this situation. So far, I haven't been living the life I dreamt for when I was in Somalia. When I came here, I wanted to find a better life, help my family and reach my love who I was looking for since I was a girl. But, so far, none of this has happened. I'm living a hard life now. But I can't say that Italy has done nothing for me. When I was crossing the sea, between life and death, *they saved me.* … We don't have to ask why all this has happened, *we just have to think how to get out*. … I used to think, that here I would have changed my life. That I would have fixed everything, I would have had a better life, and I could have supported my children. But that didn't happen. *So far, I've never had a stable place, I'm still looking for it*. I'm trying to survive. I hope next year I'll have a better life, Inshallah. … Our life [as refugees] is not a quiet life. When you go to bed, you think you'll die. You don't know if tomorrow you'll be alive. When you wake up in the morning, you don't know if you'll be alive in the evening. … Everything has its time, and will end in its time. I can't say Italy is bad. We love Italy, but Italy doesn't love

> us. I'm Somali, they should look at Somalis with different eyes. We're not like everybody else, because Somalia was an Italian colony. I used to think of Italy as my second country, but it hasn't been like that. … We don't want anything, … We're just trying to survive. Nobody wants to live such a dog's life. We're forced to live this life, because we don't have a place to go back to. In Somalia, there's war everywhere. Otherwise, I wouldn't be here. … I'm ashamed to live at Moi [the ex-Moi village], but I have no other option. I'm always praying Allah, but then I think that this house isn't mine. Allah doesn't answer my prayers because I live in a house that isn't mine, for free. *But I'm forced to.*… I've been in jail, in Libya. They used to beat us there. *Here, nobody beats you, but there's an open prison.* You go somewhere, they tell you that your fingerprints are in Italy and they bring you back to Italy. Italy doesn't give you anything. In Italy, they gave me only these papers. But when I have the money, I can't travel. No house, no job, nothing. … It's a prison open on the top. You can't speak, you can't say all these things … that we don't have rights. … We have our papers, we have been granted asylum, but we have no other things, we don't have any right. … I'm grateful to Italy, because they saved me. But the life I had… I've said this is a prison because if you go somewhere, they send you back here. *We are prisoners!* It's an expression, to say that *we don't have other choices, other ways out.* (emphasis added)

In Asha's narrative, the prison has a dual character: it is both what saves you and what forces you. The open prison is simultaneously soft and firm, clement and strict. It comes to the rescue, offers opportunities and promises, creates expectations, while, at once working to contain and constrain. It is frustrating, but the prisoner cannot even get angry, for she depends on the prison. Asha cannot completely oppose, nor submit to, the prison: "We just have to think how to get out." And what gets her out is firstly her capacity of going further, at least with her mind, and of thinking ahead. When hitting an obstacle, Asha imagines other spatialities

and temporalities. From Somalia, to Kenya, Uganda, Sudan, Libya, and then Italy, France, Sweden, Norway. If the present is almost unliveable, for uncertainty is what makes the here and now unbearable, the next day, or the next year, can offer some alternatives. When projected in the future, uncertainty is what keeps open a cracking in the prison walls.

Imagination is the space Asha is still able to carve out within the prison – a space allowing her to go beyond. Following Michael Jackson (2008), I consider human imagination as something lying in between self, others and the world. Still, while acknowledging the relation between imaginaries[77] and the surrounding sociocultural conditions, such as norms and expectations, Jackson does not reduce imagination to a product of such conditions. Rather, with Sartre, he thinks of imagination as "but one expression of the human striving for presence in relation to others and the world. Inchoate, amorphous, and volatile, this will-to-exist fastens or focuses opportunistically on various objects, some actually at hand, some absent, some wholly fantastic, in its search to objectify or consummate itself in the world. But unlike reality-testing, imagining always goes beyond what the world actually is, or any person can actually be" (Jackson, 2008, p. 72).

[77] My use of the term "imaginary" is not related to Lacan's notion of the Imaginary. Here, I draw on anthropological literature in employing the notion of the imaginary to refer to the human capacity to fantasize, dream, and project into other or future worlds – a capacity resulting from the interplay of individual imagination and social systems of representations. In a phenomenological approach, the notion of imaginary, or of "horizon", refers to the point of convergence between cultural representations and beliefs, and the use that people make of these representations and beliefs. I also consider how those subjective variations can influence the collective imaginaries: for instance, how imagined mobility can be seen as a form of resistance to "real" immobility.

Imaginaries are related to objects, to the mundane, but at the same time enable one to go beyond. Therefore, between so-called reality and our "imaginative horizons" exists a relationship of interdependence, "in which the irreality of the imaginary impresses the real of the reality and the real of reality compels the irreality of the imaginary" (Crapanzano, 2004, p. 15). As argued by Stefania Pandolfo (2007), when producing images and imaginaries, people mobilize collective configurations, thus providing a framework and a horizon within which their existential experiences are understood and reconfigured. In particular, migration's imaginaries of the elsewhere and of exile usually deal with the re-articulation of subjectivity, the experience of exclusion, the fractures in social relations, and the precarity, sometimes the impossibility, of belonging. Pandolfo points out that imaginaries combine different registers, such as the political, the theological and the moral.

Asha's phantasies, dreams, and projections for an uncertain future draw on her and other refugees' experiences of exclusion, injustice, and despair; on religious and moral configurations of hope, struggle, gratitude and obligation; and on the historical memory, by bringing the colonial past of Italy and Somalia to the foreground. Her imaginary about the act of moving on is a tactic to momentarily escape the open prison and its ambiguous present. She has not actualized her hopes about a stable place yet, but she is still looking for it. Whereas strategies aim at defining space and time, tactics stems from the possibility of seeing beyond. Tactics open horizons – and continue operating due to those horizons.

Still, tactics are provisional, precarious, and ultimately fragile. "What is the threshold of tolerance, the breaking point, for any individual, beyond which adversity comes to be experienced as unbearable, hope is abandoned, and he or she can no longer seize the day?" asks Jackson.

> This point would seem to be determined, first by the sheer weight of the world — its unresponsiveness to one's presence or one's voice, and its obdurate refusal to acknowledge one's needs, let alone one's aspirations. Second it is determined by the extent to which an individual falls prey to the thoughts, imaginings and self-fulfilling prophecies that are born of his or her frustrated efforts to speak or act. (Jackson, 2008, p. 71)

Asha has come close to the threshold. She has walked on the edge of crisis, but she has not "lost her mind" yet. So far, she has managed to climb up again. But her strength is literally leaking out from her body.

> *A.:* When they took my children away… That was the most difficult time. … If I haven't lost my mind then… With other difficulties, you think it will be over. But when they take your children… This is the most difficult thing, it never goes away. Sometimes I do things to distract myself, not to have my mind always go back to this. Otherwise, I would have lost my mind already. Now, my husband doesn't have papers, my father is sick, I'm sick too, we don't have nothing. I wanted to bring my children here, they confirmed the *nulla osta*, but I don't know how to bring them here. *If I think, if I go on thinking, I only make my health issues worse.* … Yesterday, I called a guy I met in Libya, who now lives in Malta. He told me there's a job there, for 800 Euros a month. I want to take care of my father, but then I want to go there, if there's a job… For me, the important thing is to find a job, to bring here my kids, pay for their trip. If I think here I'm only getting 50 Euros in food stamps from the Immigration Office, I'm just wasting my time… I have to take what comes.
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> *F.:* Well, if that's ok with you… Would you mind talking about your health? I've known you as a strong woman, you have told me you had a very difficult time, and you've been very strong. But I've also known you when you were sick, and you told me about your health issues. Would you mind talking about that?

A.: I have some health issues: anaemia, some liver problems, gallstones. There's something at my uterus but it's not clear what it is, I have to wait for the CAT scan's results. … I fell off, and I'm doing physical therapy for my backache. I have all these health issues, and then I have a hard life. How can your blood come back, how can anaemia go away, if you don't have water, if you can't eat red meat? if you don't have other things, vegetables? If you can't buy what you need to eat? How can this anaemia pass? This is the problem… Inshallah, it will pass. … I don't know why I have this anaemia. … I don't know what it is, we have to wait for the CAT scan's results. But if I think at the reason why it came, maybe there's a part of stress. Because I want to bring my children here and I don't know how, because I have a husband I love, but we can't live together… My father is sick, I don't have a job. Maybe all these things… I think so, but let's see the test results.

F.: In your opinion, how did the stress cause these health problems? What's the link?

A.: If tomorrow my children get the visa, and I don't have the money to pay for their trip, there's no stress bigger than that. My husband doesn't have papers, his application has been rejected, and we can't live together. … All these things. And my father, I can't leave him alone. All these thoughts have piled up and are the stress. I can't sleep at night, the thoughts come, and maybe it's for this reason that my blood went away. Because I think: what can I do? How can I fix this? How can I fix my children's problems? How can I fix my husband's problems? And then, it's two in the night. In the morning, I wake up early, and so I only sleep three or four hours. And where I live, I am the most normal! At Moi a lot of people have lost their mind. I have all these thoughts, this is the reason why I think it's the stress. In the evening, to pass the time, I listen to music, I dance… They say that if you dance, you lose weight, then I turn on the music. Sometimes I read the Quran… Or I make crosswords… I spend time like that, not to think too much. (emphasis added)

Asha's body is already strained, exhausted by relatively minor health problems that overlap and worsen due to her living conditions. As she reaches the threshold, walking on the line of what de Martino (1977) described as the risk of losing her own presence, her body begins slowly to yield. To Asha, anaemia is not a known issue, this is the first time she experiences it. In her description, the loss of blood is related to the increasing pressure from the outside, and her condition of dispossession. Her blood "goes down" or "goes away" because of the thoughts accumulating, and cannot "come back" because she is prevented from resting and eating properly. Her vigour fades, her body seems to surrender. But, this time, she recovers some of her strength, not trespassing over the threshold. She keeps her frail presence and moves on: "Even if we've a lot of problems, a hard life, we've to thank God, and not ask why all this happened. We're Muslims, we always thank God, for better or worse. … Also for sickness, thank God. Everything has its time. It will pass, it will pass." The interview is the last time we meet in person. We keep in touch via text messaging while she struggles with her own and her father's health issues. After a while, she tells me that she is probably going to Germany during summertime where there are more job opportunities, and a better social welfare. After a few weeks, her Italian number is deactivated, and I lose track of her.

A shaking, wordless body

Saeed is a 28 year old man from Pakistan. He arrived in Europe eight years ago from a small rural village in Gujrat, a district in Punjab province. He used to work as a farmer with his father and younger brother for the local landlords. His family was subject to a relation of bonded labour, a form of modern slavery widely spread

in that region (Arif, 2004; Martin, 2009; Upadhyaya, 2008). His father had spent his life in debt bondage, working under abusive conditions to repay a landlord's loan.[78] Saeed and his brother left school at an early age to help their father but the debt was impossible to extinguish and instead continued to increase. Their condition worsened when their father borrowed some more money to pay for his two daughters' weddings as the only means to grant them safety, and when the younger brother was accused of letting some cattle die during a flood. Saeed's brother was badly beaten and became mentally disabled and unable to work. Saeed and his father were beaten as well. To protect his eldest son Saeed's father made him leave.

The family agreed to pay around 7,000 Euros to the smugglers. When he left Pakistan, Saeed did not have a destination. He just wanted to work to pay the debt. He reached Karachi and flew to Dubai and then Moscow. From there, he travelled by car and on foot to Ukraine and Slovakia. He arrived in Italy and, after a few days, moved to Spain, reaching an uncle who could help him find a job to repay the debt to the smugglers. He lived in Spain for about three years, working without papers. When he lost his job, he moved to Italy with the help of some friends of his uncle. He lived near Milan without papers, hosted by other Pakistani immigrants or sleeping in parks, working occasionally. After two years had passed, a friend suggested he claim asylum. His application was denied and he stayed illegally for about five months, hiding. Not knowing about free legal aid, he did not appeal the decision.

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[78] Bonded labour is a practice that takes place outside the law and it is based on informal agreements. Although debt bondage is formally banned under Pakistani law, it persists with the complicity of police and other authorities. Bonded labour is often characterized by the threat and use of physical and other forms of coercion, but it also relies on forms of patronage and acts of benevolence by landlords. Village populations are made dependent for their security and survival upon landlords who have a monopoly over local state institutions, economic resources and the means of physical coercion (Martin, 2009).

Instead, he moved to Germany to claim asylum there. He found a job, but after six months he was transferred back to Italy under the Dublin Regulations. He arrived in Torino in November 2014 and entered a SPRAR project. With the help of a lawyer, he appealed against the first rejection.

I meet Saeed in December 2015 at Centro Kalima. Saeed has been referred there by his project's workers, after he went to A&E three times and was discharged with a diagnosis of "panic attacks". During our first sessions[79] he says that he has been suffering from these episodes only since arriving in Italy and never before. During these episodes, he feels his arms and legs shaking "like somebody is moving them"; he has palpitations and a strong fear of dying. Sometimes he sits with his feet wound firmly around the chair's legs, his arms crossed as if to prevent the shaking. When they ask him questions, the psychiatrist and the psychotherapist refer to Saeed's experience with the general and comprehensive term "anxiety" which the cultural mediator translates as *ghabrahat*, – a vernacular Urdu word describing a generalized state of anxiety, worry and fearfulness. With "panic attacks" and "depression", this is the third linguistic label that has been assigned to Saeed's experience and is used by Seed himself to talk about what is happening to him. It is

[79] The clinical team is formed by a psychiatrist, a psychologist-psychotherapist, and an Urdu-speaking cultural mediator. Though Saeed's mother tongue is Punjabi, he agrees to speak Urdu in which he is fluent. I join the sessions as a psychologist, mainly listening and taking notes. After a few months, toward the end of the therapy, the psychologist and I agree that Saeed might be interested in participating in my research. I introduce my research project, asking him if he want to tell, and make public, his experience in the asylum system. He agrees and we meet, along with the cultural mediator, for two interviews outside the clinical sessions. The interviews are conducted in Urdu and translated into Italian by Shail Jha, to whom I express my gratitude. The Urdu transcripts have been translated into English by Fatima Raja, whom I thank. All translation from Italian into English are mine.

something very new for him, and, as he will make clear in a following interview, he does not have a name for it.

> *Saeed*: I got here from Germany and then for a year, a year and a half, I felt ok. I was healthy, I didn't have any problem. Then one evening, I ate dinner, and then I went to sleep, and while I was sleeping, I felt like my hands and legs were shaking, and I was nervous and had palpitations. I got out of bed, I stood up, and I felt dizzy and fell down. … On that month, it happened four times. My hands were shaking, my legs were shaking. Every time I had this sensation, I felt I'd die. … Every time I had this, I thought: I'm going to die.
>
> *Francesca*: And what other thoughts did you have?
>
> *S.*: I had no other thoughts. No other thought would come to me. Three or four times when I went they sent me to the psychologist that he has a *vehm.*[80] They would take me to the doctor and my blood pressure would be high or it would be low, they checked me and said it's nothing. They wrote me [prescribed] some drops, and I took those drops. I'm still taking those drops sometimes. If I can't sleep I still take 2–3 drops. I'm alone, I still take the drops, I still feel scared, I still have a *vehm*. But I don't take them like I used to, like a medicine. I take them when I need them. I still buy and keep them with me. The doctor said there is nothing wrong with him, meaning that it is *vehm*, he has depression [Saeed uses the English word "depression"], they prescribed some drops, in an emergency you drink these, it's depression nothing else [is wrong]. I didn't know what depression is, I heard it for the first time when I came here. (Saeed, interview, 23/10/2016).

In the eight years he has spent in Europe, this is the first time he has had these episodes. He does not even find a particular reason for being worried, but after a

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[80] In Urdu, *vehm* refers to something like a false conviction, a paranoia or a strongly held superstition. I am grateful to Fatima Raja for this clarification.

while he mentions his long time away from home: "I don't have a particular worry, but I left home eight years ago… It could be that" (Saeed, session, 21/12/2015). He feels a responsibility towards his family in Pakistan and here he feels lonely, isolated, and powerless. He is afraid of what is uncertain, of the things about which he feels he does not have any power to act and that makes him feel stuck. He links the anxiety to the lack of a job and to the asylum seeker's condition of suspension:

> I have to work, or a lot of thoughts come to my mind. … I've been thrown in this place from Germany… I don't have a date for the interview. … In Germany, I was doing fine, I had a house and a job. … Here, you can't do anything on your own. It's like a jail. (Saeed, session, 21/12/2015)

> I'm afraid of the things I can't do anything about. … I don't understand, what will happen, what I have to do, I don't understand. … Maybe when I'll have my papers, then I'll understand. Not knowing if I'll have the papers, not knowing what will happen, this is a big problem. … I can't go neither forward, nor backward. (Saeed, session, 08/02/2016)

> [In Germany] I was fine. I had some thoughts, but I didn't have these episodes. … I didn't have anxiety because I used to work eight or nine hours a day, I paid back a lot of debts, and I could send some money home, too. Here in Italy, I didn't have a job, I don't have a date for the interview. … You can go crazy just thinking. (Saeed, session, 7/3/2016)

Saeed tells that he is feeling better since he started to work in a pizza restaurant. The project has activated a *borsa lavoro*, a temporary job contract aimed at facilitating access to the job market for vulnerable, unemployed people, and funded by the government through governmental and non-governmental entities (Regional and City Council, or associations and NGOs). In the meanwhile, his appeal is accepted and Saeed is granted asylum. He is still struggling, but hopeful for the

future: “If I have a job, the rest falls into place. And now that I have my papers, I can even move to find another job” (Saeed, session, 10/10/2016).

When we meet for an interview, we run from the outset into a communication predicament. I ask about his life in Europe, Saeed starts mentioning the difficulties, but desists suddenly.

> *S.:* … Leaving your country is not easy for anyone, leaving your household, your mother and father, everything that is your own, to come to another country. Secondly, coming to another country, it's like starting your life from zero, like you've just been born. That’s what it's like coming to a different country. You can’t speak, you can't tell anyone about yourself, it's a new start. And difficulties – it’s been a while, there have been many difficulties. Now it feels to me that I have come to Europe in this moment, when I got my papers.
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> *F.:* I’m interested in talking about this phase in between the life you left, and the life that’s beginning. In my opinion, it’s important to give testimony of what happens, because there are opportunities, but also difficulties, and I think it’s important to make them known.
>
> *S.:* This period, when I came here there was no one. To find someone, find work, find a house, sleep in parks, in stations, it’s very difficult to leave everything behind and to start anew, enduring difficulties. It’s very difficult. … Sleeping without eating. … The police takes you away, keep you for two days because you don't have papers. … There is another feat, that when the police takes you, you don't know what will happen. … I think, what [you are] asking *these aren’t things that anyone can understand or that anyone can describe properly* because it's very difficult to say all that happened to me. I don't want to remember it but I'm still telling you a little. … It's very difficult. Just imagine, you [addressing F.] you go to a country where you don't know the language, you don't know anyone, how do you feel when there’s

nobody no work, no language, no money for food, *how will it feel?* (Saeed, interview, 19/07/2016, emphasis added)

Remembering is painful, and Saeed is afraid to lose that little bit of calm he has earned recently. Then, he makes clear that the problem is not that he does not want to talk, but that some things are incommunicable. Imagine, how would you feel in this condition? I continue by asking what has changed after he received his papers.

S.: For now I'm very happy. I've got the documents at least. Before, I worked, didn't get paid, I didn't have documents, I couldn't go to the police, I had nothing. Now at least I'm here legally. I have the reassurance that if I do anything it'll be mine. If I make a decision, I can make a decision for myself. I have the papers, I can work. … Before, I couldn't work, I couldn't go around freely. It was an imprisonment to not have documents. If I went here, maybe the police would check, take me away, waste time, put me inside [prison] for a couple of days, deport me, there were a lot of worries. Now I've come out of those. I'm feeling free, things are fine, praise Allah. … I'm feeling freedom. *I'm feeling free. I feel I've come out of my personal imprisonment*. … The project where we are staying, this camp. We live there at their will, we eat at their will, we drink at their will, what they say we have to do. It's a pressure on us. If they say we have to leave at 8 we have to leave at 8. You have to be "in" at this time, "in" at that time. They give us everything but they also make us feel that you are below us. This is something you feel, living there. They always make you feel that you have left your country. … When I returned [from Germany], it was 2014 in November, two years had passed. I had been rejected once and the second time I was afraid I'd be rejected, I'd be rejected. A person goes crazy inside that if they reject me now, what will happen to me? For such a long time I had it bad, now after two years they made me sit, even till the Commission. One goes more than half mad. The only thought left is that if they reject me again I'll be zero again. One keeps

quarrelling with oneself. A hundred types of thoughts come. Someone who has a strong heart, a good heart, maybe he can bear it, but I swear to Allah, I tell them, I have seen guys who would kill themselves, or cause themselves harm. They get so depressed they get a heart attack. I've seen guys like that. It's very hard to bear. They give you an appointment and also taunt[81] you. I'm not saying they're bad, they give us everything, it's not like they don't give it to us, they give us everything but they also taunt us alongside: "you are under us, obliged to us, you have to say or do as we tell you. If you don't do it then we'll kick you out for three days, for ten days, we'll kick you out of the project." For our own greed, our own need, we stay under [suppressed under] them, tolerate it. Isn't this imprisonment? It turns the mind bad.

[…]

F.: Well, you said that your way of thinking changes, it goes bad. What do you mean?

S.: It doesn't go bad, one gets so tortured that within one there is a depression. If they kick you out for three days, where will you go? Where will one sleep, where will one eat? There's no work, nothing. If you're in the project you can't work, they're giving you *borsa lavoro* you're doing that, aside from that there's no other work. When you're doing the *borsa lavoro* you can't do any other work. If you're in the camp you can't work. If they give an appointment for 8, they'll call you in at 12. They'll write 8 o'clock but call you in at 12. But if we're late, they say we gave you an appointment for 8, why did you come at 12? Why did you come at 9? If you're even five minutes late they say such things, meaning that we don't understand rules and regulations, we are useless, we're not punctual, we're nothing. But if they call us in 4 hours late they're still ok. … *These things, only that person can understand or know*

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[81] Saeed employs the Urdu word *jitlana* which means "keep reminding you of how bad/stupid/inferior you are". I am grateful to Fatima Raja for this clarification.

who experiences them. Other people can't – this only happens to those who experiences it. *For others it's nothing*.

F.: And can you try to explain this experience, or do you think it's incomprehensible?

S.: I don't have the words. What words can I use to explain it? I don't have the words. …

[…]

F.: I'm interested in what you're saying, and the words you're using. To talk about the experience of waiting from 8 until 12, you used the word "torture". It's a strong word, very meaningful. And I wanted to ask you if you could try to explain why for you it was a torture, in that moment. …

S.: It's mental torture. It's not just if you ask – if Questura asks I will say the same thing. If the police, the army ask me, I will say the same thing. Because that's what they do. How can we explain it when we can't speak the language. It's not like only I say it, if I bring 100 people here they will say this, I can bring thousands and they'll [all] say this. They'll give an appointment for 8, it'll say we have to come at 8, and they'll call us in at 12, 1. All the people, the lawyers come, they chat, socialize. I've seen them socialize. It's socializing, isn't it? A lawyer comes, they take the lawyer in, or another person they know, they chat for a long time. Are they there to work or to chat? … There's another amusing thing I want to tell you. On my papers there's a stamp from the Questura. On 6 November 2014 I arrived at the airport in Torino. They gave me a stamp saying 4 November. It's such a big organization, the Questura. Our lives depends on their stamps. And they gave me a stamp for 4 November. I have kept the paper to day, stapled for remembrance, that I arrived on 6 November and because of their mistake, fine, it was a mistake, because of one stamp who knows what can happen. A single signature, who knows what all can happen. Our lives depend on a stamp, a signature, we are foreigners, we come here and if a judge signs

it at the commission it says we have a permission, I become a refugee. But I got a stamp saying 4 November, the Questura's stamp. … If they make a mistake it doesn't matter. If I make a mistake it's a big deal. … I know that they stamped it by mistake, they didn't do it on purpose. The date was the 6th but they stamped it the 4th. It was a mistake, it's just a stamp with the date on it, probably no one noticed. But if they make a mistake it's not a problem. If we make a mistake, or even if we don't make a mistake but they say we've done wrong, it becomes a problem. … There are also some people – I have a friend here, who got the *Soggiorno* [permit to stay] and he wrote his name etc down, at the Commission all the information was correct, and he came to the Questura to submit it and the name was written down incorrectly in the *Soggiorno*. He got the *Soggiorno*, nearly 4–5 months after he got the *Soggiorno*, his brother died. His father died, his brother died, and the name was not correct. There was one name on the passport, the name he gave the Commission was written down as something else. Meaning, the name at the Commission is original, everything is original, but when submitting the *Soggiorno* they misspelled it. He got a new *Soggiorno* after 8 months. … After getting it corrected. Eight months. … He wasn't able to go. His brother died, his father died. He wasn't able to go. He had received his *Soggiorno*, he'd had it for 1.5 years. First he got it 5–6 months earlier, then because of the error they submitted it again, but who bears the responsibility? Who was this because of? … My Commission was in 2012. I had three mistakes corrected. They conceded, the Commission conceded it was their error, maybe it was the typewriter's error [using English word, but here meaning typist] because I told them my debt was 15–16,000 euros. They wrote down 15–16. Rupees, meaning euros. When I went to the CGIL [Italian General Confederation of Labour, a national trade union also providing free legal counselling] I thought maybe they could help me get a lawyer. They saw the "15–16 euro" and they threw the papers back in my face. They said, you left your country for 15–16 euros? This is your dispute, for only 15–16 euros? There was no lawyer, CGIL couldn't give me a lawyer they said it's your

mistake, 15–16 rupees [meaning, euros] is written at the Commission. They said, you left your country for 15–16 euros? This is your dispute, for only 15–16 euros? They took out 2–3 errors sitting there, and the typewriter [typist] was there and they agreed it was the typist's error. This is the account I gave them in 2012, only what happened to my brother, the flood coming, and the livestock that died or was killed, these were the only changes but the story is the same as the one I told them in 2012. It's the same story. Four years later they heard the same story and gave me the refugee status. On the same story. In 2012 this same story was rejected. … Four years of my life were gone. (Saeed, interview, 19/07/2016, emphasis added)

S.: I don't say they're wrong. They're right. But their way of saying things, that "we're doing this for you" – no, man, you're doing it for yourself, you're getting a salary for this, you're not doing it for free, are you doing this for free? Don't you take a salary for this work or are you doing it for free? … I mean, if they think it's so easy, the tone they speak to you in, these words "we are doing this for you". This is not your house, you have to do this or that, you are in a project, this is not your house, this is not your country. … Their mode of speaking, with arrogance, telling others off. We are here so you are working. If we are not here, then there is no work for you. … We were *majboor* [compelled, obliged, forced by circumstances] so we came. Will they leave their country and go? Where will they go? When there is no *majboori* [compulsion, necessity], in his own house any man can talk. I am *majboor* so I came here. If I were not *majboor*, why would I come here? … I told the doctor that I am tortured by these things. Now, I had an appointment for 9.30 [referring to the interview]. I was 2–3 minutes late. As soon as I came I apologised to her [Francesca]. She was here before me. I apologized that I was 2–3 minutes late, I apologize. But I was 2–3 minutes late, that's normal, it happens. But four, five hours, they gave me an appointment for 8 in the morning, they gave a written appointment that at 8 you have to be there so I went at 8. They made me sit there for 4 hours, 5 hours, am I not a human being? Do I have nothing else to do? Is there nothing else I can do in those

> 4–5 hours? What do they want to prove [using the English word], that we are nothing, 4–5 hours, do they have no value for 4–5 hours?... What is there to tell? ... How we came, they don't understand. If they were to find out what happens along the way, how people enter here, their hair would stand on end. *I can't tell them, nor can they understand, not until one has lived it can one understand*. I told you this last time as well, that until one has lived it one can't have the feelings. I have such feelings that when I see someone else I want to cry because I remember this also happened with me. If I see with anyone at all, I remember this also happened to me. What feelings I experienced. I feel great pain. (Saeed, interview, 23/10/2016, emphasis added)

Saeed does not casually employ the word "torture". He has known coercion and physical violence, and chooses this particular image to describe his experience. But when I ask him to help me better understand, he lacks words: "Only one who lived these experiences can understand." For Elaine Scarry (1985), pain is unshareable, because it is not simply resistant to language, but actively destroys it. While, for the person in pain, it cannot be denied for it is incontestably present, for the persons outside of the sufferer's body, pain is elusive and cannot be confirmed. As Jean Améry writes in *At the mind's limits* (1980), it is totally senseless to try to describe the pain inflicted with torture. Torture eludes the very possibility of language, making the person only a body.

> One comparison would only stand for the other, and in the end we would be hoaxed by turn on the hopeless merry-go-round of figurative speech. The pain was what it was. Beyond that there is nothing to say. Qualities of feeling are as incomparable as they are indescribable. They mark the limit of the capacity of language to communicate. If someone wanted to impart his physical pain, he would be forced to inflict it and thereby become a torturer himself. Since the *how* of pain defies

> communication through language, perhaps I can at least approximately state *what* it was. (Améry, 1980, p. 33)

Then what pain does torture produce? According to Améry, torture transforms the person into flesh, "only a body, and nothing else beside that." With the first hit, the person feels helpless, losing trust in the world: if they are permitted to punch me, they will do with me what they want.

> But more important as an element of trust in the world, and in our context what is solely relevant, is the certainty that by reason of written or unwritten social contracts the other person will spare me – more precisely stated, that he will respect my physical, and with it also my metaphysical, being. The boundaries of my body are also the boundaries of my self. My skin surface shields me against the external world. If I am to have trust, I must feel on it only what I *want* to feel. At the first blow, however, this trust in the world breaks down. The other person, *opposite* whom I exist physically in the world and *with* whom I can exist only as long as he does not touch my skin surface as border, forces his own corporeality on me with the first blow. (Améry, 1980, p. 28)

When the boundaries of the body are violated, the core principle of the social contract is denied. In addition, the person is refused one of the fundamental elements constituting her existential experience, that is, the expectation of help. When I am injured, I believe other human beings will help me. But when I experience that there can be no defence against that first hit, my trust in the world is undermined and it can never be re-established. Indeed, torture contains

> the border violation of my self by the other, which can be neither neutralized by the expectation of help nor rectified through resistance. Torture is all that, but in addition very much more. Whoever is overcome by pain through torture experiences his body as never before. In self-negation, his flesh becomes a total

> reality. But only in torture does the transformation of the person into flesh become complete. Frail in the face of violence, yelling out in pain, awaiting no help, capable of no resistance, the tortured person is only a body, and nothing else beside that. (Améry, 1980, p. 33)

The person is left with a "great amazement and a foreignness in the world," experiencing that "in this world there can be the other as absolute sovereign, and sovereignty revealed itself as the power to inflict suffering and to destroy" (Améry, 1980, p. 39).

Saeed describes a similar experience: he feels helpless and powerless and is unable to communicate his pain. He can only show his shaking body. He bears the consequence of torture, defining his experience in these terms, but without having been beaten. Saeed is indeed claiming that torture can exist even without physical violence. The asylum prison, by means of its officers, can get under his prisoner's skin without even touching him. The asylum prison does not explicitly violate Saeed's bodily boundaries, and, in addition, it is what offers him help and opportunities, and what makes him dependent. It does not deny the social contract. On the contrary, the humanitarian regime is funded on the respect of human rights and on the protection of the most vulnerable persons. Saeed is stating that the institute of asylum can be as violent as torture: "These people always give you everything, but at the same time they keep you subordinate." Asylum procedures are arbitrary, obscure, and always changing. They are scarcely predictable and comprehensible: why did I have to wait for four hours, or four years, and other people do not? Why the same application was rejected the first time, and accepted later? Why do mistakes have such different weights? A simple typo can affect the course of event, while a long and immobile wait does not matter much. What is dehumanizing is the paradoxical nature of the asylum machine, that does not even

allow for making violence explicit and visible. If the tortured cannot oppose, but can see and recognize, violence, the asylum prisoner is not sure he can define his experience as such. Violence is not evident; rather, it is mingled with care and protection. The prisoner is not forced to submit himself, he chooses to comply, despite the possibility of resisting. Not only does he lose trust in the world, he also doubts himself, losing trust in his own perceptions and experiences. His lifeworld is on the verge of crisis.

Torture is not tangible, but its effects are. Saeed is in pain – a pain that is physical, very visible, but also unfamiliar, and without an evident origin. He is only a body, a scared body.

> *F.:* The first time it happened, did you wonder what caused this problem? Did you wonder why it was happening?
>
> *S.*: I had no awareness, I just thought I was going to die. There was nothing. I started, you know, reciting some of our surahs [chapters of the Quran]. I started as much as I could say, with my breath. My breathing was very difficult and my heart was beating hard. I recited what I could, thinking I am going to die. … And my hands shaking, I called my mother. Just to listen to her voice. … I just wanted to listen to her voice. It just felt like I was about to die, I wanted to hear someone's voice. That's how it felt. … The blacks who were with me at that time, if someone were to ask them they can say what my condition was. I had no awareness. I'm telling you as much as I remember. That was my condition.
>
> *F.:* You didn't feel nothing… What do you mean?
>
> *S.:* I was so scared. I felt just scared, and nothing else. What's that makes my hands shake, my legs shake so hard that when I stand up, then I fall down? What's that? I had no idea. … Even now, I'm not calm when I remember. I'm always scared and I try to keep my mind elsewhere, not to think about it. Because I'm always scared that

it could come back: this thing can come back, this thing can come back… It's a problem. And it hasn't come out of my mind yet. I'm fine, but it's in my mind, somewhere.

[…]

S.: When I pray the thoughts come more. Not just about this, other thoughts also come while praying, other negative thoughts. … I have the faith that, here I'm sitting here or with doctors, I have the belief that death is death. Everyone has to die, I will also die and at the time that is written [to die], no doctor or anyone can save me, I will die. It's Allah's will if I am to die or not die. But fear, terror, that doesn't go away. Now I know and you also know, one has to die some day. One day or the other [laughs] we will end. But fear, that mortal fear, human nature, compels one [to fear]. Do I know if I will take another breath? No, I don't know. … About death, what you are asking, it should be clear to you that that thought was that I am about to die. That was a different terror. But our faith is a different thing. We've been told that we should remember the grave five times a day. Five prayers [*namaz*] and five times to remember the grave, that one has to die. (Saeed, interview, 23/10/2016)

Saeed finds himself on the threshold of an existential crisis. His body is about to yield after all the violence and the pain. He cannot stand firm, his arms and legs are shaking. There is only fear, a fear that cannot be communicated to others. In de Martino's terms (1977), he risks losing the intersubjectivity and the historicity of the world. Yet, on the edge of the estrangement, Saeed looks for a handhold to prevent the fall. When he feels reduced to a wordless body he finds in the Quran something he can hold on to. The Quran's words allow him to cross over his present and private, to "transcend the risk of not-being-in-the-world", moving from crisis to the reintegration into a communicable and intersubjective world. The fear of death is comprehended and articulated in the religious discourse. In prayer Saeed can elude isolation and relate his existential experience of terror to the spiritual

awareness of human finitude. At least for now, the fall is prevented, and Saeed can come back to a world shared with others.

Conclusions

I began this chapter by asking how continuity can be established when we break down, and what make us survive in not-survivable conditions. I suggested to look at images, and metaphors, to try to make sense and get in touch with those experiences. I have listened to Asha's speech about the open prison, from within the open prison, considering not only the image, in all its intensity, but also the position, and timing, from which she chooses to make her experience communicable. She takes a stand, responding to her two teachers' effort to create a space where refugee women can take a stand. From there, she makes a claim – a counter-interpellation that challenges her interlocutors, and that cannot be easily answered. Asha talks about an invisible prison, that becomes tangible only when she hits the walls, when trying to negotiate her own space. Her narrative reveals the ambiguity and the duality of the prison – a system that rescues and contains, provides for and constrain. Asha shows the marks left on her by the years spent in the open prison, telling about the moments when her body is losing its strengths, and is about to surrender. She tells about her tactics to deal with the prison, to find some room, pushing against the wall: she moves, or she imagines moving. Mobility, and imagined mobility, thus become her space of autonomy from the prison.

Saeed talks about a prison as well, describing its paradoxes as a form of torture. It is an invisible, immaterial torture, that however maintains its working mechanisms. As the tortured, Saeed feels that the prison has violated his bodily

boundaries, breaking the most basic social contract. Language and communicability are undone: Saeed is left speechless, reduced by the system to only a body – a shaking body. He employs a vivid image, that of an imprisoned and tortured body, in the effort to re-articulate a narrative, and make his experience intelligible. He describes the hidden and paradoxical mechanism of the asylum prison, that does not even acknowledge its violence, making the prisoner doubt his own experience, and lose trust in himself. He feels tortured, but he cannot see clearly his torturer – and on this threshold, his body begins to yield, trembling. Then, Saeed turns to the Quran, grabbing hold of its words, to rejoin a shared world.

The Uruguayan psychoanalysts Marcelo and Maren Viñar (1989, 1993) refer to this process with the term *desexilio*, to describe the labyrinth through which the survivor of torture tries to go back to social coexistence, and find again her place within humanity. Through this labyrinth, the survivor has to reconstruct her body and the relations between hers and other bodies, to re-establish a form of belonging with her own kind. According to the two psychoanalysts, returning to be human after torture has to do with similarity: I have to find a resemblance with others, something in common, to consider myself a man or a woman again. The condition of the tortured is therefore similar to that of the refugee. A human being is such for he or she is someone to someone else, while refugees are often nobody – treated only as victims, and not recognized as persons.

The notion of *desexilio* is different from the concept of resilience, widely used when speaking about torture's survivors. As Viñar and Viñar write, the idea of resilience suggests a return to a prior condition, a sort of process of cicatrization. On the contrary, the human being coming out from the abyss of torture is different from the one who entered it. The painful wounds and the marks left on the body have indeed a creative, generative, potential. Drawing on their work with survivors, the

two authors argue that torture entails a fragile possibility for transformation, and reconstruction. As they put it, this extreme experience can disclose a poietic space.

As Asha and Saeed show, prisoners occupy and inhabit that space, in which an act of creation is possible, to re-imagine through their crises a life in the world. Different temporalities condense onto their bodies. By bearing the wounds of past and present violence, their bodies constitute an active process of memory. But since those wounds remain open, their bodies offer not only a narrative: they question, move, provoke, thus demanding a response from the people with whom they get in touch. They unfold a space for imagination, a possibility. Therefore, it is not just them who face a process of transformation, through which becoming different from themselves, and thus reacquiring a sense of similarity with others. It is also the social space that is challenged, and urged to a radical change – a change often perceived as threatening, and because of that, denied.

Concluding thoughts

This research began with two fundamental questions: what if we think of non-ordinary experiences as alternative, possible ways of perceiving and understanding the world – instead of framing them as disorders? What can these experiences tell about their social, political, historical circumstances? My reflections unfolded throughout this thesis following two main threads, that tackled the key issues defined in the introduction – namely, the relationship between the social and the psychological, macro-forces and individual experiences; and the new meanings that ethnography can take on when employed to investigate experiences of mental distress.

The first thread developed from the analysis of migrants' perceptions and experiences of the asylum system, meant as an aggregate of policies and practices produced by macro and micro actors. Following migrants' trajectories within the system, I considered the effects of asylum policies and practices on migrants' sense of self and of belonging. Particularly, I focused on moments of crisis, that is, when people feel defeated in the difficult process of emplacement after displacement.

Therefore, I have argued not only that mental distress happens at the conjuncture between subject and macro forces, but also that crises are powerful images in which those forces are conflated. When investigated from an anthropological angle, narratives on breakdowns become heuristic devices through which the researcher can trace the effects of the unacknowledged aspects of the asylum system – arbitrariness, exclusion and marginalization. In other words, disordered experiences can provide a privileged perspective on the work of

ordering mechanisms – namely, migration policies restricting citizenship's rights, and interventions reproducing precarity.

In addition to accounting for the social roots of suffering, this research considered also the impact of distress beyond the individual, asking: what happens to people encountering the crises of others? In this work, I referred to suffering, preferring the notion of crisis to that of mental distress/disorder, in order to emphasize its experiential and existential dimensions and to leave aside psychiatric categories, which too often conceal the history and politics of experience. I also wanted to reclaim a word that has been overused and, therefore, deprived of meaning, becoming a worn-out cliché. Since 2015, the word "crisis" has been employed extensively to frame the refugee phenomenon in terms of an emergency, and therefore to justify security and containment measures, and a tightening in migration policies.

Instead, I have tried to recover the deep and nuanced meanings of the idea of crisis. Drawing on de Martino's writings on the crisis of presence and cultural apocalypses, I have employed this word to describe the phenomenal experience of being on the verge of the fall, in the moment when the taken-for-granted world becomes strange, unfamiliar, and disorienting. In its phenomenological meaning, crisis is linked to relationality and intersubjectivity. Even the most idiosyncratic experience of crisis is always situated in a space of social, political and historical relationships. Through this notion, I have been able to consider the experience of mental disorder as an actual social object.

Hence, I have considered the disruptive potential of crisis. By interrupting the ordinary flow of life, crisis offers a chance for transformation, or, at least, for questioning one's own condition. As I have argued, moments of crisis reverberate beyond the private, creating a disturbance into the social world. The transformative

potential is not limited to the individual and can be extended to the community and the larger society. Acknowledging the social life of crisis means, indeed, not only considering its social origins; rather, there is a need to take account also of its social repercussions beyond, as already remarked, the medical concerns regarding the causes, distribution, impact and possible treatment of mental disorders. In other words, we should think at the political dimension of mental distress, or what I have defined as the critical potential of crisis as a form of political action. Crisis, other than being an individual experience of suffering, entails a claim. Even when incomprehensible or inaccessible, the experience of crisis interrogates its social conditions: it is an act of interpellation, a turning towards the other instead of a radical foreclosure.

Another question is then raised: how do refugees make sense of their non-ordinary experiences through language, in the effort to make them communicable? In my thesis, I have argued that narratives of crisis are twofold. On the one hand, they are a form of storytelling, a way of giving voice to suffering. In this sense, through their narratives, refugees express their perspective on migration policies and intervention projects that usually do not consider them as actors. They become hearable, even if they remain often unheard. On the other hand, I have claimed that crisis narratives have a critical potential. Despite being often not fully intelligible (or perhaps precisely because of that), these narratives offer a compelling critique of the social context in which they take place. It is, I have argued, their very openness that makes them so powerful: crisis, and the symptoms that are its expression, are communicable. Since they cannot be completely confined into a meaning, symptoms are never exhausted and continue to act, going beyond the private and resonating in the social space. And since they cannot be conclusively contained, symptoms speak, telling a story that is perceived by the social space as deeply unsettling. Even if they

are not clear, coherent counter narratives, for they express idiosyncratic experiences that remain inevitably opaque and not fully comprehensible, these stories challenge dominant narratives, opening the possibility for a change in the rhetorical *status quo*.

It is the very effort to get understood through language that establishes a first tentative connection towards the social, thus engendering the process defined by Viñar and Viñar as *desexilio* – the slow haul from utter dispossession to being human again. By finding a similarity with others, as, in this case, in a word that makes sense and can be understood, migrants make the first step out of a condition of (often invisible) exile. The effort to invent a language to communicate what is usually unutterable opens what Viñar and Viñar call a "poietic space", that is, a fragile possibility for transformation. In this thesis, I have argued that this possibility does not concern only the individual who is trying to regain a place within humanity and is inevitably changed in the process. Since crises pose questions out loud, they concern also those around, who can decide to listen, or to look the other way.

It is in this sense that I have affirmed that crisis is relational. It leads to a turn to the other, opening the possibility for social connection and change. By establishing a dialogue between anthropology and immunology, Napier argues that to survive we have to accept the risk of encountering the other. Life depends on an engagement with difference and on a more complete understanding of what is foreign, rather than on ignorance or rejection.

> Like the very migrants the xenophobic seek to keep out, the world coming your way has more on you – knows more about you – than you have on it, or probably know about it. Yes, we can fence ourselves in when we feel a deep and abiding fear about our own future welfare. ... But closing off the outside is only a short-term answer that can bring no new life. (Napier, 2017, p. 79)

According to Napier, immunology's findings about the role of antibodies can help us to explore the dividing line between self and other, and therefore rethink how our identity is defined at the peripheries of selfhood, where it is contested and challenged. Immunology, like anthropology, shows how the self is made up and constantly re-created "by potentially dangerous encounters at one's boundaries", "for an antibody is the tool that enables a living thing to explore the boundaries of life – to engage that danger that is the precondition of real change, whether that change be life giving or life taking" (Napier, 2012, p. 130). As Napier puts it, we can survive only by creatively attempting to engage with difference, and by accepting the risk inherent to this encounter.

Transformation can in fact be positive or negative. Napier's considerations are valuable because they provide a more comprehensive framework through which understanding why the encounter with difference is often avoided, and refugees' claims remain unheard. Crises raise questions, demand attention and, ultimately, care. The engagement with these claims engenders a transformation that is inevitably unpredictable. When encountering divergent, critical experiences, the community can feel threatened and thus react with self-protective measures, closure and, eventually, hostility. In this thesis, I have explained this process through my own experience of fieldwork. I have described encounters that disoriented me at first. All the people I met challenged me, making me question what I took for granted. I felt exposed and, at times, confused and vulnerable. I decided to accept the risk and engage with what to me made a little sense. I was moved, sometimes fascinated, sometimes upset, by the frankness of my field encounters. And I ended up changed, both professionally and personally.

This leads me to the second thread of reflection – how ethnography itself is changed in the encounter with non-ordinary and not fully accessible experiences.

Since the beginning of my research, I have pulled ethnography out of its comfort zone. I have defined my theoretical framework and my research methods drawing on different disciplines, becoming aware that such an interdisciplinary approach involves almost inevitably a tension between different theories, methodologies and practices. I have employed a methodology usually applied to the study of social facts to investigate the relationality of psychic facts, asking: how can vulnerability and distress be understood through an ethnographic lens? And, on the contrary: how can a psychological perspective contribute to acknowledge and make sense of the ethnographer's own vulnerability?

In this thesis I have explained my own understanding of ethnography. I argued that it is a personal practice, both because is inevitably dependent on the ethnographer's perceptions and meanings, and because it makes use of the personal as "the most crucial datum" of research, in the words of George Devereux. In my research, I applied ethnography to the study of experiences that are usually considered unique, but also idiosyncratic. I have focused on opacities, uncertainties, contradictions – in other words, experiences resisting language.

Looking at Baran, Lily, Asha and Saeed's efforts to put into words bodily sensations, impressions and perceptions, I came to re-think the scope of ethnography, and its capacity. In employing mental disorder as an ethnographic object, I did not intend to explore culturally constituted idioms of distress. In other words, I was not interested only in investigating the social systems of representations, meanings and categories related to mental illness, or to link individual suffering to social context, looking for explanations and points of origin. Rather, I was interested in the social effects of mental disorders, how they resonate in the society, and what impacts they have. I focused on the generative potential of disorders, following their effects, rather than their meaning: I looked at how

symptoms act in the scene, rather than trying to explain them, and I traced effects instead of causes. I wanted to make use of the idiosyncratic as a device to unfold the opaqueness and the implicit in the collective. I argued that disorders, as out of the ordinary, unsettling experiences, can contribute in exposing the hidden side of the ordinary and taken for granted.

I defined mental disorders as excessive experiences – that is, experiences that are not fully comprehensible, or commensurable, for they resist, or escape, language. In the narratives about mental suffering there is always something slipping through the lines, exceeding the words, and remaining suspended, undefined. I argued that their destabilizing potential lies precisely in this excess, that leaves mental distress fundamentally open, and never reconciled. I practiced an ethnography of residues, of what is captured only partially by language, and remains indefinite. In doing so, I crossed the lives of persons going through difficult, disorienting experiences, trying to make sense of them. With them, I have experienced the disruption, and then a fragmentary re-creation of speech. I encountered fainting, breathless, strained and shaking bodies, construing with them a discourse capturing their experiences, without exhausting them. In this thesis, I intended the ethnographic writing as the production, sometimes the invention, of an evocative, but never complete, language. An unstable language, that allows us to utter those experiences in excess and to express the tension between ordering and disordering, between the effort to recompose, give meaning and closure, and the attempt to perturb existing conditions to create new ones.

This research contributes to the debate about the ethnographer's positionality, that is, the tension between subjectivity and objectivity, involvement and detachment (Bourdieu, 2003; Geertz, 1974), engagement and distancing (Borneman & Hammoudi, 2009; Reed-Danahay, 2017). I draw on the work of

Rabinow (1977) and Crapanzano (1980) in practicing an "experiential" ethnography that considers fieldwork as fundamentally based on intersubjectivity. In the fieldwork encounter, the ethnographer oscillates between closeness, sometimes even intimacy, and a distance that is the condition for critical reflexivity. There is a large body of anthropological literature arguing that the essential ethnographic experience of "being there" is what makes it an act of witnessing. However, there is little agreement on how witnessing should be intended. For instance, Marcus (2005) argues that the ethnographer should be a detached witness, less engaged and more disinterested, and, therefore, more independent. On the contrary, Scheper-Hughes rejects firmly neutrality, while claiming for a "barefoot anthropology" in which the researcher-witness-activist is "responsible, reflexive and morally committed" (1995, p. 419), and hence takes sides and makes judgements. Or, Behar draws attention to the emotional aspects of fieldwork and on vulnerability, emphasizing how ethnographic writing is "an act of personal witnessing" (1996, p. 20).

In this thesis, I argued that ethnographers can be witnesses precisely because of their vulnerability. By being simultaneously exposed and responsive to others, ethnographers bear the marks left by field encounters and come, finally, to embody their research. The challenge is to put the bodily experience of ethnography into words, to make a speech out of perceptions, feelings, impressions. As Devereux argued, the researcher's subjectivity, what's most personal and even idiosyncratic, can become her most valuable material if considered honestly, and in its wholeness. In this research, my considerations are based on my experience of field encounters – the traces that the engagement with difference left on me. Those traces, and how they changed me, are a testimony of crises' social resonance and transformative potential.

To conclude, psychic breakdowns hold a critical potential towards society. As I have argued, narratives on the experience of symptoms express also a critical analysis of the paradoxes and ambiguities of the scene in which they take place – in this case, contemporary migration policies and practices. But this critique is active and acting: symptoms are bewildering, disturbing, unsettling. It is a critique that we cannot ignore. The symptoms of others reach into us, leaving an impression, which often produce a sense of uncanny. When disturbed by others' crises, we can react defensively, recurring to diagnostic categories, and fastening crisis into the sphere of the idiosyncratic. Or, we can acknowledge the possibility of an opening. In engendering a "poietic space", crises can bring transformation, contributing to a work of re-articulation of our social circumstances, and of re-construction. In a time of crisis, there is room for imagination.

Appendices

Appendix I

Information sheet

Name, position and contact address of Researcher:
Francesca Morra
PhD student
Department of Social Sciences
Oxford Brookes University
francesca.morra-2015@brookes.ac.uk
(Project mobile number to be added)

Research study: The lived experiences of the Italian asylum system

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

What is the purpose of the study?
This research study wants to learn more about the experience of people who claim asylum in Italy. Through this research I want to find out more about:

- What it means to go through the asylum claim process.
- What it is like to be given, or refused, permission to stay as a refugee or for humanitarian reasons: how people deal with the opportunities and problems they face.
- What it is like to be included in, or excluded from, support projects.

The study wants to learn more also about the experience of people working or volunteering with refugees:

- How and why they started working in projects supporting refugees.
- Which kind of satisfactions and difficulties the job entails, and how they deal with them.

Why are we doing the research?
While we know quite a lot about the difficulties that forced migrants lived escaping war or prosecution, we know much less about their experiences in Europe. In particular, we seldom take into consideration how they feel when they go through the process of claiming asylum and then adjusting to a new condition. In the same way, there is not much attention given to the daily experience of people employed in projects supporting refugees. Your involvement will enable a better understanding of the opinions of the people involved in the asylum system, so that the research can help to inform better policies and practices, reducing the likelihood that decisions are based on stereotypic information.

Do I have to take part?
It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason, or to withdraw any information you have given. Your decision not to take part in the research, or to withdraw, will not affect in any way the relation that you have with me or with the NGO I am volunteering for.

What will taking part in the research involve?
If you choose to participate, I will ask you take part in an interview. This will last about two hours or as long as much time as you are willing/able to give. We will meet at a time and place that is convenient for you so that you feel comfortable.
At first, I would like to discuss with you my research topic. I will ask your opinion about it and which questions do you think would be important to ask. The interview will continue with an open question about your experience as a professional working with migrants and then we will talk about the topics described above. At any time during the interview, you can ask for a break: the interview will be resumed when you feel ready. If a particular question causes you discomfort or distress you can refuse to answer; you can also stop the interview if you do not feel comfortable to continue.
If you are willing, I would like for you to be involved in the research process after the first interview. Practically, I would like to stay in contact with you over a period of about one year, and do one or two follow-up interviews. This will help me to discuss further the issues that came out during the first interview and to ask your opinion about my research findings. In practice it will mean being contacted and arrange one or two meetings.
Between each meeting, and after the end of the study, you will be able to keep in touch with me as much or as little as you want, to know how the research is going on. If you like, I can give you the transcript of the interview before I use it in my research, so that you can review it and, in case, make amendments. When I first meet you, we will talk about the different ways in which we can stay in touch and what would suit you best.

How will the information I give you be recorded?
If you agree, then the easiest way to keep a good report of what you tell me is to record the interview, using a small digital recorder. Only I will listen to this so that I can write down correctly what you say and then the recording will be erased. This recorded information will not be shared with anybody else. If you do not want the interview to be recorded using a digital recorder, then I will take detailed notes of the discussions with you.

How will the information I share be kept and used?
All the information you provide during the interviews will be stored on a computer, encrypted and protected with a password. I am the only person that will have access to these files. When I store the information I will remove your name and any information which could identify you. Instead the information will be coded with a number (or a false name – which you might like to choose). The only possible reason for sharing this information with anyone else would be if I thought that from what you had told me that you or someone else was at risk of serious harm. If so, I will talk to you first about the best thing to do.
When I come to write up the findings from the research, there will be no way of anybody identifying you from what I write. I will always use a different name to the one you have given us and I will make sure that people will not be able to identify you in another way (such as from where you are living).
We will present the findings from the research to different people: to other researchers; to policy makers; and to people who work with people in similar situations to you. We will also provide a summary of the findings to everyone who takes part in the study. When they are ready, these can be sent to you or will be available on a study website.
Data generated by the study will be retained in accordance with the University's policy on Academic Integrity and kept securely in paper or/and electronic form for a period of ten years after the completion of the research study.

What should I do if I want to take part?
If you choose to take part, you can come to me at the NGO during my working hours *(more information will be provided)*, or send me an email (francesca.morra-2015@brookes.ac.uk), or call me *(project mobile number to be added)*. I will ask you to formally give consent and then we will arrange a time and place for the interview.

Who is organising and funding the research?
I am conducting the research as part of my PhD at Oxford Brookes University, Department of Social Sciences. My research is funded by a University Research Studentship.

Who has reviewed the study?
The research has been approved by the University Research Ethics Committee, Oxford Brookes University.

Contact for Further Information
If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor. Our contact details are as follows:

Francesca Morra
francesca.morra-2015@brookes.ac.uk
(Project mobile number to be added)

Prof. Beverley Clack
Department of History, Philosophy and Religion
Oxford Brookes University
bclack@brookes.ac.uk

If you have any concern about the way in which the study has been conducted, you should contact:
(detail of the NGO referring person will be given).
Or the Chair of the University Research Ethics Committee on ethics@brookes.ac.uk.

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet.

Appendix II

Written consent form

Name, position and contact address of Researcher:
Francesca Morra
PhD student
Department of Social Sciences, Oxford Brookes University
francesca.morra-2015@brookes.ac.uk
(Project mobile number to be added)

Research study: The lived experiences of the Italian asylum system

	Please initial box
I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.	
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason.	
I agree to take part in the above study.	

	Please initial box	
	Yes	No
I agree to the interview being audio recorded (to be checked at each interview).		
I agree to the interview being recorded through notes (to be checked at each interview).		
I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications.		
I understand that: • anything I say will be kept in a safe place • audio-recordings will not be shown to anyone outside of the researcher • nobody will be able to identify me in the research		
I understand that if the researcher think that, from what I had told her, I or someone else is at risk of serious harm, she has a duty to act.		

Name of Participant _____ Date _____ Signature _____

Name of Researcher _____ Date _____ Signature _____

Appendix III

Letter for permission to volunteer and to conduct research in the NGO

Francesca Morra
PhD student
Department of Social Sciences
Oxford Brookes University
francesca.morra-2015@brookes.ac.uk
(Project mobile number to be added)

(NGO address and details to be added)

Date

Request for permission to conduct research
Research study: The lived experiences of the Italian asylum system

Dear Mr/Ms ,

I am writing to request permission to conduct a research study at your organization. I am a PhD student at Oxford Brookes University, Department of Social Sciences, and I am conducting a research about the experience of people who claim asylum in Italy. Through this research I want to find out more about:

- What it means to go through the asylum claim process.
- What it is like to be given, or refused, permission to stay as a refugee or for humanitarian reasons: how people deal with the opportunities and problems they face.
- What it is like to be included in, or excluded from, support projects.

The study wants to learn more also about the experience of people working or volunteering with refugees:

- How and why they started working in projects supporting refugees.
- Which kind of satisfactions and difficulties the job entails, and how they deal with them.

I am hereby seeking your consent to conduct research in your organization. This will involve joining your organization as a volunteer (from _____ to _____) and participating in the daily activities. I will record my observations in a field notebook and will engage in informal conversations and interactions with members of your staff and with clients. I hope to recruit people interested to be interviewed about their experience of the Italian asylum system, as migrants or as social/health worker.

Moreover, I would like to identify a referring person within the senior members of your organization who will help me to monitor the research process and who can be contacted by research participants if concerns should arise.

To prevent identification, name and location of your organization will be anonymysed in the final write-up and in field notes. However, they will be known to participants.

I have provided you with a copy of my research proposal which includes copies of the information sheet and consent form to be used in the research process, as well as a copy of the approval letter which I received from the University Research Ethics Committee, Oxford Brookes University.

Your approval to conduct this study will be greatly appreciated. If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor. Our contact details are as follows:

Francesca Morra
francesca.morra-2015@brookes.ac.uk
(Project mobile number to be added)

Prof. Beverley Clack
Department of History, Philosophy and Religion
Oxford Brookes University
bclack@brookes.ac.uk

If you consent for me to conduct this study at your organization, kindly sign below and return the signed form.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,

Francesca Morra
PhD student
Department of Social Sciences
Oxford Brookes University

Approved by:

_____	_____	_____
Print your name and title here	Signature	Date

Referring person in the organization:

_____	_____	_____
Print your name and title here	Signature	Date

Appendix IV

Verbal consent script

OXFORD BROOKES UNIVERSITY

Research study: The lived experiences of the Italian asylum system

My name is Francesca Morra and I am a research student from the Oxford Brookes University, in the UK. My research study wants to learn more about the experience of people who claim asylum in Italy. Through this research I want to find out more about:

- What it means to go through the asylum claim process.
- What it is like to be given, or refused, permission to stay as a refugee or for humanitarian reasons: how people deal with the opportunities and problems they face.
- What it is like to be included in, or excluded from, support projects.

The study wants to learn more also about the experience of people working or volunteering with refugees:

- How and why they started working in projects supporting refugees.
- Which kind of satisfactions and difficulties the job entails, and how they deal with them.

I would like to ask you some questions. At first, I would like to talk about my research topic. I will ask what do you think about it and which questions do you think would be important to ask. Then I will ask you what it is like to be a migrant and we will talk about what you think is most important about that. At any time during the interview, you can ask for a break: the interview will restart when you feel ready. You can tell me that you do not want to answer if a particular question makes you uncomfortable or disturbs you. You can also stop the interview if you do not feel comfortable to continue.

If you agree, then the easiest way to keep a good report of what you tell me is to record the interview, using a small audio recorder. I will be the only person to listen to this. This will help me to write down correctly what you say. Then the recording will be erased. This recorded information will not be shared with anybody else. If you do not want the interview to be audio-recorded, then I will take written notes.

If you are willing, I would like for you to stay involved in the research after this first interview. Practically, I would like to stay in contact with you over a period of about one year, and do one or two other interviews. In this way, we can continue to talk about what came out during the first interview. I would also like to ask your opinion about my research findings. In practice it will mean being contacted and arrange one or two meetings. Between each meeting, and after the end of the study, you can contact me as much or as little as you want, to know how the research is going on. If you like, I can give you the transcript of our conversation before I use it in my research, so that you can read it and, in case, change it.

I will give you my email address and my telephone number. If you have any concern about this research, you may speak freely with me or with *(detail of the NGO referring person will be given)*.

I will do everything I can to be sure that nobody will be able to identify you. All the information you provide during the interviews will be stored on a computer and be protected with a password. I am the only person that will have access to these files. When I store the information I will remove your name and any detail which could identify you. Instead the information will be coded with a number (or a false name – which you might like to choose). The only possible reason for sharing this information with anyone else would be if I thought that from what you had told me that you

or someone else was at risk of serious harm. If so, I will talk to you first about the best thing to do. When I come to write up the findings from the research, there will be no way of anybody identifying you from what I write. I will always use a different name to the one you have given us and I will make sure that people will not be able to identify you in another way (such as from where you are living.)

I will present the findings from the research to different people: to other researchers; to policy makers; and to people who work with persons in similar situations to you. I will also give a summary of the findings to everyone who takes part in the study.

It is up to you to decide if you want to take part. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason, or to withdraw any information you have given. Your decision not to take part in the research, or to withdraw, will not affect in any way the relation that you have with me or with the NGO I am volunteering for. Also, your decision will have no impact on immigration status or legal advice and support given to you regarding your case.

Do you agree to be interviewed?

Do you allow me to audio-record our conversation?

If the participant asks not to be audio-recorded, the verbal consent will be documented in presence of the identified referring person of the NGO: I will record it at the beginning of my interview note and the referring person will sign the consent form on behalf of participant.

Appendix V

Interpreter confidentiality agreement

Research study: The lived experiences of the Italian asylum system

Name, position and contact address of Researcher:
Francesca Morra
PhD student
Department of Social Sciences
Oxford Brookes University
francesca.morra-2015@brookes.ac.uk
(Project mobile number to be added)

Date

I have read and retained the Information sheet concerning the research "The lived experiences of the Italian asylum system" being conducted by Francesca Morra. In my role as interpreter for the researcher, I understand the nature of the study and requirements for confidentiality. I have had all of my questions concerning the nature of the study and my role as interpreter answered to my satisfaction.

A. Maintaining Confidentiality

I agree not to reveal in any way to any person other than the researcher any data gathered for the study by means of my services as interpreter.

B. Acknowledgement of My Services as Interpreter

I understand that the researcher will acknowledge the use of my services in any reporting on the research. I have indicated below whether I wish that acknowledgement to be anonymous or whether it may recognize me by name.

___ I do not wish my name to be associated with the acknowledgement of the use of an interpreter in data gathering for the research.

OR

___ I agree that the researcher may associate my name with the acknowledgement of the use of an interpreter in data gathering for the research.

C. Identification and Signature Indicating Agreement

Name: _____

Email: _____

Telephone: _____

Signature: _____

Should you require further information please feel free to contact me
Francesca Morra
francesca.morra-2015@brookes.ac.uk
(Project mobile number to be added)

For questions, concerns or complaints about the research ethics of this study, contact the Chair of the University Research Ethics Committee on ethics@brookes.ac.uk

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