ROAD TO MANHOOD:

MASCULINITY AND VULNERABILITY ACROSS THE CENTRAL MEDITERRANEAN MIGRATION ROUTE TO EUROPE

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Declaration

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to explore the relation between gender and vulnerability in the context of men's mobility along the Central Mediterranean route to Europe. In order to do this, I will explore how male Sub–Saharan asylum seekers, refugees, and other international protection holders position themselves as 'men' within their stories – from their life at home to their relocation to Europe. The study is based on 36 qualitative 'life history' interviews conducted in Sicily. Each empirical chapter focuses on a specific stage of the migration experience: life at home pre–migration; the journey through Libya; and relocation in Sicily. This approach helps uncover the role of masculinity in shaping men's gendered vulnerabilities on a continuum across the different phases of their journey to Europe. By looking at the reasons that prompted participants to flee, the migration experience emerges as a gendered enterprise, a complex project in which a passage into socially recognised manhood is negotiated. In this context, the materiality of the journey across the Central Mediterranean Route, characterised by hardship, violence and danger, offers a landscape of symbols associated with the traditional masculinity tropes of mastery, courage, competency and physical and moral strength. By describing the crossing through Libya as a masculine accomplishment, participants' narratives illuminate the gendered vulnerabilities associated with patterns of gender relation in the male-dominated smuggling industry and in the context of illegal migration. Once in Sicily, being dependent on humanitarian assistance, unable to work and to make decisions over their lives, refugee and asylum seeking men experience an interruption in their trajectory towards manhood. Here, gendered vulnerabilities are mainly associated with their location within Sicilian refugee centres. Forced into a protracted liminal condition by asylum policies and practices, navigating the racialization processes activated by the 'refugee crisis' discourse in the local communities, masculinity emerges as a key site of resistance wherein negotiating political agency at the intersection of multiple systems of inequalities.

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I am grateful to my parents, Rosalda and Giovanni, for their unconditional love and to my grandparents for all the stories they told me when I was a kid. In particular, to my grandfather Michele, who told me about his own migration experience in Germany in a time when we, Sicilians, were those who were migrating. Thanks to all my incredible friends in Sicily, Rome and London. Some deserve a special mention: Fabrizio and Alice for being always there, and Paola and Paola for being my mentors and feminist gurus.

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I dedicate this thesis to my nephew Mattia, who arrived in my life when I was about to start this experience; and to all the women and men who crossed the Mediterranean Sea.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

AIDA Asylum Information Database

ASGI Association for Juridical Studies on Immigration

CAS Temporary Reception Centres

CARA Centre for the Reception of Asylum Seekers

CDA Accommodation Centre for Migrants

CPSA First Aid and Reception Centre

EMR Eastern Mediterranean Route

ECOWAS Economic Community of West African States

ECFR European Council on Foreign Relations

EU European Union

FIDH Fédération internationale des ligues des droits de l'Homme

IOM International Organisation for Migration

MSF Médecins Sans Frontières

OAS Organization of American States

OAU Organisation of African Unity

ODIHR Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

OECD Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

OHCHR Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

OSCE Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

RMMS Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat

SPRAR System of Protection for Asylum Seekers and Refugees

UN United Nations

UNHCR United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNODC United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

UNSMIL United Nations Support Mission in Libya

Intro

Razak, a 19–year–old Gambian asylum seeker, emerges from his room, while I am visiting a reception centre in Sicily. Razak proclaims that he wishes to go back to Libya. His words are received by me and two social workers, Darla and Ada, with great surprise. I have spent the previous six months gathering accounts of people who fled for their lives from Libya. Razak is one of them. I interviewed this young man a couple of days before and I am curious to know the reasons for his sudden change of mind. Meanwhile, Darla reminds him how terrible Libya is for African refugees. To which Razak responds resolutely: 'I'd rather die in Libya than waste my days in Sicily doing nothing.' His gestures and his tone have now changed. Razak presents himself as a man, not a boy, a man who needs to work and is tough enough to survive Libya, once again. This performative shift is received by Darla and Ada with a warm laugh. They do not take Razak seriously.

I perceive his utterance as a display of masculinity and a way to express his frustration over the few job opportunities and the condition of enforced inactivity he has encountered in Sicily. At the same time, I found the response of the audience, namely, Darla and Ada's laughter, as the most interesting element of this performance; why did Razak, a few days earlier, appear so 'credible' to me when narrating his journey to Libya, almost breaking down in tears? And why does this current performance of masculinity and toughness resemble a parody? This vignette illuminates the social and political complexity of refugee gendered lives in Europe. The aim of this thesis is to explore these complexities, challenging monolithic representations and stereotypes of refugee men, while uncovering the density of their everyday experience and the challenges they face throughout the journey. Razak's quote indicates the scope of this task; in his words, the journey to Europe emerges as an event profoundly entangled with the 'making' of his masculinity due to the notion of risk, agency and incertitude associated with illegal migration and border crossing. Beyond this utterance, however, there is a whole life story, which in the case of this young man, starts somewhere in Gambia and ends in a small reception centre in Sicily. Razak, who before being an international protection seeker was a talented musical artist, summarised his journey in one lyric: 'We are strugglers' he sang.

This study is therefore committed to explore one dimension of this struggle associated with the performance of masculinity in the context of the refugee experience; that is because, for refugee and asylum seeking men, masculinity is often a site of conflict, negotiated across multiple discourses and in relation to

different contexts (Turner 1999, Jaji 2009, Griffiths 2015, Lukunka 2012, Ingvars and Gíslason 2018, Rowe 2001, Suerbaum 2018b, Quist 2016,). By exploring this dimension, we are able to connect gender performance to asylum practices, patterns of mobility and dislocation. Here, gender appears as a mediating factor between the individual and the shifting landscapes, which frame the refugee experience.

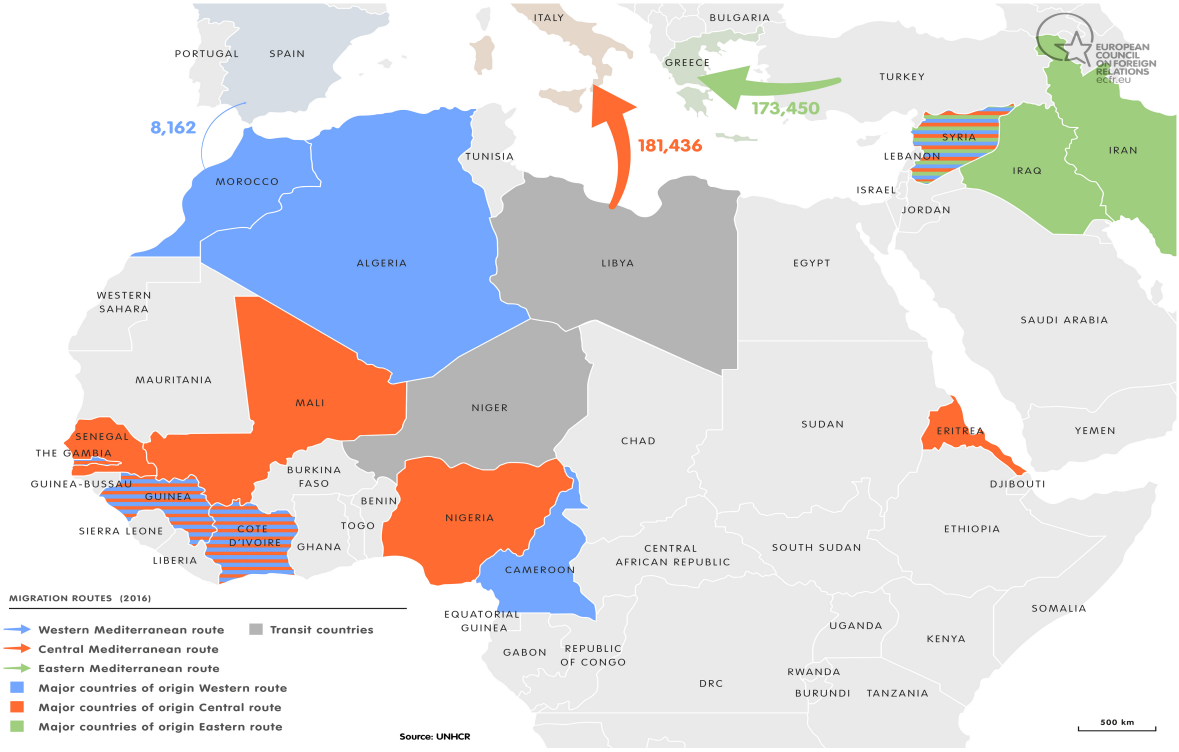
The general research question of the study is therefore 'How do men perform masculinity in the context of the entirety of their refugee journey?' In order to answer this, I will explore how male asylum seekers and refugees position themselves as 'men' within their asylum stories – from their life at home to their relocation in Europe. The study is based on 36 qualitative interviews conducted with Sub–Saharan asylum seekers, refugees, and other international protection holders in Sicily across a fieldwork period of eight months.

Although a limited body of literature exploring the interrelations between masculinities and refugee experience (Turner 1999, Jaji 2009, Hart 2008) has emerged in the last two decades, mainstream migration scholarship tends to treat men as genderless subjects with gender being used as a category only applicable to women. Particularly with regards to migratory movements across Mediterranean routes, gender is rarely taken into account when it comes to men's mobility (McMahon and Sigona 2018, Mainwaring 2016, Wittenberg 2017, Crawley et al. 2016, Altai Consulting 2015, Crawley and Skleparis 2018). This thesis aims to interrogate this scholarship by focusing on refugee and asylum seeking men arriving along these routes as gendered actors. The main reason to do this is that although it may be invisible in academia and policy, refugee masculinity is, nevertheless, at the very centre of the so–called 'refugee crisis' discourse, framing specific gendered and racialised hierarchies of 'deservingness' and 'risk' at the interplay between humanitarianism and securitization (Scheibelhofer 2017, Mavelli 2017, Freedman 2019). On one side, anti–migrant and securitarian narratives depict male asylum seekers as potential criminals, terrorists and abusers of the immigration system (Griffiths 2015); on the other, humanitarian discourse conjures the portrayal of the 'genuine refugee' informed by feminised notions of vulnerability, victimhood and helplessness (Turner 2010, Oxford 2005, Griffiths 2015, Suerbaum 2018b). Refugee and asylum–seeking men coming to Europe, therefore, enter the public debate essentially as a problem for the host society (Scheibelhofer 2017, Herz 2018). This can be observed in the visual politics of rescue operations in the Mediterranean where Europeans are represented saving the helpless refugees while arresting human traffickers and illegal migrants

(Musarò 2017). Here, women and families, in particular from Syria, are depicted as 'genuine refugees' while single men are located in a frame of danger and suspicion due to their racialised masculinity (Vezovnik 2017, De Genova 2018).

Locating the field site in Sicily in 2016, this study represents a unique opportunity to challenge both these stereotypes associated with the discourse of 'crisis' and the invisibility of refugee men as gendered subjects (Charsley and Wray 2015), in the scholarship on the refugee movements across the Mediterranean region. Participants' stories enable an exploration of one of the most trafficked, yet deadliest, migration routes in the world (Kingsley 2015, Unicef 2017, Wittenberg 2017): the 'Central Mediterranean route' (CMR) to EU, which connects Sub–Saharan Africa to Italy, via Libya. This route currently accounts for the largest number of people crossing to Europe by sea. According to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR 2018b), from January 2017 to March 2018, 124,711 people have crossed the Central Mediterranean towards Italy. The year when I started my fieldwork, more than 181,000 people arrived in Italy via sea, the highest number ever recorded in the country (Frontex 2017). Due to the geographic proximity to Libya, most of these sea arrivals landed in Sicily.

FIGURE 1 MEDITERRANEAN ROUTES IN 2016



Source: European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR)[1]

The 'Central Mediterranean Route' is characterised by the high prevalence of men, and particularly, of young adult men using this route (UNHCR 2017, Kofman 2019). In 2017, men represented the vast majority of sea arrivals in Sicily (75%). This number increases further if we add unaccompanied minors (UNODOC 2018). Consequently, 86.6% of the adult beneficiaries of the Italian Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees (SPRAR) are men (SPRAR 2017, 37). These percentages should not lead, as argued by Freedman (2016a, 2016b, 2012b), to the conclusion that women are less persecuted than men; on the contrary, they point out the necessity of incorporating a gender perspective in the analysis of refugee and asylum seeking men coming along this route in order to understand the significance of gender in shaping mobility patterns, experiences and practices in this arena.

Engendering a masculine perspective to the study of participants' trajectories across this route, we are able to outline the role of masculinity in relation to the illegal migration complex that has arisen between Europe and Africa. We can thus examine the specific vulnerabilities that gender creates for people on

[1] The map is designed by Marco Ugolini for ECFR. It is available at: https://www.ecfr.eu/specials/mapping_migration

the move to Europe – in particular, in relation to violence, abuse and dehumanising practices. Such vulnerabilities, in the case of men and boys, are often neglected in public debates. On the contrary, I am interested in exploring the role of masculinity in regulating interaction, social relations and practices in the context of this migration route.

Secondly, the study provides an opportunity to engage with the gendered and racialised notions that regulate asylum discourse, practices and policies in Europe. By illuminating the complexity of participants' subjective experience within asylum institutions and receptive structures, we grasp the place of masculinity in European border regimes. Such a focus is particularly necessary; most of the research on refugee masculinities focuses on the Global South: Turner (1999), Jaji (2009) Lukunka (2012) in Sub–Saharan Africa; Hart (2008), Suerbaum (2018a, 2018b), Rowe (2001) and Quist (2016) in the Arab world. Another relevant area concerns refugee resettlement and diaspora in, predominantly English–speaking, destination countries: Affleck et al. (2018) in Canada, Griffiths (2015) and Godshaw (2014) in the U.K., Herz (2008) in Sweden, Kleist (2010) in U.K and Denmark and James (2010) in Australia.

Less interest has been given to the experience of transit across European border countries associated with the new pattern of mobility in the Mediterranean. One of the few exceptions is Ingvars and Gíslason's (2018) study on refugees in Greece. This thesis offers the opportunity to enlarge the scope to Sicily, one of the most economically disadvantaged regions in the European Union (Azevedo 2015) and, with Malta, the most extreme southern border of the European Union. Moreover, differently to Ingvars and Gíslason (2018), who focused on Syrian men, this thesis examines the experience of Sub–Saharan refugees and asylum seekers, a population, I argue, who tend to be dismissed as 'bogus' due to racialised and gendered hierarchies of deservingness produced by the discourse of the 'crisis' in Europe. Here, we can finally locate the dimension of the 'struggle' indicated by Razak's vignette. Emerging from the African shores as a problem, confined in a position of extreme marginality and dependence within asylum centres, being subject to racialization in Sicily, performing masculinity becomes a contested site for negotiating identity across transnational arenas, unequal power relations and competing discourses.

Outline of the thesis

The thesis is organized in 7 chapters. The first two comprise a literature review; the third deals with the methodological approach; from Chapter 4 to Chapter 6, we have three empirical chapters, each one exploring one stage of the refugee experience (decision to take the CMR, journey through Libya, life in reception centres in Sicily); finally, in the last chapter I summarize the findings and engage with implications for future research and policies.

In Chapter 1 'Migration, Mobilities and Masculinities', I outline the project of incorporating a gender perspective to men's experience across the CMR. Given the mixed–migration patterns and complex process of mobility associated with Mediterranean routes, I propose gender as a way to uncover the vulnerabilities produced by gendered mobilities along the CMR. In order to do this, I will first reconstruct how gender emerged as an analytical framework in the field of international migration; within feminist critiques of migration theories, gender analysis aimed at uncovering the neglected experience of women in mainstream migration research. Then, I will specifically focus on how this theoretical orientation has been extended to refugee scholarship. In the second part of the chapter, I will delineate my approach to the exploration of participants' gendered lives. Starting from Connell's (2005) concept of hegemonic masculinity, I will review the complexities of analysing masculinities in processes of transnational dislocation and mobility. Drawing on this analysis, I will illustrate my theoretical framework for the study of refugee masculinities and what the general gaps are in understanding the relationship between masculinity and the refugee experience.

In Chapter 2 'Masculinities in the context of the "refugee crisis"', I will locate my analysis of masculinity in the context of the so–called 'refugee crisis'. Here, I argue that gender and race play a central component in the making of the discourse of the 'crisis', at the intersection between humanitarianism and securitization. Reflecting on the place of foreign masculinity in the making of the European response to the crisis, the chapter aims at illuminating the social, political and discursive landscape in which participants' gender performance should be located. Here, I argue that whether aligning to the feminised ideal of the 'genuine refugee' or being associated with the spectre of the 'bogus asylum seeker', men coming along the CMR are immediately perceived as a problem for European societies that need an intervention. In the final section of the chapter, I will connect the two literature review

chapters by illustrating specific gaps in the knowedge that this thesis aims to fill in relation to the CMR and the main research question of the study.

In Chapter 3, I outline my methological approach inspired by the life history method and Boyd and Grieco's (2003) multilevel framework to incorporate gender in the study of international migration. Here, I reflect on the challenges, limitations and opportunities of working with refugee participants and I particularly reflect on the role of reflexivity as an integral component of the interpretative process; both in relation to the interview process and data analysis. In this chapter, I also engage with my positionality in the field, by locating access and sampling efforts across the research sites and in relation to racial hierarchies in Sicily. The selected qualitative approach allows me to examine participants' gendered experience throughout their journey; from the moment they left their homes to their life in Sicily. We are thus able to grasp the masculine trajectory associated with the quest for a better life that every migration project entails.

In Chapter 4 'Engendering men's decision to migrate along the Central Mediterranean Route', I explore the role of masculinity in shaping people's decision to flee and their further onward mobility toward Sicily. By following individual decision–making we are able to understand the gendered processes that inform the decision to flee. Here, I see gender as a mediating factor between individual and structural levels. In order to do this, I locate participants' stories in three different scenarios: political violence and state persecution; generalised violence and failure of the rule of law, lack of livelihood opportunity and conflicts over land rights. Moreover, connecting these gendered processes to specific stages in the life–cycle and status/roles within families, we are able to illuminate the aspirations, expectations and possibilities that the journey embodies for men. The refugee experience emerges as an active masculine project (Connell 2005), a gendered enterprise undertaking a quest for masculine realization and recognition. Here, I argue that the CMR emerges in participants' narrative as a meaningful landscape in which to locate this process of engagement with hegemonic masculinity as a result of the flight.

In Chapter 5 'Men's Journey towards Europe', I follow participants' unfolding of their journey to the EU. In their narratives, such enterprise emerges as a particularly complex project, crossing the largest desert on Earth (the Sahara) and a portion of sea (the 'Strait of Sicily'), using very dangerous smuggling

practices; and a country characterized by armed conflicts and significant human rights violations (Libya). Given that masculinity is always inhabited through discourse of courage, mastery and strength, the experience of the desert crossing becomes a central arena to analyse participants' engagement (Connell 2005) with masculine tropes and norms. Here, the suspended temporality and difficulties of the journey make the crossing a liminal experience where men–on–the–move might prove their masculinity. The arrival in Italy is thus narrated, not only as an opportunity for a new life, but as a masculine accomplishment. This chapter provides a significant opportunity to analyse the Trans–Saharan illegal migration complex from a gendered point of view. Given the predominance of men in positions of power, I argue that masculinity is a central element in framing crossing practices, interactions and patterns of violence.

In Chapter 6 'Men–Interrupted', I examine participants' new positionality in Sicily as refugee and asylum seeking men within and outside the refugee centres, uncovering the vulnerabilities produced as a result of the refugee experience and how participants negotiate these while performing gender. In this chapter, my main aim is to explore how gender expectations, negotiated throughout the journey, are reconfigured and reconciled in the context of refugee lives in Sicily. This requires integrating an account of refugee lives in the centre with the socio–economic and ethno–racial landscape of Sicily resulting in emasculating dynamics; here, I argue that a relevant role is played by the specificity of reception structures I accessed – a small local refugee centre in the middle of a small Sicilian town, and their mode of operation – separation between refugee men and women. Most importantly, I outline how participants attempt to exit in this liminal condition; I see masculinity as a central site wherein negotiating political agency and notions of 'deservingness' in the highly racialised Sicilian landscape.

In Chapter 7, I provide a summary of findings and examine both the strengths and limitations of this study. Chapter 7 offers a chance to connect the different findings and single contributions of each section as part of a unified story. By looking at the unified gendered narrative emerging across different migration phases, we can locate men's gendered vulnerabilities on a continuum from the moment participants left home to their new positionality in Sicily. By doing this, vulnerability emerged as gendered, meaning that is produced by changing patterns of gender relations associated with different migration context. In this chapter, I engage with the implications of this

understanding of men's mobilities along the CMR for policy–makers, researchers and practitioners.

CHAPTER ONE. Migration, Mobilities and Masculinities

In 2017, 68.5 million people around the world were forced from their homes. Among them, 25.4 million are refugees (UNHCR 2018a). The great majority of these are displaced in the Global South (UNHCR 2018a); however, in the last few years we have seen a sharp rise in the number of people coming to Europe. In 2015, an exceptional number of 1.26 million first–time asylum applications were registered in the EU28 countries (Burmann and Valeyatheepillay 2017, 48). Three routes emerged as main entry points to the European Union (EU): the Eastern Mediterranean route (EMR) and Western Balkans route (WBR) in the East and the Central Mediterranean Route (CMR) connecting Libya to Italy and Malta.

Research identifies different socio–demographic characterists for people using these routes: while the EMR was used by families, the CMR emerged as an arena primarily crossed by young single men from Sub–Saharan African countries (Cummings et al. 2015, Kofman 2019). After the adoption of the EU–Turkey statement in March 2016, which significantly reduced the Turkey–Greece flows across the Eastern Mediterranean Route (Mentzelopoulou and Luyten 2018), the CMR become the most popular migration route to Europe (Frontex 2017, 2019). From 2014 to the end of 2016, over 450,000 people crossed from North Africa towards Italy and, to a lesser degree, Malta via the CMR (McMahon and Sigona 2018). In this context, international migration emerges as one of the most relevant policy issues in European society, entangled with national–level concerns with border control and national security and global–level debates around human rights, economic globalization, North–South inequalities and transnationalism (Castles 2003, 27).

Studies on Mediterranean routes have illuminated the multiple and overlapping nature of migration drivers that prompt refugee and asylum seekers to travel with economic migrants (McMahon and Sigona 2018, Wittenberg 2017, Crawley et al. 2016, Cummings et al 2015, Altai Consulting 2013, Crawley and Skleparis 2018). The 'mixed–migration' discourse, while maintaining the view of a distinct categorization between refugees and migrants (Long 2013), recognises how people with different motivations might migrate in similar directions, using the same migration infrastructure and routes (Cummings et al. 2015). It also acknowledges how they might share similar conditions of mobility, mostly associated with irregular migration (Crawley and Skleparis 2018). These mixed–migration patterns require further consideration of the way we examine the relationship between men's mobility

experience and masculinity. In this context, the aim of this thesis is not to advance the debate around the nature of current migration flows from Africa to Europe; neither to determine whether my participants are 'real' refugees or not. On the contrary, I am interested in examining their refugee experience as a gendered process undertaken by men–on–the–move[2] along the CMR. This, however, necessarily entails focusing on the gendered implications of refugee labelling and the effect that this has on people's mobilities.

That is why, beside legal definitions, I use the concept of 'refugeeness' (Lacroix 2004) to encapsulate the characteristics of participants' experience due to their location in the Italian asylum system (Lacroix 2004). Namely, whenever used in this thesis, the term 'refugee' refers to the fact that all participants have formally applied for or been granted international protection in Italy. At times, I also use the terms 'migrant', 'travellers', 'men–on–the–move'. In doing this, I am by no means questioning the entitlement to refugee protection by participants. Rather, I am highlighting that my research focus is participants' experiences of mobility along the CMR and the role of gender in framing these.

Conceptualising mixed–migration patterns

In the study of international migration, refugees have traditionally been distinguished from labour migrants, with 'the former representing the political, and the latter the economic, outcome of global systems and interactions' (Koser 2007, 238). Later, this distinction was replaced by the differentiation between 'voluntary' and 'involuntary' migration; however, the general assumptions behind this relationship did not change (Koser 2007). On one side, the refugee is socially constructed as a victim of force and coercion while economic migrants are idealised as free agents driven by the search for economic gain (Apostolova 2015). These dichotomies are reflective of the refugee regime as fixed by the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. According to the Article 1(A)(2) of the Convention, a refugee is a person who:

> *[O]wing to a well–founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group, is outside the country of his or her nationality and is unable or unwilling, due to such fear, to benefit from the protection of that country's government; or who, not having a*

[2] This term is used by Ruben Andersson in his book on the illegality industry (Andersson 2014)

> *nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or unwilling, due to such fear, to return to it.* (UN General Assembly 1951)

As a result of these demarcations, understanding people's motives is a key element of the refugee category; that is why state parties of the Convention establish a legal or administrative procedure (Refugee Status Determination) by which governments or UNHCR determine whether a person seeking international protection is entitled to international protection (UNHCR 2019). The UN Refugee Convention sets out a comprehensive list of rights for refugees (Hamood 2006); the pillar is the principle of *non–refoulement* that prohibits the return of anyone to a country "where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion" (Article 33 cited in Hamood 2006, 13). Compared to refugees, the protection of other types of migrants' rights is much less developed at the international level. For example, while UNHCR's core mission is to protect refugee rights, the IOM's aim is to facilitate orderly migration (Hamood 2006, 14).

Refugee categorization fixed by the 1951 UN Convention is necessarily intertwined with the geopolitical landscape of the time when the Convention was produced. The UN Convention's (1951) definition aimed at responding to the specific dynamics of post–1945 European 'refugee crisis' and was shaped by Cold War rivalries (Long 2013, 6). The dichotomy between 'refugee' and other types of migrants therefore should not be taken as an apolitical or trans–historical conceptualization, with politics of labelling (Zetter 2007) being reflective of wider political interests and power relations of the Cold War era (Apolostova 2015). Although the focus on the need for protection from political violence still maintains its significance as demonstrated by the cases of Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur (Zetter 2007) and more recently, Syria and Iraq; many authors like Zetter (2007), Castle (2003) and Turton (2003) have pointed out the limitations of the refugee categorization in relation to current globalised patterns of mobility, in particular from and within the Global South.

On this matter, Turton (2003) recounts, for example, the 1951 categorization of refugee was suddenly tested by broader definitions introduced at the regional level – such as The 1969 OAU Convention and the 1984 Cartagena Declaration for the Central American region – in response to wars of colonial liberation in the 1960s and 1970s. Then, the concept of

'internally displaced person' emerged to capture the situation of people in the Global South that are in situations of forced displacement, but have not crossed national borders. Lastly, the new category of asylum seekers – people who are waiting for their refugee application to be determined – emerged in response to the growing difficulty of making clear distinctions between people who are moving for political as opposed to economic reasons. In this context, the exclusivity of the refugee label seems to serve the political interests of national states to limit access to refugee protection (Zetter 2018). Chimni (2009) connects this process to colonial and imperialist narratives aimed at legitimizing the containment and the exclusion of people from the Global South by Western states.

The problem of refugee labelling, however, concerns not only specific set of border practices and migration regimes (Zetter 2007), but it also has further implications on the lenses we use as researchers investigating people's experience of mobility. In this regard, several authors have illustrated the risk of refugee–economic migrant dichotomy as obscuring lived people's experience of mobility (Turton 2003, Chimni 2009). Others like Richmond (1988, 1993) have attempted to overcome the voluntary–involuntary migration dichotomy, locating migrants' experience on a spectrum between 'proactive' and 'reactive' migration. This model takes into account the role of structural constrains, predisposing factors, feedback systems and enabling circumstances (Richmond 1993). Van Hear (1998) proposes a similar matrix, maintaining the idea of continuum between voluntary and involuntary migration. Others highlight the level of compulsion associated with migration drivers. For example, Bett (2013) puts forward the concept of survival migration, by insisting on the existential threat that prompts migrants to flee while acknowledging how these threats might fall outside the 1951 Refugee Convention. Other scholars (Al– ali et al. 2001, Koser 2007, Shami 1996) have drawn on the conceptual lens of 'transnationalism' to illuminate the blurred lines between refugees and economic migrants by focusing on how political, economic, social and cultural processes and activities extend beyond the borders of a particular state (Bloch 2017).

In this context, the concept of forced migration has emerged to delinking the legal and status bound definition of the displaced person from the processes of migration as a means to recover a focus on the lived experience of displacement bringing together refugees, asylum seekers, trafficked people and other internally displaced people (Zetter 2018, 38). Here, Turton (2003) has

specifically highlighted the ethical and political implications of labelling processes:

> *[T]he reason for separating out* forced migrants *from the wider category of migrants is that forced migrants make a special claim on our concern. They require us to consider issues of membership, citizenship and democratic liberalism… They require us, in other words, to consider who we are – what is or should be our moral community and, ultimately, what it means to be human* (Turton 2003, 8 emphasis in original).

This approach recognises how contemporary migration trends from the Global South are characterised by restricted access to refugee protection, reduced legal pathways for migrants and increased militarization of border regimes (Andersson 2014, Bloch and Doná 2018, Agier 2011). It also acknowledges the diversity of protection needs of different groups of migrants (Zetter 2018) and how refugee and migration policy, at the global, regional and national levels, fails to meet these.

With regards to Mediterranean routes, Crawley and Skleparis problematize how 'dominant categories fail to capture adequately the complex relationship between political, social and economic drivers of migration or their shifting significance for individuals over time and space' (Crawley and Skleparis 2018, 1). Contesting the effects of labelling, and the black and white picture depicted by the refugee regime, Carling suggests that we recognize that refugees are migrants too: 'When someone risks their life to cross the Mediterranean on a boat, we don't know exactly what made them leave, whether they will apply for asylum, or what will be the outcome of their case' (Carling 2015).

As argued above, the aim of this thesis is not engaging with refugee labelling itself, but rather exploring how migratory process works for people on the move along the CMR and how refugee labelling impacts on their gendered experience (Crawley and Skleparis 2018). That is why the mixed–migration discourse appears the best-suited to explore the complexities associated with mobility across the Mediterranean region while maintaining a focus on the gendered effects of refugee labelling on men's lives in Europe.

As Banulescu–Bogdan and Fratzke (2015) argue, the mixed–migration discourse recognises how individuals whose protection claims are likely to be recognized by European authorities according to the 1951 Geneva Convention travel together with individuals who may not qualify for refugee

status but are still at risk in their home countries, and migrants who feel compelled to leave their countries for largely economic reasons. At the same time, it recognizes the nature of individuals' motivations which might defy mono–casual categorization (Banulescu–Bogdan and Fratzke 2015). This is confirmed by McMahon and Sigona's (2018) large qualitative study involving over two hundred interviews with newly arrived boat migrants in Italy and Greece. Similarly, Neumayer's (2005) quantitative analysis of the determinants of asylum migration to Western Europe also indicates economic factors cannot be clearly separated from political factors such as human rights abuses or failure of democratic institutions. As Hamood (2006) argues, countries afflicted by armed conflicts and human rights abuses usually also suffer from a dire economic environment while people fleeing in search of asylum also want to safeguard their economic security. Within these mixed–migration flows, the CMR became a major gateway to Europe for both West and East Africans, and for people from the Middle East (Wittenberg 2017).

Despite these differentiation in terms of migration drivers and socio–economic characteristic, once on the move, different groups of migrants share similar patterns of mobility and transit experiences along the CMR. These are characterised by irregular or unauthorised migration, dangerous smuggling strategies and disjunctive journeys (Wittenberg 2017, McMahon and Sigona 2018).

On this matter, critical migration scholarship has illustrated how current patterns of mobility are produced by the EU border regime, which uses obstruction of mobility as a form of migration management pushing people to seek alternative, often irregular and dangerous, ways to reach Europe (Ansems de Vries and Guild 2018). This is caused by structural factors such as reduced legal migration pathways to the EU; increasingly restrictive asylum policies; and greater border controls by EU countries (Hamood 2006, 15). Andersson (2016) notes that whether the European 'refugee crisis' is a recent phenomenon, it should be linked historically to the changes in migration regimes put in place around the time of the 1970s oil crisis and, most importantly, to the establishment of Schengen agreement on free movement. Before the 70s, there were various opportunities for low–skilled labour mobility to migrate into Europe such as the Germany's 'guestworker' programme or via the migration pathways from former colonies into Britain and France. The surge of irregular land and sea migration, however, is mostly associated with the Schengen agreement on free movement, which entailed the reinforcement of the EU external borders and visa system. With scarce

opportunities to apply for asylum in their countries of origin or to secure a visa for travelling legally, both labour migrants and refugees are compelled to arrive 'irregularly' in Europe as asylum–seekers (De Genova 2018). To prevent these irregular migrants from reaching Europe, the European border regime enacted a sophisticated border and military surveillance regime both at the EU border (Cuttitta 2014, Gabrielli 2014) and in neighbouring non–EU countries (Andersson 2014). With regards to the externalization of migration control mechanisms outside the EU space, the European approach aimed at creating a number of buffer zones outside the European continent (Gabrielli 2014). In his persuasive book, Andersson (2014) provides rich ethnographical descriptions of this by uncovering the illegality industry[4] emerging at Euro–African borderlands. Here, the externalization of the European border regime has made transit countries, like Niger or Libya, an outpost of the fight against irregular migration to Europe (Gabrielli 2014, Bensaâd 2007). It has also promoted increasingly dangerous practices of smuggling and crossing (Andersson 2014), including attempting to cross the Mediterranean by sea (Mainwaring 2016).

As a result of this, migration trajectories along the CMR are thus characterised by recurring or continued displacement (Ansems de Vries and Guild 2018) and protracted wandering across transit countries (Agier 2016). Being on the move, migrants along the CMR might relocate in urban transit camps, refugee villages or squatter settlements, or they might be forcefully detained in prison, holding centres or smugglers' warehouses (Agier 2016, 2010, Triulzi 2012). This makes the migration experience a dynamic process, marked by a periods of rest, blockage and re–orientation (Schapendonk 2018); with mobility not necessarily predicated on a clear and final destination (Brachet 2012, Zetter 2018, Ansems de Vries and Guild 2018, Collyer and de Haas 2012, Schapendonk and Steel 2014). Thus, many people might leave their countries voluntarily in search of better livelihood opportunities but find themselves in situations – like Libya – that endanger their lives in the same way as those that have forcibly displaced them from the beginning of their migration experience (Zetter 2018, 34).

[4] With the term 'illegality industry' Andersson identifies the system that facilitates, controls and produces illegal migration in the Euro-African borderlands (Anderrson 2014).

In this context, studies on migration routes across the Mediterranean region have illustrated the significant role of smuggling[5] networks in 'facilitating' irregular migration towards Europe (Wittenberg 2017, Triulzi 2012, McMahon and Sigona 2018). This is a multi–billionaire smuggling industry that has emerged at the Euro–African borderland (UNODC 2018). Here, 'facilitation' goes often hand in hand with exploitation; with illegal migrants being extremely vulnerable to violence and abuse by smugglers and other actors in the arena (Atlai Consulting 2015, Triulzi 2012). According to Carling et al. (2015) the role of facilitators is strictly associated with the criminalization of migration movements. As a consequence, smugglers recognise the opportunity to maximise their profits by exploiting smuggled migrants either during their journey or at their destination. In such situations, the differentiation between trafficking and smuggling might dissolve[6]. The nexus between trafficking and smuggling creates further situational vulnerabilities associated with the process of transit and mobility for smuggled people (Galos et al. 2017).

In Libya, in particular, Aziz et al. argue that refugees and migrants become the target of a wide range of potential abusers and exploiters, who have proliferated as a result of Gaddafi's regime collapse. Here, increasing vulnerabilities affect migrants and refugees when they are kept against their will by smugglers in 'safe houses' during crossing through Libya; when they imprisoned by police forces in 'official' detention centres; when they are kept prisoner by militia or criminal groups in unofficial detention centres; and when they are forced to work for free for local population (Aziz et al. 2015, 44).

[5] In the Mediterranean routes, the difference between smuggling and human trafficking is blurred and difficult to conceptualise as two opposing and separate phenomena (Hamood 2006). Theoretically, migrant smuggling seeks to facilitate a person's illegal movement for profit but the relationship between the smuggled migrant and his or her facilitator ends when the journey is completed; while trafficking has its final purpose associated with the journey in the exploitation of migrant subject (Carling et al. 2015). In the context of the CMR – particularly in Libya – we have large evidence that these two phenomena overlap (Altai Consulting 2015, Amnesty 2017, Triulzi 2012, Galos et al. 2017).

[6] On the difference between trafficking in persons and migrant smuggling, however it is important to acknowledge that this has important legal ramification. Once in Europe, contrary to trafficked people, smuggled migrants, even those subject to hardship and abuse, are not considered to be victims of crime or human rights violations. So that the legal labelling of the two phenomenon has profound ramifications on people's asylum claims and legal status (Carling et al. 2015).

With regards to women, research has illustrated how these vulnerabilities are extremely gendered, and how female travellers are vulnerable to highly traumatising experience of violence and abuse during their journeys to Europe (Gerard and Pickering 2013, Gerard 2014, Freedman 2016a, Freedman 2012b, Grotti et al. 2019, Barbara et al. 2017, Amnesty 2016, Kofman 2019). The same approach, however, is rarely extended to men migrating along the Mediterranean routes. In his work on Syrian men in Jordan, Lewis Turner (2016) writes that this gendered understandings of vulnerability led to the invisibility of men's vulnerabilities in refugee response in the region. This literature review will attempt to delineate the reason why and how this happened. Overall, the aim is to show that there is much to be gained from integrating elements of feminist and critical migration scholarship to the study of men's experience along the CMR, enabling a focus on how vulnerabilities are contextually produced by conditions of gendered mobilities (Cresswell and Uteng 2008)

Vulnerability and gendered analysis: from the absence of women to the invisibility of men

Sociological literature on vulnerability overall recognises the 'complexity, ambiguity and indeterminacy of the term' with sociologists 'working within various theoretical traditions tend to define this concept differently' (Misztal 2011, 41). Large part of this literature, however, is influenced by Foucault's ideas on governmentality and its emphasis on the 'mechanisms of power that frame the everyday lives of individuals' (Foucault 1979, 7). Vulnerability can be thus understood as 'a specific label that can be deployed to justify targeted actions towards/against specific groups of people' (Van Loon 2008, 55 cited in Misztal 2011). This involves considering how policies assess vulnerability and what are the effects of this classification on the access to rights and protection (Kofman 2019, Clark 2007).

According to the UN: *'Vulnerability can be seen as a state of high exposure to certain risks and uncertainties, in combination with a reduced ability to protect or defend oneself against those risks and uncertainties and cope with their negative consequences'* (UN 2001). In the context of humanitarian assistance to refugees and migrants, however, a large scholarship has critiqued the categorical approach that equates vulnerability with the membership to a predefined vulnerable group (Clark 2007, Fineman 2008, Peroni and Timmer 2013, Fiddian 2006). Freedman (2019) argues that the types of vulnerability assessments- dominant in Europe refugee regime- tend to treat vulnerability as one dimensional, rather than as a layered concept (Luna 2009). On the contrary, Freedman

(2019) argues that emphasis should be placed on the contextual and relational causes that create vulnerabilities. By doing this, we can recognise how everyone may be rendered 'vulnerable' by changing political, social and economic circumstances (Clark 2007). Quesada et al. connect this relational understanding of vulnerability to the individual position in a hierarchical social order; vulnerabilities are seen as the product of power relations at the interplay between individual and structural levels (Quesada et al. 2011). Based on these contributions, gender, being a key signifier of power in social relation (Scott 1986), might be indicated as a crucial analytical level. In particular, through gender analysis we are able to explore how vulnerabilities are socially and relationally produced by migration processes (Grotti et al. 2018).

The analysis of gender relations provides a framework to do this, locating the individual trajectories of migrant subjects within the wider socio-cultural landscape they inhabit (Howson 2014). By looking at gender relations, we are thus able to analyse vulnerabilities as 'embodied in hierarchies of power and social status, in positions in home and host communities, and in work and domestic relationships – all of which may be transformed in the course of the migratory process' (Van Hear 2010, 1531). This orientation has been largely incorporated in research on migrant and refugee women associated with the feminist project of uncovering women migrants' experience (Brettel 2017, Lutz 2010). Extending the same approach to men, however, has been more problematic.

The absence of women in mainstream migration scholarship

Traditionally, mainstream migration theorization organizes into three main, but not mutually exclusive, levels: macro, meso and micro. Macro–level theories give emphasis to structural factors of opportunity, which act as 'push' and 'pull' factors for migration (Hagen-Zanker 2008). Push factors reflect the reasons why migrants leave their country of origin while pull factors illustrate why they choose to settle in a particular country (Hooghe et al. 2008). Meso–level theories focus on systems and networks, highlighting the role of socio–cultural–economic linkages between countries (Hagen-Zanker 2008) and interpersonal relations that link migrants with relatives, friends or fellow countrymen at home (Arango 2000, 291). Micro–level theories focus on what factors influence an individual's decision to migrate (Hagen-Zanker 2008). The classic individual micro approach was best developed by Lee (1966) around four areas: factors associated with the area of origin; factors associated with the area of destination; intervening obstacles; and personal

factors. This scholarship emphasising the rational, calculating individual actor, ignored the role of cultural and normative expectations, and roles in the family, which are quintessentially gendered (Broughton 2008, 568).

A gender focus in migration studies first emerged in the 1970s in order to recover a place for the experiences of women migrants. At that point, in mainstream migration research, women were primarily regarded as dependent subjects – whether mothers, wives or daughters – automatically following the male breadwinner migrant (Hondagneu–Sotelo 2005). Mainstream migration research approach was to treat the experiences of migrant men as representative of the entire migrant population (Brettel 2017), although without considering them as gendered actors (Boyd and Grieco 2003). Influenced by feminist theoretical insights, a body of scholarly work, mostly quantitative with a descriptive outlook, began to challenge these assumptions, illuminating the specific characteristics of female migrants, the timing and volume of their migration trends and adaptation processes. The major contribution of this body of scholarly work is to have provided evidence on the feminization of international migration (Castles and Miller 2003), making women's invisibility in migration research indefensible and unjustified (Pessar and Mahler 2003). At the same time, one major limitation was failing to acknowledge the relational dimension of gender (Connell 2015). This body of work, presenting women migrants as a 'special' case (Curran et al. 2006) failed to grasp the interrelation between gender, power and social relations. For this reason, this approach is usually defined as 'add and stir' (Brettell 2017, Hondagneu–Sotelo 2005).

A more relational approach to gender was progressively incorporated in migration research across the 1980s and the 1990s in line with the development in feminist theory (Nawyn 2011). Gender emerged as a social construct and a signifier of social relations (Scott 1987). Qualitative studies illustrating the dynamic relationship between gender and migration finally emerged (Curran et al. 2006). Pierrette Hondagneu–Sotelo's (1994) study of Mexican migrant women and Sherri Grasmuck and Patricia Pessar's study (1991) of Dominican international migration are well–known examples of this scholarship (Hondagneu–Sotelo 2005). As a result, feminist–oriented migration scholarship explored the experiences of migrant women in relation to a vast range of topics, such as labour migration, transnational families, citizenship, sex trafficking, and sexuality (Nawyn 2011) and across multiple domains. A crucial issue tackled by this scholarly work was the relationship between patriarchy and access to resources to migrate, and how gender

relations were altered or reconstituted after migration (Boyd and Grieco 2003).

Overall, feminist contribution in migration research was fundamental. They identified the lack of focus on women migrants, which marginalised and made invisible their experience, providing significant insights in how the process of migration works differently along the lines of gender. In particular, they illuminate the complex processes that mediate between micro, meso and macro levels and the changing relations of power which produce, and are the product of, these both in sending and receiving countries (Boyd and Grieco 2003, Pessar and Mahler 2003). However, the incorporation of gender in migration research was originally characterized by a 'women only' lens (Brettell 2017). Here, migrant women were understood as 'gendered' subjects while the institutions they navigated were presumed to be gender neutral and the men migrating with them were regarded as genderless (Hondagneu–Sotelo 2005). As a consequence, this scholarship reinforced the invisibility of men, as gender subjects, in mainstream migration research (Charsley and Wray 2015). According to Pessar and Mahler, 'the pendulum shifted so far in the opposite direction that the male migrant as study subject disappeared almost to the same degree as the female migrant had previously' (2003, 814). The 'women only' lens theoretical approach was challenged by new orientations in feminist scholarship that saw gender as a multi–dimensional phenomenon intersecting with other social divisions, and by the emergence of masculinity research that problematized men's gender position in the migration process (Brettel 2017). These contributions were particularly important in the context of refugee scholarship, due to its focus on power relations associated with forced migration and the asylum regime. Following Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2014), we can organize the literature gender and forced migration in two major streams: one concerning the refugee status determination and another dealing with gendered responses to forced migration and displacement. In both streams, feminist research has illustrated how different social, political and economic conditions in countries of origin, transit and destination might create gender-specific vulnerabilities for refugee women (Freedman 2019).

Gender and the international refugee regime

In order to illustrate the way gender shapes specific vulnerabilities that prompt women to flee, feminist researchers have focused on the limitations associated with the 1951 UN Convention and its gender biases/limits[7]

[7] The extensive debate around refugee women being persecuted as women or because they are women, although acknowledged, is deemed to go beyond the scope of this literature review.

informing the definition of refugee. According to feminist researchers, the refugee convention, based on a liberal rights narrative relying on 'gender neutrality' and universal applicability (Smith 2016), results in overlooking refugee women's gendered experience of persecution and violence (Greatbatch 1989, Spijkerboer 1994, Macklin 1995, Castel 1992, Indra 1987). Focusing mostly on public sphere activities dominated by men (Indra 1987), the UN Convention seems unfit to cover violence and persecution happening in private spaces or in instances where the state fails its duty to protect citizens from harm (Boyd 1999). Gender–based violence such as threat of forced marriage or female genital mutilation might therefore not be recognised as grounds for refugee status (Freedman 2008).

Although the calls for adding 'gender' to the 1951 grounds of persecution have been unsuccessful to date, women's experiences of gender persecution have acquired international attention and they have been integrated into the refugee regime (Oswin 2001). The common interpretation was to include 'gender–based persecution' under the umbrella of the 'particular social group' category included in the 1951 Convention. In 1984, the European Parliament adopted a resolution calling upon states to consider women who had been the victims of persecution because of their sex as a particular social group, under the terms of the Geneva Convention (Freedman 2013, 420); in the 1990s, many state courts started recognizing this approach (Musalo 2003). In 1991, UNHCR adopted Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women, which asserted how gender–based persecution exists and should be recognized by 'refugee–receiving' states as a basis for asylum (Oswin 2001). Other gender–specific guidelines have been adopted by an increasing number of countries and by international organizations including the UNHCR[8] (Callamard 2002).

Without denying the importance of these efforts, inspired by political and moral values that seek to empower women (Rao et al. 2019), this approach has been criticized by feminist scholars for reinforcing gender essentialism. Equating gender with 'women', according to Crawley (2000), leads to a tendency of generalising about women's experiences of forced migration; and it ignores the multiple configurations that gender enacts at the intersection

[8] See UNHCR (2002) Guidelines on international protection: Gender–Related Persecution within the context of Article 1A(2) of the 1951 Convention and/or its 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees www.unhcr.org/3d58ddef4.pdf

with other social division and the critical differences among women across multiple social locations and contexts[9].

According to Macklin (1995)[10] and Oswin (2001), by explicitly focusing on women's experiences of gender oppression, we may reinforce a stereotype that men 'own' the categories of oppression that are not overtly 'gendrified' (Macklin 1995, 259) such as political persecution or violence (Freedman 2008). This is part of an essentialist understanding of gender, in which men and women/minors are associated with 'mutually exclusive and oppositional attributes' regarding the need of protection (Carpenter 2005, 296).

As a consequence, such gender essentialist approach overshadows the gendered dimension of forced migration for both men and women, resulting in the construction of an essentialist position of vulnerability and need of protection, framed by gender notions (Turner 2010, Szczepanikova 2009, Freedman 2019). On one hand, this might reinforce a paternalist view towards refugee and asylum seeking women, marking them as passive, dependent, voiceless victims of an oppressive culture (Smith 2016, 65) in constant need of advocacy groups and aid providers to speak on their behalf (Pupavac 2008).

On the other hand, through this process of labelling, humanitarian actors define who is 'more' worthy of aid and assistance (Hyndman and Giles 2018); they forge exclusion criteria between deserving and undeserving 'refugees' along the lines of gender (Ticktin 2016, L. Turner 2016). This has significant implications for both men and women asylum seekers, who might be penalised when not conforming to dominant definitions of gendered vulnerability (Kofman 2019, Freedman 2019, Clark 2007). In her work on refugees in Cairo, for example, Fiddian argues that single young males who do not speak Arabic are among one of the most vulnerable groups in that specific

[9] Additionally, Crawley (2000) argues that treating women as the special case deviating from the normative framework of the 1951 Convention overshadows women's vulnerability to political persecution and repression in their country of origin, even when they do not participate on the frontline of formal politics. For example, the act of refusing to comply with laws/cultural practices, which impose particular clothing, in some contexts, could be perceived as a highly political act of opposition (Freedman 2008, 418).

[10] According to Macklin: *'The trouble with framing any persecution of women as 'persecution because of gender' is that it can reinforce women's marginalization by implying that only men have political opinions, only men are activated by religion, only men have racial presence, etc.'* (Macklin 1995, 259).

context. In particular, despite being at high risk of committing suicide, this group of men does not receive special attention from UNHCR, and they are rarely deemed eligible for resettlement. At this point, Fiddian recounts how one male asylum seeker stopped taking antibiotics for a serious infection in his leg as a strategy to qualify as 'vulnerable' and therefore being granted 'extraordinary' protection according to UNHCR policies (Fiddian 2006).

On the place of vulnerability in UNHCR policies, Charsley and Wray (2015) mentioned section 3.4 of the Procedural Standards for Refugee Status Determination under United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Mandate (UNHCR, n.d.) which identifies some specific groups of asylum seekers: women who are at particular risk in the host country, elderly asylum seekers, unaccompanied minors and asylum seekers that require medical assistance among others, as 'applicants with special needs'. According to the UNHCR (n.d.) guidelines, these should be prioritized in reception and registration procedures. Here, the two scholars conclude that: 'All refugees are, by definition, vulnerable but some are regarded as particularly so' (Charsley and Wray 2015, 413). Following Lewis Turner (2016), this approach appears to view gendered vulnerability as inscribed to the person (usually a woman or child) rather than seeing it as the product of what being a man or a woman means in a particular context associated with the refugee experience.

Gendered vulnerabilities framing refugee women's experience

Numerous studies have highlighted the vulnerabilities of women in processess of displacement, encampment and resettlement. This scholarship places emphasis on the fact that the entire refugee experience is a gendered process (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2014) and that refugee women are exposed to cycles of gender–based violence, including sexual violence and domestic violence, across different migration stages (Fiddian 2006, El–Bushra and Sahl 2005, Krause 2015, Horn 2010, Seckinelgin et al. 2010, Feseha and Gerbaba 2012, Ferris 2007, Hans 2008, Bartholomei et al. 2003, Freedman 2012).

On the role of gendered vulnerabilities affecting women in displacement, Seckinelgin's (2012) work on the Burundian conflict, for example, explored the role of gender relations in conflict–related contexts, where men joined in mass armed forces and women, without patrilineal protections, become vulnerable to violence, rape and homelessness. Seckinelgin speaks of a 'hyper–patriarchal reconfiguration' of existing gender structures in the new political economy of the conflict. Here, 'patriarchal structures identified with marriage

and family are replaced by the structures of arms and camps as the regulatory structural basis for gender relations' (Seckinelgin 2012, 58).

With regards to flight experience, feminist scholarship has illustrated how men tend to represent almost the totality of intermediaries – smugglers, aid workers, military personnel and migration officers – making gender relations a critical dimension of forced migration (Indra 1987, 4). A study on Eritrean and Ethiopian refugees conducted by McSpadden and Moussa (1993), for example, provides qualitative evidence of how violence is perpetrated differently at the border by guards; here, men were beaten, imprisoned and threatened with repatriation, while women were subjected to sexual violence or forced into transactional sex.

Similar processes are documented in the context of refugee encampment and resettlement. Carlson's (2005) work on refugee encampment in Malawi, for example, shows how notwithstanding UNHCR engagement with gender equality, refugee women's experience of domestic violence persisted in camp situation and was even enhanced by camp structures. Similarly, in her work on refugee population in Cairo, Fiddian (2006) illustrates how women who fled for reasons not connected to gender–based violence might experience systematic sexual abuse once in exile. In Fiddian's analysis, thus, the country of asylum emerges as a site where new forms of violence are inflicted as well as a site where the continuation of violence can take place. Here, it worth noting how Fiddian's study represents one of the limited attempts within the scholarship on displacement, humanitarian crisis and forced migration, employing an inclusive and intersectional understanding of gendered vulnerabilities, which takes into account refugee men's experience of violence, including sexual violence (Fiddian 2006).

Overall, much of the scholarly work in this area has primarily focused on the role of men being overwhelmingly[11] 'the fighting personnel of national militaries, popular militias, political police forces and the armed gangs of warlords' (Cockburn 1999, 9). Here, masculinity has been widely used to explain primarily the perpetration of violence associated with partiarchial domination and oppression (Løvgren 2015, Myrttinen, et al. 2017, El-Bushra, Naujoks, and Myrttinen 2014).

[11] This should not underestimate the role of women in armed conflict and violence (see Coulter et al. 2008).

Less interest has been given to male–on–male violence[12] and in particular, to those men who are at the receiving end of this violence, with masculinity rarely examined as a category of vulnerability (Løvgren 2015, 18). Another relevant exception, in this sense, is the work of scholars such as Jones (2000, 2006), Lwambo (2013) and Dolan (2010) who have explored the implications of male–on–male violence for non–combatant men in conflict settings; with masculinity framing specific vulnerabilities for those men who do not participate in the fighting. According to Jones (2000), non–combatant men of "battle age," roughly 15 to 55 years old, are the most vulnerable and consistently targeted population group in armed conflict context. This is because they are perceived 'as the group posing the greatest danger to the conquering force, and are the group most likely to have the repressive apparatus of the state directed against them' (Jones 2000, 192). In such contexts, men are often forced to join warfare groups; they might be victims of violence because they are assumed to be ex–combatants or to prevent rebellion (Dolan 2003, 2010, Myrttinen and Nsengiyumva 2014, Menzel 2011, López and Myrttinen 2014).

The shape of violence associated with armed conflict has also implications for men's gender positions in the family and, therefore, for the political economy of the household. In her study of masculinities in the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, Lwambo notes a participant's comment, 'before the war, I was a man' that express such erosion of masculinity associated with displacement. As a result of armed conflict, Congolese male farmers found themselves unable to carry out farming activities. With armed men often occupying their fields, stealing their livestock and making the roads too insecure for trade, farmers experienced a sense of losing their masculinity which mirrors their inability to fullfil masculine responsibilities as providers in relation to their families (Lwambo 2013, 53-54).

Additionally, a growing literature is focusing its attention on sexual and gender–based violence against men in conflict and post–conflict settings (Dolan 2010, Sivakumaran 2005, Zarkov 2001). Reviewing this literature, Myrttinen et al. argue that male rape aims at 'undermining of the victim's gender and sexual identity' through the feminization and homosexualization of 'heterosexual male identities' (Myrttinen et al. 2017, 111). In war settings,

[12] As Sara Ruddick writes 'In all war, on any side, there are men frightened and running, fighting reluctantly and eager to get home, or even courageously resisting their orders to kill' (Ruddick 1998, 218 cited in Cockburn 1999).

men might be forced to witness the sexual torture of their female relatives; they might be forced to sexually assault/mutilate another person, often a family member or fellow prisoners (Carpenter 2005).

With particular regard to the CMR, the production of violence associated with the illegal journey is gendered only when it targets refugee women (Grotti et al. 2019, Amnesty 2016, Freedman 2019, Kofman 2019). This approach concerns both the pre-migration phase and the experience of transit.

On the issues of why women might be prevented from migrating along the Mediterranean routes, Freedman (2016a) mentions lack of economic and social resources, responsibility for children and children's welfare, restrictions on women travelling alone both within their own country and outside it, and fears of violence during migration. At the same time, we register a significant lack of interest in extending such analytical frame to the gendered vulnerabilities that might promtp male refugees and asylum seekers to flee along these route.

With regard to the gendered experience of transit through North Africa, Gerard and Pickering (2013) describe how gender impacts on the variability of transit- ultimately determining women's exposure to violence along the route. In particular, female travellers spoke about the danger and violence they had to negotiate at particular phases of the journey: transit through the desert, through Libya and travel by sea to Malta. In the Sahara, those perpetrating the violence also facilitate transport and navigation so that sexual violence or the provision of sexual service might be the 'prize' for the journey. In this context, it clearly emerges how women and men face different patterns of gendered violence. Gerard and Pickering (2013) and Hamood (2006) observes that similar patterns of gendered violence inform women's experience in Libyan detention centres with female detainees often being threatened with rape by prison guards. At this juncture, it appears that the lack of gender analysis of men's experience in this context might compromise our understanding of the relational dimension of violence in the Libyan context and its function in the smuggling industry (UNODC 2018).

Migration and Masculinities

In the previous section, I illustrated how the project of incorporating gender to study refugee experience has failed to fully extend this approach to men. Over the last two decades, however, a small body of work applying a masculinity perspective to the study of international migration, including refugee migration, has emerged in response to this tendency (Broughton 2008,

Osella and Osella 2000, Charsley 2005, Donaldson and Howson 2009, Howson 2014, Sinatti 2014). Overall, this scholarship highlights how men act as gendered actors in the migration process (Brettell 2007) and how the migration experience can signify an opportunity to construct masculinity (Donaldson and Howson 2009).

The emergence of this research field has been largely influenced by the introduction of Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 2005). Prior to this, the few attempts to study men as gendered subjects were mostly infused with 'categorical understandings of gender' (Connell 2005), based on biological essentialism or sex role theory. Definition of gender was associated with sex categories and treated as a fixed entity, without taking into account the dynamism of gender as a social construct produced by historical processes (Connell 2005). Even if gender essentialism is still very popular (Connell 2012) with some important implications in the area of asylum policies, this approach has been largely challenged by the expansion of critical studies on men, which according to Hearn (2010), starting from a critique of sex role theory and using a power–laden concept of masculinities, emphasized men's unequal relations to men, as well as to women, through a theory of masculinities.

Hegemonic Masculinity

The concept of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 2005), influenced by Antonio Gramsci's theorization of hegemony, is interested in highlighting the cultural dynamic by which a group of men sustains a leading position in social life. Hegemonic masculinity, namely 'the currently most honored way of being a man' (Connell and Messerschimidt 2005, 832), necessarily provides a collective, organised meaning of gender (Courtenay 2000). Based on this frame of comparison, men are judged and learn how to assess themselves (Correia and Bannon 2006). That is because as Connell (2002) writes, gender is a way in which social practice is organised and configured.

Connell's (2005) theory is often used to trace key social requirements or chief mandates of manhood (Barker and Ricardo 2005). This is because, as argued by Vandello and Bosson (2013), compared to womanhood, which is typically ascribed in natural, permanent, and biological developmental transition, manhood is a tenuous and uncertain status that need to be achieved and it can be easily lost or taken away. Among these social requirements, some seem to be relevant across patriarchies: the ability to work and achieve financial independence; being able to establish a family and provide for them; the ability to exert power, control, and authority, in particular, over women

(Correia and Bannon 2006).

Most importantly, Connell's (2005) theorization of masculinities is a theory of power. She recognises the plurality of masculinity and argues that only a small portion of men can embody hegemonic masculinity. Her theory is oriented at illustrating the power relations that gender enacts not only between men and women, but also among different groups of men. Men are not equally privileged[14] by the gender order and masculinity interacts (Connell 2005) with other social divisions – such as race, class, sexuality – framing specific relations of dominance and subordination across micro and macro domains (Scott–Samuel et al. 2009). Hegemonic masculinity, in Connell's framework, is thus distinguished from other masculinities. Subordinated masculinity is the position of those men who display qualities that are the opposite of those values in hegemonic masculinity (for instance, gay men). Complicit masculinity refers to men who gain from hegemony and obtain a patriarchal dividend even if they do not represent a hegemonic position themselves. Marginalized masculinity corresponds to those men who cannot fit into the hegemonic because of certain characteristics like race, but still subscribe to norms of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 2005).

Connell locates migrant men in the category of marginalization (Connell 2005). She uses this category to explain race relations as part of the dynamic of masculinity, highlighting the symbolic role of black masculinity for white gender construction. For example, she cites the fantasy figure of the black rapist in the making of white sexual politics (Connell 2005, 80). Another characteristic of marginalization is that it always entails the authorization of the hegemonic masculinity of the dominant group (Connell 2005, 81). Black athletes like Anthony Joshua or LeBron James might become exemplars of hegemonic masculinity but this will not confer social authority to black men in general (Connell 2005).

Overall, Connell's theory of masculinities (2005) helps us to understand, as Morrell and Ouzgane write, the 'evident fact that not all men have the same amount or type of power, the same opportunities, and consequently, the same life trajectories '(Morrell and Ouzgane 2005, 4). Here, structural factors – such as dynamics of poverty, exclusion, inequalities or conflict – affect the possibility 'to fulfil these external and internalized expectations of what it

[14] Connell mentions the concept of 'patriarchal dividend' as the advantage of being man in a patriarchal society (Connell 2005).

means "to be a man"' (Correia and Bannon 2006, 246). Thus, hegemonic masculinity as a theoretical concept can be used to examine the making of social relations; but also the effect of these power inequalities and disparities in the gendered lives of men[15] in terms of vulnerabilities (Scott–Samuel et al. 2009).

In the case of migrant subjects, following Howson (2014), the process of alignment with hegemonic masculinity (Connell 2005) must be located within multiple power relationships and imbalances inhabited and produced by the process of transnational mobility and displacement. This requires a careful attention to masculinity as a site of power for refugee men as they go through the process of identity reconstruction and social life renegotiation associated with transit and dislocation (Datta et al. 2009). Such reworking of social relations often entails reconfiguring previous conceptions of gender roles, positions in the family and gender relations (Szczepanikova 2005) and confronting the radical alteration of life circumstances as a result of migration.

Complexities of transnational masculinities

Engendering a masculine perspective in the study of refugee men's transnational experience requires careful consideration of how to apply Connell's hegemonic masculinity (2005). Overall, the problem of multilocality is essential to grasp the complexity and dynamism of transnational life and the constant reworking of masculinity associated with different migration stages (Datta et al 2009). This reworking involves migrant men navigating alterations in family structure and social life and dealing with tensions between gender ideologies in the homeland and the host country (Hopkins and Noble 2009). Migration might become a space for decostructing and reiventing masculine practices and gender–sexual identity (Manalansan 2006).

Many ascholars have problematize hegemonic masculinity being conceptualised in terms of traits or fixed charactestics (see Connelll and Messerschmidt 2005 for a review). Others argue that the original formulation of Connell's theory of gender relations, focusing much on macro structures

[15] This has great costs for men and women on many levels; evidence has demonstrated that in response to such failure, men often embody 'destructive, and sometimes violent, illicit, or criminal behaviour, against themselves and women' (Correia and Bannon 2006, 246). A large body of evidence in health (Courtney 2000; Evans et al. 2011) and criminology (Messerschmidt 1993, Phillips 2012) has illustrated this.

and social institutions, has given less attention to issues to do with culture[16] (Nawyn 2010), identity (Whitehead 2002) and intersections with other social divisions (Hopkins and Noble 2009). With regard to migrant masculinities, the most relevant criticisms concern the mechanisms available for men to align with hegemonic masculinity ideal when dealing with new cultural situations and context (Howson 2014). Some of these criticisms have been accepted in the reformulation of her theory that Connell wrote with Messerschmidt in 2005. In particular, the emphasis on the role of place and context in the making of gender (Connell and Messerschimidt 2005).

On this matter, Howson (2014) warns against the conceptualisation of transnationalism as a boundless process which frees migrant men from the process of alignment to hegemonic masculinity, as entangled by their social location in a specific context and history. Migrant men need to negotiate their diasporic masculine identity in new social, cultural, economic and political environments, yet they do not leave behind their cultural histories (Farahani 2012). From this perspective, the 'doing' of masculinity appears to be a complex project situated across multiple socio–cultural geographies and temporalities (Scheibelhofer 2007, Pasura and Christou 2017, Lutz 2010, Farahani 2012).

Influenced by Stuart Hall's (1997) theory of cultural identity, Herz (2018) argues that masculinity should be seen as something dynamically influenced by both past and the present – recognising patterns of continuity and discontinuity (Hall 1997) in the way masculinity ideals are produced and reproduced across different temporalities. This approach rejects an understanding of masculinity as a fixed and static construction. On the contrary, it calls for an exploration of how new ideals are constantly embodied during processes of mobility. At the same time, this requires taking into account patterns of continuity and stability in the reproduction of gender expectations and norms – for example, being a family provider.

In order to grasp both fluidity and instability, continuity and situatedness, of transnational masculinities, there has been a shift in masculinity studies toward

[16] Hopkins and Noble note 'there has been a shift from a sociological emphasis in masculinity studies to an increasingly cultural one, which focuses on questions of subjectivity, the discursive construction of masculinity, and its intersections with other vectors of identity, like class, sexuality, race and ethnicity' (Hopkins and Noble 2009, 813).

a conceptualization of gender as performance[17]; undertaken and accomplished in a given social context (Hopkins and Noble 2009, Brickwell 2003, Datta et al. 2009). This involves a renewed interest in what set of specific meaning hegemonic masculinity assumes in a determined setting (Adu–Poku 2001) and the intersecting discourses that construct diasporic masculine subjects in different transnational spaces (Farahani 2012).

Based on this scholarship, given the context of the CMR, it is important to situate Connell's work in relation to a critique of 'non–Western' masculinities, and in particular, African masculinities. Miescher and Lindsay (2003) rightfully suggest caution when applying hegemonic masculinity to African masculinities. They argue that due to the history of colonialism, in Africa it is hard to determine which masculinity becomes hegemonic, since 'understanding of gender depend on the specific context and on different actors' subject positions' (Miescher and Lindsay 2003, 6). Here, I am well aware, as argued by Agier (2016), that the European gaze has attempted deliberately to reduce this regional diversity into a number of dualistic simplifications, such as forest/savannah, polytheism/monotheism, matrilineal/patrilineal to name a few, constructing 'African' culture as whole ensemble in a relation of alterity with European identity. There is a need to avoid treating Africa as a country or a single culture, nor to simplify and disqualify the richness of African gender orders, but rather to operationalise a theoretical framework in the study of masculinities of Sub–Saharan African men. That is why 'a model of multiple hegemonies of masculinity'[18] (Morrell et al. 2012, 21) is extremely necessary when studying African men.

Hence, the relationship between African masculinities with the white hegemonic ideal imported by colonialism is crucial. As argued by Kabesh, when a specific form of masculinity, based on whiteness and middle–class, is taken as norm, the others are formed through and within post–colonial conditions, meaning that the history of colonialism and its socio–political conditions are internalised (Kabesh 2013, 26). These conditions compelled African men to endlessly place themselves in a subordinate position in relation

[18] For instance, with regards to the experience of South Africa, Morrell denotes at least three forms of hegemony: a 'white' masculinity associated with the white ruling class) ; an 'African', rurally based masculinity associated with indigenous institutions (such as chiefship, communal land tenure, and customary law) and a 'black' masculinity that emerged in the context of urbanization and African townships (Morrell et al. 2012).

to the masculinity of the colonizer (Uchendu 2008, 9)[19]. Depicted as barbaric, stupid, backward, dullards (Uchendu 2008), African men were described as 'lacking in almost every virtue' (Uchendu 2008, 1). The definition of the European man as superior and inherently different (Morrell and Ouzgane 2005, 10), which ultimately aimed at providing legitimation to colonial occupations and the slave trade, was to be achieved via the othering of the colonized. In the case of African men, this process entailed the impossibility to be fully perceived as 'men', embodying Western hegemonic masculine traits such as dominance, control, strength and authority (Andersson 2008).

Morell (1998), however, asserts that the imposition of colonialism did not erase the richness of African gender orders. Neither was it ever able to completely eradicate pre–colonial and indigenous values systems (Morrell and Swart 2005). In the vast body of anthropological and sociological research on African indigenous culture, here, the notion of manhood[20] emerged as a status to be attained diachronically by the boy; usually through some sort of rite of passage (Turner 1967), which signifies a ritual necessity for male initiation (Janssen 2007), such as traditional male circumcision (Heald 1982, Tucker 1949, Gitywa 1976, Vincent 2009, Wilcken et al. 2010). In his paper on Xhosa male circumcision, Vincent reviewing this literature identifies typical themes associated with such rites: the enhancement of masculine virility, the performative enactment of the separation between men and women, preparation for marriage and adult sexuality and the hardening of boys for warfare (Vincent 2009, 434). The initiation rite usually involves a separation from the community and confronting some sort of pain/suffering which marks the transformation. Before this ritual passage (Turner 1969), the boy is not included in the realm of manliness, being considered just a child. After the initiation, the boy emerges with a new identity; he is recognised as possessing the social requirements associated with manhood, intended as social adulthood. According to Barker and Ricardo, such rites of passage from boyhood to manhood clarify 'a clear demarcation between children, or boys, and men, and between men and women' (Barker and Ricardo 2005, 9) which is essential in the understanding of Africa gender orders. The beautiful

[19] Uchendu (2008) is specifically referring to the impact of colonial occupation on the Shona people of modern Zimbabwe.

[20] Miescher and Lindsay (2003) specify the distinction between masculinity and manhood in African gender order; with manhood indicating the indigenous notions on men physiology, often recognised as male adulthood; while masculinity refers to cluster of ideologies, values and expressing social expectations on how men should behave and represent themselves to others.

autobiographical book of West African author Malidoma Somé (1994), 'Of Water and the Spirit', illustrates what initiation represents in the social, political and spiritual life of African men and what the risks are if ritual passage does not occur. Once a man, he can take on the masculine tasks and duties in relation to his community, clan or family.

With the imposition of colonialism, native understanding of masculinity underwent significant transformations[21] (Morrell and Ouzgane 2005). The effect of urbanization, the arrival of Christian missionaries, and the introduction of wage labour impacted on 'gender roles in general, and in manhoods specifically' (Barker and Ricardo 2015, 14). Loosening communal ties as a result of their migration from rural to urban settings, young men in Sub–Sahara Africa find themselves in a socially and economically marginalised position; marked by uncertainties, scarcity of resources, and increasing inequalities' (Lovgren 2015, 7). A vast literature sees these processes at the centre of armed conflict and mass violence in Africa (see Lovgren 2015 for a review of this literature).

Globalization has allowed some African men to enter the global economy, while it has represented for many others the entrance into new forms of poverty (Morrell and Ouzgane 2005). Being unable to live up to hegemonic masculine expectations in their home countries, a large portion of men from the Global South find in transnational migration an opportunity for the enactment of masculinity (Pasura and Christou 2017, Smith 2017,Osella and Osella 2010).

In her study of Senegalese migrants, Sinatti (2004) points out how transnational migration might be seen as providing material resources for African migrant men to construct a respectable form of manhood and to access adulthood. In particular, fulfilling the breadwinner role might be used to negotiate respect and status in relation to their transnational families (Sinatti 2014). Interestingly, in line with the model of rite of passage, Sinatti (2004) points out the diachronic aspect of the construction of African masculinity as a trajectory over time marked by key ritual moments in a man's

[21] Another important arena for the transformation was nationalist and independence movements and the project of nation–building in the post–colonial period (Miescher and Lindsay 2003). The masculinity of African leaders associated with the struggle against the white oppressors was highly respected (Ricardo and Barker 2005). As Morrell writes: "Where black men resisted class and race oppression, they were also, simultaneously, defending their masculinity" (Morrell 2002 cited in Barker and Ricardo 2015, 14).

life – such as circumcision, pilgrims to Mecca, taking responsibility towards the family of origin (in particular toward the elders) and establishing an independent household. These findings complement the small, but interesting, scholarly work that views international migration as a rite of passage into manhood in many parts of the Global South. In her qualitative work on 'mobile masculinities' of Bangladeshi men living and working in South Africa, Pande (2017) sees the decision to migrate as a mandatory rite of passage into manhood connected to economic deprivation and 'saving face' in the eyes of the community. Monsutti (2013), in his study of young male Hazaras, recounts how the journey from Afghanistan to Iran is a necessary rite of passage into manhood intended as a social adulthood, where they prove their capacity to face hardship, work and be separated from their families before returning home.

Building on the criticism that Connell's theory of gender relation treats masculinities as fixed and unambiguous (Scheibelhofer 2012), another branch of studies integrated gender theory with an appreciation of hybridity[22] and postmodern understanding of identities. Pasura and Christou's (2017) study on African men in London explores the diverse ways notions of masculinity and gender identities are being challenged, reaffirmed, and reconfigured in the reconstruction of life associated with the diaspora. In particular, the changing gender relations, including women's economic empowerment and access to breadwinning, produce a loss of their hegemonic masculinity, consequently forcing them to negotiate alternative respectable forms of masculinity to regain status and social recognition (Pasura and Christou 2017, 20). These include engaging in transnational activities, withdrawing from marriage and returning to their homelands, using religious and social spaces to resist changes or resorting to hypermasculine behaviours such as excessive use of alcohol and violence.

[22] Hybrid masculinity is defined as 'a type of gender identity where some elements of subordinated and or marginalised masculinities, along with some 'feminine' traits and practices, are selectively incorporated into dominant male identities and practices' (Trąbka and Wojnicka 2017, 146). Despite this scholarly work, mostly focused on 'young, white, heterosexual men who occupy privileged positions in their societies' aiming at illustrating how these incorporate 'non–hegemonic and non–traditional elements of identity' in their masculinity construction (Trąbka and Wojnicka 2017, 146); a few attempts have been made to explore male migrants' and refugees' trajectories in relation to competing demands and precarious balances associated with transnational movements (Osella and Osella 2010, Datta et al. 2009, Pande 2017).

Understanding the relationship between masculinity and refugee experience

Compared to international migration, research on the specific intersection of masculinity and forced migration is relatively less developped (Gass, 2014). Here, most of this literature focused on patterns of emaculation associated with changes in gender relation and loss of masculine status as a result of forced migration. In particular, being dependent on humanitarian assistance, for many refugee men, gender becomes 'a discursive and moral battlefield' (Kleist 2010, 186). According to Gass (2014), this is motivated by the high level of surveillance associated with the refugee regime.

Refugee camps and settlements as sites of intensified control and disciplinary power (S. Turner 2016) constitute an arena where gender relations and roles are often reshaped and changed (Krause 2014, Harrell-Bond 1986). Humanitarian agencies primarily see women as the ones most likely to benefit from receiving aid; evidence suggests that is because they are assumed to be more responsible toward other family members (Myrttinen, Khattab and Naujoks 2017), they are considered easier and more manageable objects of assistance by humanitarian actors (Szczepanikova 2005), or the agency wants to ensure a continuation of political and humanitarian support by external donors (Fiddian–Qasmiyeh 2014). Fiddian–Qasmiyeh argues that this approach has the effect of reinforcing the marginalization of men, boys and girls who live in the camp (Fiddian–Qasmiyeh 2014).

Simon Turner's (1999, 2010) work on Burundian refugees in Tanzania documents how the aid system, aimed at promoting women's empowerment, results in significant changes of gender relations in the Lukole refugee camp. With women being not dependant on their husbands, family relations were profoundly challenged by the camp's aid regime. Here, UNHCR emerges as the 'new' authority in control of both material resources and ideological discursive formations, including the way gender equality is defined. The famous quote 'UNHCR is a better husband' elucidates how masculine responsibilities toward breadwinning are threatened by humanitarian assistance. In such contexts, young men are heavily affected by these new social hierarchies and change in gender relations. They are at are at a junction in life where they are supposed to establish a family that they can protect and provide for. As a result of camp governance, these men find themselves in a condition of marginalization and liminality that invests their socio–economic positions and masculine identities.

The camp therefore emerges as a 'highly gendered space' as 'practices of the camp workers in relation to asylum seekers are informed by particular socially and historically constructed assumptions about gender roles' (Szczepanikova 2005, 291). This inability to fulfil masculine expectations is problematized also by humanitarian actors that view refugee men's unemployment and their inability to financially secure the family as the main features of men's dysfunction (Szczepanikova 2009, 2005). In her qualitative study, Szczepanikova argues that NGO workers acknowledge how the process of settlement may be in many respects more difficult for men who see their capacity of breadwinning jeopardised. At the same time, they still maintain refugee women as the prime objects of their assistance while men tend to be primarily constructed as obstacles in refugee women's development (Szczepanikova 2009, 25).

Similar findings emerged from the work of Lukunka (2012) on the Kanembwa Camp (Tanzania). Here, emasculation associated with men's positionality in the camp seems to be activated by the restrictions on the movement of refugees enforced by the Tanzanian government, the lack of economic opportunities which force refugee people in being dependent on humanitarian assistance, the promotion of refugee women's empowerment by aid workers and the loss of familial and communal ties as a result of displacement.

In her study on young refugee men from the Great Lakes region, Jaji (2009) argues that men's frustration is often associated with the inability to conform to pre–flight normative notions of masculinity. These include: economic self–sufficiency, marriage, fatherhood and the ability to control, provide for and protect a family (Jaji, 2009, 192). In particular, having to depend on humanitarian assistance and UNHCR's goodwill is seen as erosive of their masculine authority.

While much of this research focuses on encampment in the Global South (Turner 1999, Lukunka 2012, Carlson 2005, Quist 2016, L. Turner 2016) or Eastern Europe (Szczepanikova 2009, Jansen 2008), some scholars have extended these analytic lenses to the asylum regimes in Europe. The ethnographic work of Griffiths (2015) illustrated the infantilizing aspects of the U.K. asylum system, which provides few opportunities for asylum seeking men to behave as adults – making decisions about their lives and forming stable families – once they enter the asylum system. Griffiths explores the interplay of gender with asylum law and policy, which aims at simultaneously working to emasculate and infantilize the asylum seeking men (Griffiths

2015). With particular regards to failed asylum seeking men, she points to how these men placed the blame on their immigration situation, which marginalized them socially, and on what they considered to be a gender imbalance in British society tipped unfairly in favour of women (Griffiths 2015, 470). Gass (2014) describes a similar process of emasculation in the context of Swiss asylum system. In her qualitative work with four male asylum seekers, she detailed how asylum policies inform participants' construction of masculinity. Here, male asylum seekers seem to conform to the dominant gendered notions inscribed to refugee subjectivity. Being an asylum seeker, however, is viewed by these men as jeopardising the elements associated with competent masculine identities; such as the ability to work, to study, and to make independent decisions (Gass 2014, 127)

With regards to resettlement, McSpadden and Moussa (1993) argue that this does not bring an end to the gendered challenges of reconstructing identity for refugees. The process of adaptation and integration of refugees/asylum seekers in the receiving country and the impact of migration on their status, including socio–cultural and economic changes is forged by gender (Grieco and Boyd 1998). Jansen's work (2008) on Bosnian refugees explores the sense of misplacement experienced by middle–aged, professional, educated fathers who had fled Bosnian towns. This dimension of misplacement was mainly associated with downward social mobility and being subjected to the refugee policies of the host state. Here, these men would cling to their remembered personhood, located there where they recalled having counted as someone, and misplaced in resettlement.

The process of acculturation and the experiences of discriminations might also constitute other gendered challenges associated with resettlement (Jansen 2008, Herz 2018). An interesting qualitative study on the "Lost Boys of Sudan" living in the US (Arizona), shows how this group of African refugees negotiate identity in resettlement, confronting multiple discourse and racialization strategies (McKinnon 2008). This implies confronting multiple racial dynamics, being black, foreigners and refugees at the same time, in a country with a long history of racism (McKinnon 2008). Here, the racist structure might deepen the experience of status loss for refugee and asylum seeking men (Jansen 2008).

At this juncture, in order to uncover how gendered vulnerabilities are produced at the intersection between subjective and structural level, it is important to explore how men, as gendered actors, cope with processes of

marginalisation and downward mobility associated with the refugee experience. The model of hegemonic masculinity seems to suggest that as a result of this loss of status, marginalised men should aim at re–establishing power (Johansson and Haywood 2017). Based on the experiences of men living in Kanembwa Camp, Lukunka (2012) argues that processes of emasculation associated with humanitarian regime might also affect refugee women exposure to domestic violence and other forms of abuse, including exposure to sexually transmitted diseases. Similar findings can be identified in the work of Carlson (2005). According to Jaji, however, being unable to fulfil normative masculine expectations does not necessarily equate to forms of dysfunctional masculinities, but rather it requires a reworking of masculine identity (Jaji 2009).

For example, Jaji notices how refugee men might emphasize the spiritual and faith–related capacity of enduring hardship and suffering as constituting the essence of masculinity instead of physical strength, violence and aggression (Jaji 2009, 192). Exploring the interactions between gender and the process of encampment, Turner (1999) illustrates how refugee men develop coping strategies such as getting involved in politics, finding a job in a relief agency or developing new forms of leadership in the life of the camp. In his study on Sudanese refugees in Cairo, Rowe (2001) describes how organizing a protest against the UNHCR might become a site for young refugee men to reassert agency and perform masculinity. This involved facing the tasks of maintaining control and discipline and negotiating with an international agency. In her work on of Chechen refugees in a Czech refugee camp, Szczepanikova (2005) observed men engaging in what they perceived as women's activities, such as bringing food from the camp canteen, mending children's clothes or spending more time with women and children. Kleist (2010), in her multi–sited fieldwork across Copenhagen, Somaliland and London, indicates associational and community involvement, for example, might be used to create alternative social spaces of recognition in which respectable masculinity can be enacted. Ingvars and Gislason (2018)'s study of Syrian refugee men in Greece shows how men engage in egalitarian, solidary and inclusive practices toward other oppressed groups including women. However, with few exceptions, like the work of Simon Turner (2010) whose book includes an analysis of life histories from male participants, and Jansen (2008) who connects misplacement to participants' life trajectories, most of this literature proposes a static, sometimes simplistic, analysis of these gendered responses to emasculation and change of status. Focusing on a specific segment of the refugee

experience, such as life in the camp, this scholarship fails to reflect on the role of changes and continuities associated with mobility in the making of refugee subjectivities; and what is the impact of these patterns of emasculation on men's life trajectories.

Conclusions

In this chapter, I illustrated the major concepts, issues and gaps in the knowledge, concerning the study of refugee men as gendered subjects in the context of the CMR. First of all, I located the mixed–migration patterns characterising mobility processes in the region. The relevant literature reviewed indicates the complexity of journeys along the CMR, marked by obstructed mobility, and significant exposure to violence and exploitation. Here, gender emerges as a way to advance an understanding of vulnerabilities as produced by the individual location within given social contexts and power relations (Grotti et al. 2019). However, I also illustrated how this approach is mainly applied to refugee and migrant women, with a significant lack of knowledge regarding refugee men's vulnerabilities along the CMR.

In order to engender a masculine perspective in this context, this review has attempted to summarise the trajectory of gender and migration scholarship; namely, how gender emerged as an analytical category aimed at uncovering the neglected experience of women in mainstream migration theories. Secondly, I extended this analysis to the study of refugee women, illustrating the key role of gender in shaping notions of vulnerability associated with refugee regime and experience. By focusing on the gender responses that refugee women put in place when navigating these vulnerabilities, we grasped how gender can be seen as a factor shaping the entire refugee experience across different migration stages.

In this context, while recognising the fundamental contribution of feminist research, some scholars critiqued the equation of gender with women. This approach is deemed to produce a limited understanding of migrant and refugee men's experiences. As a result of this tension, in the last two decades, a small body of research has emerged to engender a masculine perspective in the study of men's migration experience. Based on Connell's (2005) hegemonic masculinity concept, this literature focuses on migrant men as gendered actors in their mobility experience (Brettell 2007); it also explores how different masculinities are enacted in response to the changing gender relations produced by transnational mobility. Here, I engage with the critical

literature that problematizes the use of hegemonic masculinity in relation to non–western masculinities and to transnational migration context. In particular, most of the literature problematizes the rework of masculine identity associated with radical changes in their lives, downward mobility and marginalization activated by migration experience. In the field of refugee studies, masculinity scholarship seems to focus on the changes in gender relation associated with encampment and the humanitarian regime. In these contexts, being unable to fulfil their gender duties, refugee men experience emasculation. However, the majority of this scholarship, focusing only on camp situation, fails to interrogate how emasculation is dynamically produced across different phases of gendered mobility and how it ultimately impacts on men's gendered life trajectories.

CHAPTER TWO: Masculinities in the context of the current European 'refugee crisis'

In the previous chapter, I introduced the reasons why it is important to extend a masculine perspective in the study of refugee and asylum seeking men coming along the CMR. Through gender we are able to advance an analysis of refugee men's gendered experiences while engaging with the vulnerabilities associated with theie journeys. In this chapter, my aim is to illluminate the place of refugee masculinities in the so–called 'refugee crisis' discourse. Current debates on the 'refugee crisis' (van Reekum 2016) in the Mediterranean often problematize men, being the largest majority of people arriving via sea (UNHCR 2017, Kofman 2019). In these media representations, the invisibility of men's vulnerabilities mirrors the hyper–visibility of the 'risks' that a male-dominated refugee population posits for European societies (Kofman 2019).

Here, I am influenced by the relevant literature on refugee representation (Nyers 2006, Pupavac 2008, Johnson 2011, Lynn and Lea 2003, Szczepanikova 2009, Chouliaraki and Stolic 2017) which critically engages with the mechanism of power underlying dominant discourses and narratives on refugee subjects. Based on Foucault's (1978) account of power and subjectivity, Olivius argues that discursive practice 'shape how we experience ourselves and our reality, creating certain possibilities while excluding others' (Olivius 2016, 58). For this reason, the refugee subject cannot be separated from the discourses that create and inform the refugee category (Gass 2014). By engaging with these discursive processes, we are able thus to uncover the social and political complexity of refugee men's position in European migration debates, where they are primarily understood as a 'problem' for host societies. This will introduce the reader to the significance of studying refugee masculinities in the racialised space of Europe (De Genova 2018) and, in particular, in Italy, one of the symbolic places of the 'crisis' discourse.

Innocence and victimihood in humanitarian discourse

As Quist eloquently notes, 'Representation is an act of power, a fundamentally political act, shaping the context for policy making and implementation by telling us how to interpret the world' (2016, 16). In Chapter 1, I illustrated how gender shapes specific modes of governing refugee population in the context of humanitarian regime. In this section, I want to focus on how this translates into a set of subject positions assigned to individuals and groups in humanitarian discourse and representation (Olivius 2016).

Humanitarianism is 'the administration of human collectivities in the name of a higher moral principle which sees the preservation of life and the alleviation of suffering as the highest value of action' (Fassin 2007, 151). In this sense, as argued by Ticktin (2011), humanitarianism often requires refugees to be represented in the passivity of their suffering. This representation functions as an empirical proof of a moral imperative to intervene; providing legitimation to the humanitarian enterprise (Quist 2016).

In her study on the visual representations of refugees in publications of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Johnson (2011) illustrates how the dominant image of the Cold War heroic white male refugee ready to fight for Western political values while jumping from a plane was replaced by the voiceless woman from the Global South, always pictured with a child, beneath the caption 'Click to donate'. In such representations, the victimisation of the refugee informs both 'how refugees are spoken of and how they are visually depicted' (Johnson 2011, 1028) and aims at mobilizing support, including financial support and donations, for refugee advocacy (Johnson 2011, 1032). Here, women and children, amalgamated into a single humanitarian category 'in need' of being saved by states, NGOs, and other humanitarian actors (Smith 2016). Informed by notions of helplessness, passivity and vulnerability (Oxford 2005, Scheibelhofer 2017, Griffiths 2015, Turner 2010), the ideal refugee seems to be strategically constructed as a 'womanchild' (Enloe 1991) to communicate innocence and victimization. According to Johnson (2011), this historical shift in refugee representation was produced by three intersecting processes: feminization, victimization and racialization.

> *[T]he racialization of the refugee, with a shift of the global refugee regime from a Eurocentric focus to one on the global South and an associated shift in the preferred solution from integration and resettlement to repatriation and 'preventative protection'; the victimisation of the refugee, with a shift from an imagination of the*

> *refugee as a powerful, political figure to an undifferentiated victim, voiceless and without political agency; and the feminisation of the refugee, with a shift in the imagined figure from a man to a woman* (Johnson 2011, 1016).

Evidently, this shift in representational practices is both the product and the producer of wider power relations between those who have the moral 'duty' to protect (the citizen), and those who are in need of protection (the refugee) (Ticktin 2011). Agency, and especially political agency, is a central characteristic of the citizen; in this sense, the refugee subject is constituted by an ontological omission marking his or her difference from the realm of citizenship (Nyers 2006). Far from being a means to empower refugee women, or to remove the obstacles when confronting the 1951 gender–insensitive refugee definition, this representational shift in humanitarian discourse has instead aimed at removing political agency from all refugee subjects (Johnson 2011). Women and children are amalgamated in a single category based on 'racialized and gendered ideas of who is a worthy subject of compassion' (Ticktin 2016, 265). This logic pushes asylum protection outside the realm of rights and international laws, reframing it in relation to the capacity to empathize with refugee subjects on moral grounds[23] (Ticklin 2016, Fassin 2001).

Far from being merely a representational issue, the above–mentioned feminization of refugee clientele translates into specific policies and politics (Szczepanikova 2005, Hyndman and Giles 2011). We can see this in Turner's ethnography of Burundian refugees in the Lukole refugee camp in Tanzania. This study provides a persuasive analysis of how the politics of innocence fixed by humanitarian discourse inform specific practices and approaches enacted by relief agencies. These aimed at framing refugees as innocent victims without a past and without political identities (Turner 2010).

On the matter of racialization (Johnson 2011), it is interesting to see how hierarchies of vulnerability are constructed in relation to colonial history (Scheibelhofer 2017, Ticktin 2005, Abu-Lughod 2002). That is because, as Oswin (2001) points out, asylum discourse frames positions of superiority/inferiority between 'refugee receiving' and 'refugee producing' countries along racial lines. Ticktin (2005) works on the French refugee status determination process illustrates how women asylum seeker escaping sexual violence are conceptualised as the ideal type of refugee. Ticktin (2005) draws

on post–colonial theorist Chandra Mohanty's (1988, 2003) critique of the monolithic representation of the 'Third World' woman as a powerless victim of particular socio–economic systems; questioning those western–centric narratives that portray women of the Global South as in constant need to be saved by Western saviours from black and brown men (Abu-Lughod 2002). These discursive constructions of gendered victimhood appear to reinforce an inventory of colonial narratives around othered masculinities (Scheibelhofer 2017). Predominantly regarded as dangerous, violent, hypersexual and savage – the colonised man was considered as a 'threat' for white women, and for this reason in constant need of discipline, domestication and control by the white man (Collins 2005).

Similarly, in his study on the representation of refugee men in humanitarian policy, combining analysis of policy texts and interviews with humanitarian workers, Olivius (2016) argues that refugee men emerge primarily as perpetrators of violence and discrimination; powerful gatekeepers and potential allies; and emasculated troublemakers. Within this discourse, refugee masculinities emerge as pathological, primitive and in need of an intervention by humanitarian actors.

Gendered construction of the 'genuine refugee' in the Mediterranean

At this point, it worth asking how the gendered and racialised hierarchies of vulnerability activated by humanitarian regime are replicated in the current discourse on the 'refugee crisis'. With the term 'refugee crisis'[24], in this thesis, I indicate the discourse that emerged in response to a substantial increase of refugee and migrant arrivals on European shores by sea (McMahon and Sigona 2018, Crawley et al. 2016). This surge, starting from 2010, has in the period between 2014 and 2016 hit its highest peak (Cummings et al. 2015), mostly connected to the effects of the civil war in Syria and the collaspe of Gaddafi's regime in Lybia. As a result of these events in 2015 more than one million people reached Europe via sea (Triandafyllidou 2018).

At sea, the media spectacle of the crisis (Musarò 2017, De Genova 2013, Fernando and Giordano 2016, Van Reekum 2016) has gained its international dimension; mostly due to the tragic loss of human lives. Despite the presence of multiple governmental–military and NGO search and rescue vessels, according to UNHCR (2017), the proportion of people that died while

[24] Here, I acknowledge that some authors like Van Reekum (2016) use the term 'migration crisis'.

attempting to cross the Central Mediterranean in 2016 was one death for every 40 persons crossing. This is caused by the use of poor quality vessels, such as inflatable boats, often overloaded and traveling in bad weather (UNHCR 2017). Although it is difficult to measure this massive loss of human lives at sea, Steinhilper and Gruijters (2018) estimate a number of 31,799 deaths in the Mediterranean between 2000 and 2016. Among these, the figure of Aylan Kurdi, whose body was found on a Turkish beach in September 2015, became the symbol of these desperate journeys (UNHCR 2017), mobilizing an international public outcry (Fernando and Giordano 2016).

Following Holmes and Castañeda (2016), we can argue that refugee and migrant deaths in the Mediterranean were framed and experienced by European public as a crisis (Kehr 2015). In this context, Steinhilper and Gruijters (2018) distinguish two narratives that can be organized along the traditional dichotomy between 'humanitarianism' and 'securitisation'. One concerned with the moral imperative to 'save' refugee and migrant lives at risk; the other focusing on the uncontrolled and irregular nature of this migration flows and its implications for state security and sovereignty.

Although humanitarian and securitarian approaches are usually contextualised as opposed political rationalities, authors like Agier (2011), Andersson (2017) Mavelli (2017), Ticktin (2011), Pallister-Wilkins (2011) and Walters (2011) have illustrated how the two approaches operates conjunctly, delineating specific modes of border regimes. This is commonly referred to as 'humanitarian securitization' (Vaughan–Williams 2015). Here, as Cuttitta (2014) argues, humanitarian concerns are used to support restrictive policies; with the protection of some lives remaining contingent on the deterrence of others (Holzberg et al. 2018). As a consequence, in the Mediterranean, the same large military apparatus in charge of military surveillance, has been deployed in search and rescue (SAR) operations with the humanitarian objectives to save lives and arresting human traffickers and illegal migrants (Triandafyllidou 2018, Musarò 2017, Cuttitta 2014). According to Musarò and Parmiggiani (2017), this frame serves to position Western 'spactators' as possible saviours, due to their racial affinity with military and NGOs personells in the Mediterranean. On the other hand, refugee rescued bodies are immediately identified as the racial 'other'.

In her work on migrant passage throung the Mediterranean, Mainwaring notes that refugee and migrants are rendered victims at sea, during rescues, and in

death in the Mediterranean; but they are rarely regarded as victims of the state and its border policies, or the structural inequalities between the Global South and the Global North (Mainwaring 2016). In particular, Mainwaring argues that boat people must 'perform' as the depoliticized suffering subject incapable of action and necessitating rescue. Those who do not conform to this image, demonstrating agency by thwarting state controls, are immediately casted as villains (Mainwaring 2016).

As a consequence, 'deserving refugees' are conceptualised in terms of 'the most vulnerable' ones (Wilson and Mavelli 2016, Apostolova 2015) with gender being a key characteristic in shaping how vulnerability is assessed by European refugee laws and policies (Freedman 2019). These types of vulnerability assessments tend to emphasise notions of physical weakness and dependency associated with women and children (Freedman 2019, Kofman 2019, Turner 2015).

According to Freedman (2019) these politics of gendered vulnerability have a significant impact not only on refugee resettlement in Europe and asylum determination process, bu also on the chances of being rescued at sea. For example, she documents how during the sea crossing from Turkey to Greece women are often placed at the front and on the outside edges of the crowd of refugees in each boat. This was considered by her interviewees as a means to ensure that the boat was more likely to be rescued by coastguards. The assumption was that European SaR vessels would be far less likely to leave the boat to sink if they saw women on board.

The gendering of the 'genuine refugee' category– with the adjective 'genuine' which does not appear in the 1951 UN convention– appears to capture these hierarchies of deservingness. In this context, the racialised and gendered notions of vulnerability as victimihood seem to discursively inhabit the dichotomy between refugees and migrants, suggesting that most of the refugee and asylum seeking men in Europe belong to the second group (Vezovnik 2017).

In his study on the Slovenian tabloid, Vezovnik notes that Syrian families are constructed as 'genuine' victims, while other categories, mainly single men are supposed to be 'fake' victims and victimizers (Vezovnik 2017, 128). This representation not only ignores the specific issues affecting men in forced migration contexts such as forced military recruitment, torture, sexual violence, arbitrary detention, and summary execution (Carpenter 2005), but it

also penalises those who, instead of waiting patiently in the humanitarian camps, engage in proactive survival strategies such as crossing the Mediterranean (Wilson and Mavelli 2016). Not confoming to the gendered construction of the ideal 'genuine refugee', their masculinity is often used to question the 'genuineness' of men's asylum claim and therefore the 'deservingness' of asylum aid and protection.

Talking about his decisions (Il fatto quotidiano, 2018) of not authorising the disembarkation of 177 migrants from the Italian coastguard vessel Ubaldo Diciotti, docked in the port of Catania, Italy's interior minister and leader of the right–wing League party, Matteo Salvini, described the men on the ship as 'fit guys' who, for this reason, were not entitled to asylum protection. From a humanitarian perspective, some responded to the minister that there were not 'fit guys' on the Diciotti and that passengers were all forced into inhumane and undignified detention conditions – one could easily verify this by looking at the pictures of the suffering people crammed on the deck of the ship (Tondo 2018b). However, in both cases, being 'fit guys' intended as being young, healthy and male, was accepted as not conducive to asylum protection. Then, it is not a surprise to know that these men, who in the eyes of Salvini were deemed to be 'fit', were also the last to disembark from the vessel: after, in sequential order, minors, women and men with medical conditions. It appeared that for the men left on the Diciotti, international law – and legal protections granted by the Italian Constitution to all individuals – could be suspended because of their masculine 'fitness'. The same Salvini, a few months later, would welcome at the airport of Roma Ciampino, 51 migrants who arrived through a human corridor organized by the UNHCR. Talking to the journalists the minister said 'you saw them: they are women, children and a disabled father' as proof of their deservingness (Piccolillo 2018). The same narrative was used by Luigi Di Maio, the leader of the other party in the government coalition, M5S, talking about another NGO vessel unauthorized to disembark on Italian soil, the Sea Watch, when he asserted that Italy was ready to 'take' women and children from the boat (Il Fatto Quotidiano 2019).

The role of the 'Masculine Other' in 'Fortress Europe'

In their study, based on content and discourse analysis of German press between 2015 and 2016, Holzberg et al (2018) demonstrate how current discourse of the 'crisis', instead of focusing on the reasons why people migrate, is mainly based on the benefits and burdens that refugees are presumed to pose to the host country. These narratives forge a binary distinction between deserving and undeserving refugees across three major

themes: economy, state security and gender relations. This set of themes ultimately replicates the binary contraposition between 'bad' and 'good' refugee: the costly/useful, the destabilising/assimilable and the misogynist/victimised refugee. Here, men are often positioned as 'undeserving' refugees who have to prove that they are worthy of protection and, as such, always find themselves on the point of deterrence and deportability. Being depicted as a potential terrorist, misogynist and abuser of the asylum system (Griffiths 2015), these men are conceptualised as 'undeserving' of refugee protection (Holzberg et al. 2018). Similarly, in their analysis of public discourse on refugee and asylum issues in Austrian newspapers during the 2015 'refugee crisis', Greussing and Boomgaarden (2017) note that the discursive construction of refugees as innocent victims mirrors a counter-narrative that depict thems as threat. Based on these studies, we can locate the figure of the 'genuine refugee', ideally women and children, in relation to another discourse, the male "bogus asylum seeker' (Lynn and Lea 2003).

Predominantly pictured as male, the 'bogus asylum seeker' conveys gendered suspicions regarding agency, strength, and cunning associated with foreign masculinity (Griffiths 2015, 472). Whether the 'genuine refugee' is imagined as a passive victim with no agency, the 'bogus asylum seeker' is characterised by agentive malevolence against the host society (Chouliaraki and Stolic 2017). This was exemplified by the debate that followed the New Year's Eve gang assaults on women in Cologne. In such debates, the dangerouness of uncontrolled migration was activated based on the 'imageries of a dangerous foreign masculinity' (Scheibelhofer 2017, 102). The masculine other was depicted as driven by a spasmodic, archaic, and primitive sexuality, and, for this, in need of a 'reprogramming' by European societies (Herz 2018). Similarly, after the 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris, securitarian concerns emerged with regards to uncontrollable refugee influx providing cover to Muslim terrorists (De Genova 2018). This notwithstanding the alleged perpetrators identified in these attackes were not refugees but racialised minority Europeans (De Genova 2018). Within this dominant representation of evil–doing male asylum seekers (Chouliaraki and Stolic 2017), men coming along the Mediterranean routes emerges primarily as a security risk for European societies (Scheibelhofer 2017, Andersson 2014, De Genova 2018, Herz 2018).

A few months before the Diciotti case, during the electoral campaign and after the horrific murder of a young woman, allegedly at the hands of a group

of Nigerian asylum seekers, Silvio Berlusconi, the leader of the centre–right coalition, called for the deportation of 600,000 asylum seekers on the basis that only a small fraction of these were 'genuine refugees'. The former Italian Premier added that the rest, living off trickery and crime, constitute a 'social bomb' ready to explode (Politi 2018). Similarly, President Donald Trump speaking at a rally during the presidential campaign, with his inflammatory rhetoric, clearly cited this figure:

> *This could be the great Trojan horse of all time. Because you look at the migration, study it, look at it. Now they'll start infiltrating with women and children. But you look at that migration—and I'm the first one to bring it up—three weeks ago I'm sitting and I'm saying, 'isn't that a shame?' And then I said to myself, 'Wow. They're all men.' You look at it. There are so few women and there are so few children. And not only are they men, they're young men. And they're strong as can be—they're tough looking cookies. I say, what's going on here?* (Rhodan 2015).

The metaphor of the Trojan horse is particularly powerful. The Trojan horse work to suggest the potential catastrophic impact of fake male refugee flows ('they're all men'). In Trump's quote, othered masculinity emerges, thus, as a trope of suspicion to implement restrictive policies in the context of the 'refugee crisis'.

Based on the view that border and migration regime necessitate discourse that legitimate them (Da Genova 2018, Lutz 2010), we can locate these discursive construction of the 'bogus asylum seeker' in relation to the wider processes of securitization of migration in the EU:

> *Securitization is a process of social construction that moves an area of regular politics into the area of security by employing a discursive rhetoric of emergency, threat and danger aimed at justifying the adoption of extraordinary measures* (Hyndman and Giles 2018, 81).

The construction of the European Union granted EU citizens and their family members the right to move and reside across the member states (Shutes and Walker 2018, Shutes 2016). The erosion of internal borders and freedom of movement, however, went together with the strengthening of external border controls and restrictive migration policies for those who are outside (Kofman and Sales 1992). Such regime, commonly denoted by critical scholars as 'Fortress Europe', has been criticised for being based on notions of a securitized inside in relation to a threatening outside (Linke 2010). Who remains outside are normally people of the Global South. According to Linke

(2010), therefore, this border regime frames the construction of European identity through racialised lenses, marking blackness – of migrants as well as of European citizens – as alien. For this reason, De Genova argues that in Europe 'every question of migration and border securitization…inevitably presents the concomitant question of migrants' racialization' (2013, 1191). According to De Genova (2018) the contemporary 'refugee crisis' should be seen as an unresolved racial crisis originated by the postcolonial condition of Europe. In the crisis debate, therefore, 'Europeanness' is constantly re–articulated as a racial formation of postcolonial whiteness (De Genova 2016). On this matter, it worth noting that one of the key fears associated with male-dominated refugee population is the assumption that they aim to bring in other family members in future through a right to family reunification (Kofman 2019). This assumption generates concerns over future increase in the refugee population in Europe connecting gender imbalance of current refugee flows (Hudson 2016) to the making of European racial space (Linke 2010).

Evidently this has implications [25] on European border regime. In his persuasive work on the illegality industry, Andersson provides ethnographic descriptions of how EU border externalization is implemented in Sub–Saharan and Northern Africa and the repercussions it has on people mobility. Interestingly, Andersson (2014) describes these operations as a regional manhunt, undertaken at the Euro–African borderlands. Regrettably, the gendered nature of this 'manhunt' is taken for granted and acknowledged briefly by the anthropologist. But following his ethnographic account, we can grasp the gendered dimension of the EU project of fortification. In this context of the EU border regime, the 'threatening outside' (Linke, 2010) which legitimates the project of fortification of borders, appears to be discursively personified by the undocumented male 'bogus asylum seeker' coming from the Global South. This man is marked as 'illegal' and identified as a threat (Andersson 2014).

At this point, it is important to notice that such intersection between gender and racial hierarchies activated by the 'crisis' discourse are rarely investigated through empirical studies. Most of the literature, here, is theoretical or based on discourse analysis (Scheibelhofer 2017, Chouliaraki and Stolic 2017, Greussing and Boomgaarden 2017, Vezovnik 2017, Holzberg et al. 2018, Lynn and Lea 2003). One of the few exceptions is Herz's (2018) qualitative

[25] For a review of the gender implications of Fortress Europe see de Jong et al. (2014).

study on unaccompanied young men in Sweden. Here, the author argues that following the events of Cologne, these young men were 'aware of the public, media image of them as a possible threat, which affects how they navigate through their everyday life, and how they look upon themselves and others' (Herz 2018, 446). Based on this, we can identify a significant gap of knowledge concerning the implications of these othering processes on the lived experience of refugee and asylum seeking men in Europe. Most importantly, extending this perspective to Southern European countries, like Italy and Greece, might provide insights on how these cultural and racial hierarchies create further gendered vulnerabilities for this group of men at early stages of their asylum experience in Europe.

Locating the 'refugee crisis' discourse in Italy

Due to its geographical position, Italy is among the EU southern border countries that were most directly affected by this reconfiguration of the Mediterranean region as a space of crisis (Cuttitta 2014, Musarò 2017) and a zone of intensified military and humanitarian operations (van Reekum 2016, Garelli and Tazzioli 2019). Through the years, the geopolitical landscape of the region has significantly changed with EU border countries, such as Italy or Greece, becoming the setting of a perpetual state of emergency (Musarò 2017).

In 2013, following the Lampedusa shipwreck, the Italian government decided to implement a SAR operation – 'Mare Nostrum' – using military ships to patrol the area near Libya (Triandafyllidou 2018). The mandate of the operation balanced humanitarian efforts of rescuing people in need with the securitarian aim of policing the illegal entry of undocumented migrants and arresting human smugglers (Musarò 2017). The number of people rescued was around 100,000, but the cost of the operation, estimated around 9.5 million euros, was deemed too high for a single state. In a press conference, the former Italian Minister of the Interior, Angelino Alfano, affirmed: "Responsibility for the Mediterranean frontier rests with Europe. These migrants don't want to come to Italy, they want to come to Europe." (Il Tempo 2014). The European Union (EU) launched a new operation called 'Triton', coordinated by Frontex, under the command of the Italian Ministry of Interior, in 2014; this time it was a joint operation bringing together 26 member states (Frontex 2016). The budget and mandate of Triton downsized SAR efforts, with only a third of the Italian operation's budget and a more limited patrol range (BBC 2014). That brought a number of humanitarian organizations deploying their own vessels to engage in SAR (Steinhilper and

Gruijters 2018).

In 2015, after another tragic shipwreck, the European Union launched 'EUNAVFOR MED operation Sophia' whose mandate is the 'identification, capture and disposal of vessels used, or suspected of being used, by migrant smugglers' (OECD 2018, 66). One of the supporting tasks of the operation was to provide training to the Libyan coastguards and navy (OECD 2018). In 2017, following the EU–Turkey agreements model, the Italian government signed a memorandum with its Libyan counterpart ('The Italian–Libyan agreements') defining a framework of bilateral cooperation in which Italy offered technical and financial support to the Libyan Coast Guard and Navy in their patrol and interception of migrant boats in Libyan territorial waters (Nakache and Losier 2017). These Libyan 'rescue operations' have the effect of pushing back forced migrants at sea to detention centres in Libya (Garelli and Tazzioli 2018), characterised by inadequate detention conditions and human rights abuses (Amnesty 2013). This coincided with increasing criminalisation of NGOs and civil society rescue operations in the Mediterranean (Sigona 2018, Garelli and Tazzioli 2018), culminating in Italy's decision to declare its ports to be "closed" to NGO vessels (Villa 2018).

At this point it is important to underline, as argued by Castelli Gattinara (2017), how the 'refugee crisis' discourse in Italy triggered public discussion on other relevant issues, including the socioeconomic, cultural and security consequences of migration flows across the Mediterranean. These were used by Italian politicians and media to problematize the crucial role of Italy in the EU external border regime (Castelli Gattinara 2017). In particular, Italy demanded a more balanced distribution of costs and responsibilities associated with humanitarian and securitarian duties associated with migrant and refugee movements in the Mediterranean (Musarò and Parmiggiani 2017, 244).

According to the Dublin Regulation (1990, 2003, 2013) the country of arrival is responsible for asylum application. This principle aims at disfavour secondary movements (Belloni 2016). At the same time it has the effect of placing most responsibility on countries along the EU's border countries (Castelli Gattinara 2017). This asymmetry generated significant political tensions between Italy on the one hand and other European states on the other (Castelli Gattinara 2017). In 2015, the European Commission enacted emergency relocation quotas and developed the 'hotspot approach', with the aim to distribute asylum seekers from the frontline countries to all the

member states (Triandafyllidou 2018 Mentzelopoulou and Luyten 2018). The system was based on nationality; if the claimant was from a country, such as Syria or Eritrea, which had more than 75% of asylum recognition rates could be put forward for relocation (McMahon and Singona 2018). Here, D'Angelo (2019) notes that the majority of people arriving in Italy via sea are West African asylum seekers from countries that have recognition rates below 35%. This was problematized by Italian politicians as a proof of Italy being left to deal with a mass of 'bogus asylum seekers', who were there to abuse from the generosity of Italian asylum regime. Due to the large number of refugee influx from Libya, the Italian asylum system underwent a major and rapid expansion (D'Angelo 2019). This was often characterised by inefficiencies and, in some cases, by corruption scandals (Castelli Gattinara 2017). We can see this as part of Italy's historical struggle in finding a credible model of integration for migrant population; characterised by a significant lack of policy aimed at inclusion (Zincone 2006).

The failed asylum seekers who could not legalise their situation ended up in a condition of illegality, due to the inefficiencies of repatriation system and the fact that Italy has signed a bilateral agreements with few African countries – Nigeria, Egypt, Morocco (D'Angelo 2019). Once outside the asylum system, these Sub-Saharan African men face lack of access to alternative sources of support or possibilities to legalise their status (McMahon and Singona 2018). As a result, D'Angelo (2019) argues that most of these failed asylum seekers end up on the streets, being exploited by agricultural sector in the Southern regions or attempting to continue their journey toward other European countries.

This dimension of illegality created an opportunity for right parties to push the 'dangers' of migration at the centre of the political agenda (Colombo 2018, D'Angelo 2019). These anti-migrants parties, notably Salvini's Lega, gained significant electoral consensus from the moral panic produced by the 'crisis' discourse (Castelli Gattinara 2017). This ultimately contributed, in the 2018 elections, to the victory of two anti–EU parties – M5S and Lega. Matteo Salvini's Lega particularly capitalized on anti–migrant sentiments across the country with his political slogan of 'Prima gli italiani' ('Italians first'), which ultimately resembles Trump's 'America first' (Edwards 2018). In these narratives, Italy was described on the brink of socio–economic, social and cultural collapse, caused by left–wing multiculturalism and refugee aid organisations (Castelli Gattinara 2017). In particular, right wing parties connoted the expansion of refugee centres, usually outsourced to social

cooperative (D'Angelo 2019), as a highly lucrative business (the so–called 'business of hospitality'). Thus, they targeted the disillusionment of ordinary Italian citizens who suffered increasing socio–economic inequalities and high level of unemployment associated with the 2008 global economic crisis, without receiving the same degree of welfare support as refugee people (Castelli Gattinara 2017). Such discourse seemed to reproduce long–lasting socio–economic conflicts mainly on racial terms (Curcio and Mellino 2010).

On this matter, it is important to note how some of these racialization processes targeting migrant population in Italy preceded the discourse of the 'refugee crisis' (Angel-Ajani 2002, Curcio and Mellino 2010). Triandafyllidou (1999) locates them historically in the transition from a country of emigration to a country of immigration. However, we can argue that the current 'crisis' discourse transformed refugees and asylum seekers in the scapegoat of a wider institutional, political and socio–economic crisis (Castelli Gattinara 2017). On this specific point, it worth noting a lack of empirical studies trying to investigate how these social and racial hierarchies frame refugee lives in the locale. The few exceptions are qualitative analysis of interaction between refugee people in asylum centres and local communities in Italy (Casati 2018, Pasquetti 2016). Despite refugees and asylum seekers often being allocated in these centres based on their gender, in these studies, masculinity theory is never used as the main framework to understand the making of power relations between refugees and native population or within refugees and the social cooperative in charge of the centres. Nor it is used to investigate, at the micro level, how notions of 'deservingness' and day–to–day interactions are negotiated by refugee and asylum seeking men in relation to the gender positions and racialization processes activated by the 'refugee crisis' discourse (De Genova 2018).

The 'Central Mediterranean Route': knowledge gaps and research possibilities

The CMR connecting Sub–Saharan Africa to the EU via Libya has become the major gateway to Europe for both West and Sub–Saharan Africans, and for people from the Middle East (Wittenberg 2017). The vast majority of people using this route are men, and particularly, young adult men (UNHCR 2017). In 2015 and 2016, more than 70% of arrivals in Italy involve adult men while the share of women remained stable below 15 per cent (UNODC 2018 [26]). This number increases further if we add up the data on unaccompanied minors who 'are nearly all teenage boys' (UNODC 2018,

[26] UNODC's analysis (2018) is based on UNHCR data.

148). For some West African countries, with the exception of Nigeria where women are around 20%, men constitute almost the totality of asylum beneficiaries in Italy (SPRAR 2017, 37). This data, however, should not lead, as argued by Jane Freedman (2008) to the conclusion that women are less persecuted than men. On the contrary, it exemplifies the urgent necessity of engendering men's mobility experience across the CMR.

As argued above, much of the literature on refugee flows in the context of Mediterranean routes treats both men and the contexts they navigate as genderless (McMahon and Sigona 2018, Wittenberg 2017, Crawley et al. 2016, Cummings et al. 2015, Altai Consulting 2013, Crawley and Skleparis 2018); with gender only applied to the experience of refugee and asylum seeking women. In this context, a significant body of work has illustrated the gender–specific vulnerabilities of women to abuse, violence and exploitation (Gerard and Pickering 2013, Gerard 2014, Freedman 2016a, Freedman 2012b, Grotti et al. 2019, Barbara et al. 2017, Amnesty 2016a). The same approach, however, is rarely extended to men migrating along the Mediterranean routes.

First of all, this literature review registered a significant gap in the knowledge regarding the gendered processes prompting refugee and migrant men along the Mediterranean routes. Here, most of the analysis on migration drivers fails to integrate gender–sensitive analysis of refugee and migrant decision. Nor it is interested in exploring the gendered vulnerabilities that might affect them in their pre–migration phase (Boyd and Grieco 2003).

The same critique can be extended to the transit phase. Patterns of mobility across the CMR involve entering the European Union as illegal migrants. The undocumented nature of migration patterns results in a great deal of danger associated with the journey and dangerous smuggling practices (Black et al. 2017). People–on–the–move across this route, in order to arrive in Italy, need to cross in order: the largest desert on Earth (the 'Sahara desert'), a country characterized by ongoing conflicts and lack of state authority (Libya) and a portion of sea (the 'Strait of Sicily') using often poorly–equipped boats. The gendered implications of illegal migration to EU, in the case of men and boys, are largely under researched. On the contrary, drawing on a survey with more than 16,000 migrants in seven countries, Galos et al. found that migrants travelling alone across the CMR are more 'vulnerable' to exploitive practices than those across the EMD. Here, being a man and having a low level of education are seen as predictors of vulnerability to human trafficking and exploitation. It is important to notice that the survey focused on exploitative

practices such as forced labour, not sexual violence or sexual exploitation. Moreover, on the CMR, age is another important predictor, with migrants aged 21–23 years and 24–26 years being marginally more likely to respond positively to the human trafficking and exploitation indicators than children, and than adults in other age brackets (Galos et al 2017). Given these indications of masculine vulnerabilities, there is a need to establish the meaning of such experiences for those who live through them.

Movement of undocumented migrants/asylum seekers across the Sahara is facilitated by an extended network of smugglers/traffickers. According to the UNODC, along the CMR smuggling networks are part of a highly 'male dominated business' (UNODC 2018, 11) with men occupying the vast majority of role and positions in this industry. As a general point, Cummings et al. (2015) asserts that we have a general gap in evidence on the role of networks, in particular, the smuggling and trafficking network, and information flows in this arena. Speaking directly to the likely gendered empirical realities of men on the move across the CMR can therefore offer potential insights.

With particular regard to CMR migration, Wittenberg (2017) encompasses among push factors also conditions of country of first asylum/transit. Libya clearly represents a good example as asylum seekers face a lack of legal protection; Libya is not a signatory of the UN 1951 Convention and has a highly repressive migration policy; entering illegally the country, migrants are detained without due process or live in very precarious conditions (Amnesty 2017); they are often held captive by militia in internment camps controlled by armed groups and they are forced to work without pay for an undetermined period (Unicef 2017), in some cases, until a ransom is paid by their family. Moreover, deteriorating political situation in Libya appears to have incremented increased xenophobia against foreign nationals; they are often victims of physical assaults, robbery and work exploitation (Amnesty 2015, 2017). In this regard, we have robust evidence on how women experience violence, including sexual violence, from various sources during their journeys to the EU, whether from smugglers or traffickers, fellow refugees in camps such as Calais or by police and coastguards in transit countries such as Turkey (Freedman 2016b) or Libya (Gerard and Pickering 2013). Such a gender perspective is rarely extended to violence directed to male refugees and asylum seekers when smuggled and detained in Libya (Amnesty 2017, Unicef, 2017). Thus, this thesis aims at advancing our understanding of the relationship between gender, violence, and illegal migration in Libya. This is a

geographical site in which there is still much to be learned about the experiential realities of men moving along this route

As argued in Chapter 1, the analysis of refugee masculinities seems to focus more on camps located in the Global South (Turner 1999, Lukunka 2012, Jaji 2009). Less interest has been given to the European asylum system; and to those transit countries, like Italy and Greece, that have been affected by higher volumes of refugee arrivals. This thesis has thus the potential to integrate the relevant theoretical literature on the racial and cultural hierarchies activated by the 'refugee crisis' discourse with empirical evidence. Given the place of other masculinity in these racialization processes, there is a need to explore the effects of these on refugee and asylum seeking men in Europe, understanding whether these produce further vulnerabilities for men in refugee centres.

Lastly, given the place of Italy as a transit space in their journey to mainland Europe, here we are able to uncover the complex decision making associated with mobility and resettlement in Europe, illuminating the implications that this has for men's identities across their life trajectories. This literature review suggests that there is much to be gained from integrating elements of feminist and gender scholarship to enable a focus on the entire refugee experience as gendered process (Lutz 2010). Such holistic approach offers a possibility to reflect on changes that migration experience along the CMR has produced in participants' gendered lives and how men negotiate alignment to hegemonic masculinity in the context of fractured mobility. Moreover, extending a gendered analysis to the whole forced experience might provide insights in how different gender positions are dynamically formulated along the process of displacement and dislocation; instead of seeing these as reflective of a particular phase or stage. Here, gendered vulnerabilities, instead of being equated with personal characteristics or identity traits, can be investigated dynamically on a continuum from the pre–migration phase to their arrival in Europe.

In light of the research puzzle presented in this section, this thesis will aim at combining these multiple research aims into a broad and exploratory research question:

Research Question:

How do men perform 'masculinity' in the context of the entirety of their refugee journey?

Conclusions

This chapter has attempted to engage with the discursive construction of masculinity in the context of the European 'refugee crisis'. By engaging with the role of masculinity in the discourse of the 'crisis', we were able to uncover the cultural and racial hierarchies which frame European public discourse on refugee and asylum seeking men.

Mainly conceptualised as a burden for European societies, these men are immediately casted as 'bogus asylum seekers' in opposition to the feminised 'genuine refugee'. The large complex of military and humanitarian operations in the Mediterranean captures this discursive frame; here, the 'genuine refugee' is represented in need of saving while the 'bogus asylum seeker' is arrested.

This dichotomy activated by the contemporary refugee discourse seems to combine securitarian and humanitarian narratives on who is worthy of asylum protection. At the interplay of this, those not conforming to dominant notions of innocence and victimhood, like single men coming along the Mediterranean routes, are immediately associated with the 'bogus asylum seeker' figure and their 'deservingness' to asylum protection is inescapably questioned.

These gendered and racialised narratives inhabit the construction of the Mediterranean as border zone characterised by a perpetual state of emergency. This is particularly visible in Italy, where the 'refugee crisis' discourse has triggered complex racialization processes and othering strategies as result of right wing propaganda, inefficiencies in asylum governance and long–lasting socio–economic problems.

In the final section of the chapter, I outlined specific gaps in the knowledge reviewed in the two literature review chapters. By doing this, I illustrated the research puzzle that this thesis aims to fill in relation to the CMR and the main research question of the study. Overall, the aim of the study is to investigate dynamically the relation between masculinity and vulnerability throughout the entirety of the refugee journey.

CHAPTER THREE. Methodology

From the previous literature review, we have recognised that men coming to Europe from the Global South are immediately cast, by the European border regime, as a 'problem' due to their masculinity and race; at the same time, the study of their migration experiences across the CMR is rarely framed through a gender lens, which limits our understanding of male refugees' and asylum seekers' lives in Europe. Extending a gender perspective to the study of this group of migrants, as has been done in the case of women refugees and asylum seekers, represents an important corrective. By following participants' accounts of their trajectories to Europe, we are able to link masculinity to the complex decision making associated with different migration stages (Jaji 2009), exploring the renegotiation of social life, identity and relations associated with transnational movements (Osella and Osella 2010). The peculiar location of Italy, as a bridge between the European Union and the 'Global South' and a transit country for participants' mobility to mainland Europe, allows us to apply such a transnational focus; thus, we are able to explore the ways participants view their lives and themselves as a result of their migration experience across the CMR. The characterization of Sicily as the first entry point in Europe means that participants are able to reflect and remember what has recently happened to them in the context of their journey. This spatial and temporal proximity is one of the rationales for why Sicily was chosen as a research site.

In–depth interviewing was regarded as the best–suited research method to answer the research question. Drawing on the work of Maalki (1995), Eastmond (2007) argues that micro–level approaches provide an opportunity to analyse the refugee experience as entangled and located within specific historical and political conditions of displacement; rejecting universalist depictions even within the same refugee population. In other words, the selected method provides participants with an opportunity to define what happened to them in their own terms. Additionally, aligning with integrative approaches to the study of international migration, in–depth interviews is a suitable method to illuminate micro, macro and meso levels of analysis and how these mediate subjective experience. In doing this, we are able to locate participants as gendered actors responding to opportunities/constraints and competing demands associated with the socio–cultural–economic landscape (Boyd and Grieco 2003).

Following individual trajectories enables us to explore the situated circumstances of participants' experience, associated with different migration stages, not as isolated events but on a continuum. As a result of this, the performance of masculinity can be analysed as part of an emerging project unfolding through time and space (Connell 2005) and consolidated in biography (Brickell 2003).

Such attention to identity work was hardly compatible with positivist and quantitative approaches. However, I had considered other qualitative methods; in particular, a more ethnographic approach, which would have focused the research enquiry more on the final stage ('life in Sicily') while my interest is to investigate changes/continuities of masculinity across the entire refugee experience. For this reason, a qualitative interview seems to be the best method to grasp a contextual understanding of their entire migration experience across the CMR.

Having said that, due to both my ethnographic training and the significant fact that I undertook the fieldwork in Sicily, my homeland, the way I approached these eight months was with an ethnographic gaze. I collected observational material in my field notes throughout the research process. Having lived in Sicily until I turned 18 years old, I was able to reflect on the changes and differences that the 'refugee crisis' has produced in the locale, in particular with regards to the proliferation of asylum centres, associated with an emergency outlook of the 'refugee crisis'. These spaces of confinement impacted largely on the Sicilian social landscape, creating a new frame of interaction between white and black communities.

These reflections often come up in my field notes as a way to question my own positionality in the field and therefore sustain my analysis of interview data. Overall, the observational material I gathered across these sites became not only an important source of reflection on my work and the way I approach my data (reported in the final section of this chapter when engaging with reflexivity and the interpretative process) but also helped to orientate, ethnographically, my research enquiry during interviews. In this sense, interviews conducted during fieldwork must be taken as relationally constructed with my permanence in reception facilities, the voluntary work I undertook, and my time spent in the host communities. This can be seen in how some interviews pick up themes or events that happened outside the formal interview situation.

However, I argue that this study is not entirely ethnographic. In order to answer research questions ethnographically, I would have need to have extended the fieldwork in Africa, possibly in Libya or in Niger, where the CMR begins and develops. However, this was not considered feasible due to time resources and safety concerns associated with the Libyan situation in 2016.

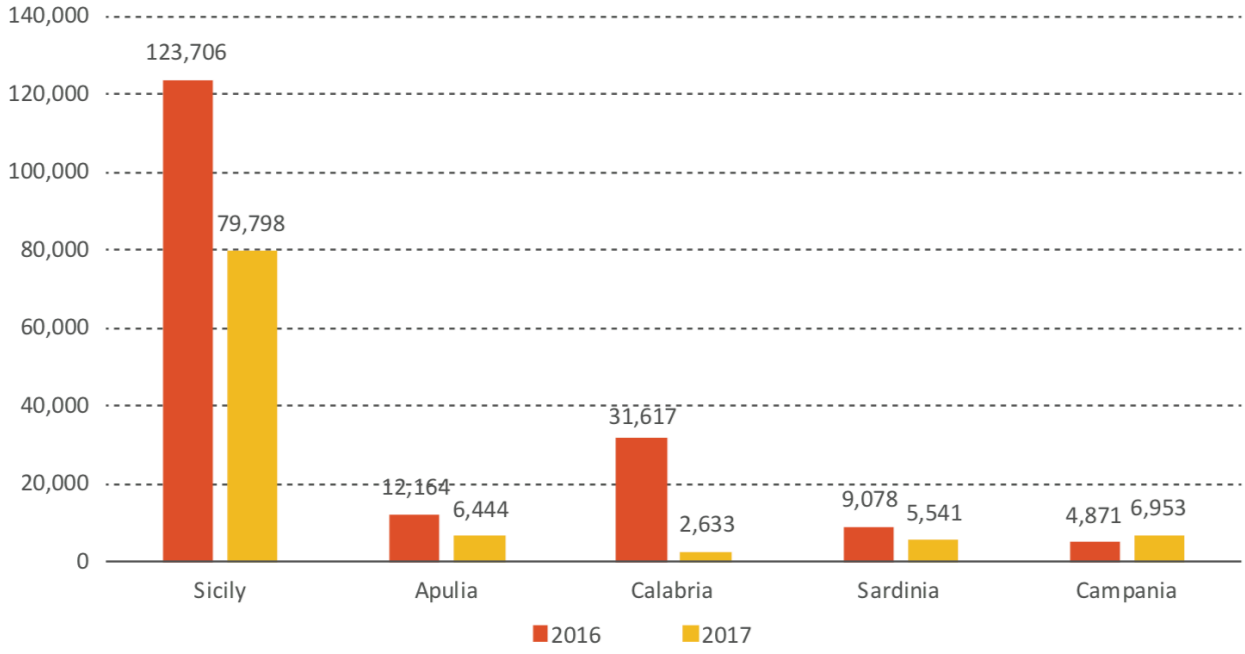
In the next sections, I will engage with the research context, introducing the social and ethno–racial landscape of Sicily and the Italian asylum system. Here, I will locate participants' gender performances and my researcher gaze. Then I will clarify how my approach to in–depth interviews aligns with the life history method as a qualitative approach best suited to study divergence, continuities and transformative events associated with transnational movements. Lastly, I will engage with issues to do with access and sampling, and the interpretative process, locating reflexively my positionality in the field as a way to reflect on the dialogical and intersubjective construction of meaning between interviewee and interviewer.

Research Context

The fieldwork was conducted in seven Sicilian towns during a fieldwork period of eight months from September 2016 to May 2017. Among the research sites only one town had a population above 36,000, while the smallest was below 2,000 people. The fieldwork coincided with what is usually referred to as the highest peak of refugee and migrant arrivals ever recorded in the country. In 2016, indeed, more than 181,000 people arrived in Italy via sea (Frontex 2019). This locates my research in the middle of the so–called 'refugee crisis'.

Due to its geographic proximity to the African coast, most of these sea arrivals landed in Sicily (UNODC 2018).

FIGURE 2. SEA ARRIVALS IN ITALY, BY POINT OF ARRIVAL, 2016–2017



Source: UNODC (2018)

Since the mid–2000s, Sicily and its islands of Lampedusa and Linosa have become the main transit point for migrant flow from Libya (Fargues and Bonfanti 2014). This role was amplified after the collapse of Gaddafi's regime in Libya and the undertaking of the EU–Turkey agreement. Particularly, this agreement reduced the volume of migration flows across the EMR (OECD 2018).According to McMahon and Sigona's analysis of the Italian Ministry of the Interior's data, from 2014 to the end of 2016, 450,000 people crossed the Mediterranean sea to Italy (2018, 501).

This makes Sicily one of the key outposts of the EU border regime, often called Fortress Europe. Following the EU integration process in the 2000s, the Mediterranean Sea, as Giglioli writes, emerges essentially as 'the key dividing line between the Europe and the 'rest" placing 'Sicily firmly on its northern side' (Giglioli 2017, 421). This characterization of the research site as the first entry point to Europe enables us to capture processes of fractured mobility across the CMR, from the point of exit to the point of arrival in the EU (Gerard and Pickering 2013); hence, participants who are just arrived from Libya are able to reflect on their experiences of mobility and displacement not as distant memory but on a continuum with their current social location.

Another reason to choose Sicily is that most of the broader research on refugee and gender focuses on refugee camps and countries of destination rather than on the entirety of the migratory journey itself (Gerard and Pickering 2013). Being a borderland between Europe and the Global South, and one of the most economically disadvantaged areas in the European Union, for many participants, Sicily represents a 'transit space' on their way to mainland Europe (including Northern and Central Italy); meaning that for them, their journey is not yet concluded once landed on the Mediterranean island (D'Angelo 2019). From a masculine perspective we are able to focus on the process of adaptation at the initial stages of migration in Europe, where migrant subjects attempt to renegotiate their position in a new gender regime (Datta et al. 2009). This allows us to capture how refugee and asylum seeking men renegotiate ideas about masculinity in the context of the refugee experience and how these ideas inform gender relations and practices in their everyday.

The transit dimension of Sicily is mainly caused by its dire economic outlook, characterised by high rates of unemployment – the second highest in Italy – and low level of GDP PPS (Eurostat 2019). The location of Sicilian towns I accessed was mainly in the rural part of the region, not in coastal areas. This means that most of the local economy was primarily connected to the agricultural sector. Refugees and migrants heavily rely on agricultural and farming jobs, which in rural Southern Italy have been characterised historically by an intensive use of casual and seasonal labour (Corrado et al. 2018). Migrants often work in situations of irregularity, poor working conditions and quality of life (Mori 2016). Labour exploitation is often linked to the ancient phenomenon of 'caporalato', an illegal recruitment of low–cost manpower in the agricultural sector undertaken by the 'caporale', an intermediary who is

often associated with criminal groups or activities, in charge of negotiations of tasks, working hours and pay for casual workers (Meo and Omizzolo 2019, Mori 2016). According to trade unions, this has led to low salaries and slavery–like conditions of work; with the daily average salary of 20/30 Euros, 50% of the expected wage in national contracts, migrant workers are often pushed into further marginalization and poor housing conditions, including living in tent cities (Osservatorio Placido Rizzotto 2016).

Sicilian ethno–racial landscape and migration history

Due to its geographical position as the largest island in the Mediterranean Sea, Sicily has played a pivotal role in human migration processes (Sarno et al. 2017). At least since the Bronze Age, Sicily has been a transit and a destination country for human migration flows in the region, particularly associated with military conquests, trade routes and economic cooperation (Di Matteo 2007). Ancient Greeks, Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Romans, Byzantines, Ostrogoths, Arabs and Berbers, Normans, Germans, Spanish, and Piedmonteses, have all settled and, more or less, thrived in Sicily. As a consequence, Sicilian identity[27] is very much an interesting kaleidoscope of different cultural influences and traditions, above all Arab and Spanish. Due to these strong ties with North Africa and the Middle East and the historical disadvantage of Southern Italy, poor and less developed, in relation to the industrialised North, I agree with anthropologist Iain Chambers (2008) when arguing that Sicily should be interpreted and should interpret itself as being part of the larger post–colonial network of the Mediterranean Sea (Ponzanesi and Polizzi 2016)[28].

Throughout the last century, Sicilians have migrated to rich urban centres of Northern Italy or abroad in search of job opportunities; many, like myself, are still doing it now. As a result of this massive history of emigration, the southern migrant become the object of a racialization process in the receiving communities, including Northern Italy. Sicilians were often represented as depraved, illiterate and brutal people, with a natural propensity to criminality, and unworthy to claim the political privileges of whiteness (Webb 2002). These racist tropes against dark–skinned Sicilians were expressed in

[27] Here, it is important to acknowledge that I was born and raised in Sicily.

[28] Interestingly Giglioli (2017) points out how the relationship with Tunisia and Tunisians has been essential, after the Italian unification, in making Sicilians fully Italian and European; Sicilian intellectual and political elites viewed the Southern Mediterranean as a way to boost Sicily's political and economic centrality in relation to the richer Northern Italy (Giglioli 2017).

Lombroso's theory of born criminals (Sian 2017). In Italian language, the racist slur 'terrone' is still used to indicate Southern Italians' 'backwardness' and subalternity. Here, we can notice some similarities with the derogatory term 'extracomunitario' currently used against non–EU migrants (Russo Bullaro 2010). Obviously, we should not imply a linear continuity (Curcio and Mellino 2010) between the racialization of Sicilian and African refugees/migrants; but this history is important to understand the place of Sicily as a borderland between Europe and the Global South.

Although Sicily has this long history of emigration, international migration in Italy became a significant phenomenon only in the 1990s when the collapse of the former Yugoslavia and Albania put Italy under the pressure of illegal flows of 'boat people' from the Balkans (Del Boca and Venturini 2003). From a transitory phenomenon, migration was redefined as an emergency that needed new regulations (Colombo 2013); since then the country, however, has struggled to find a credible model of migration management, with a clear lack of policy aimed at facilitating legal pathways for regular immigration (Zincone 2006). Sea arrivals of boat people from African shores increased throughout the 1990s and 2000s, mirroring the intensification of EU external borders required by the implementation of the Schengen agreement (Giglioli 2017, 419).

Following the turbulent changes in the Southern bank of the Mediterranean Sea, and in particular, after the collapse of Gaddafi's regime, Italy experienced a significant intake of 'boat people' coming from Libyan shores. According to McMahon and Sigona (2018), in the period between 2005–2010, the average number of migrants arriving in Italy via boat was 23,000 people while in 2014–2016 this number increased to 170,000.

In line with what happened in other European countries, this has coincided with the emergence of anti–migrant discourse and the rise of far–right movements. These movements, as argued by Monica Colombo, frame migration as a threat to ethno–national identity, a major cause of criminality, social insecurity, unemployment, and abuse of the welfare state (Colombo 2013).

A report published by the Jo Cox Commission on hate crimes of the Italian Parliament[29] shows how the great majority of Italians think of refugees as a burden because 'they exploit the social benefits and the work of Italian native

[29] Commissione sull'intolleranza, la xenofobia, il razzismo e i fenomeni di odio

inhabitants' (Camera dei Deputati 2017). In Sicily, a region overwhelmed by unemployment, where more than half the population is at risk of poverty or social exclusion (Eures 2018), such narratives are extremely powerful.

As a result of these processes of criminalization towards refugees and migrants, organizations like the UN have denounced 'a climate of hatred' against migrants and refugees (Repubblica 2018). According to the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), in 2017 there have been 1048 cases of hate crimes recorded by the police compared to 555 in 2015 and 472 in 2013 (ODIHR 2018). Among these, 828 out of 1048 were motivated on the grounds of racism and xenophobia. (ODIHR 2018). ODIHR observes that to date Italy has not reported to them the numbers of people prosecuted and information on sentenced hate crime cases (ODIHR 2018). ODIHR data for 2018 are not available; however, according to Lunaria (2018) from January to September 2018, 488 cases were registered. Most notably, in June 2018, Soumaila Sacko, a Malian farm worker and trade unionist, was shot to death in Calabria. With regards to Sicily, Lunaria (2018) reports a mob attack on a group of six African male minors in Partinico, a 25–year–old Nigerian man beaten with a blunt object in Bagheria and a 16–year–old foreign minor physically assaulted in Raffadali. In the vast majority of these cases, the victims are beneficiaries of the Italian asylum reception system, living in refugee centres. This might suggest a link between racist violence and anti–refugee narratives (Marino 2018).

The asylum system in Italy

The right to asylum is recognised by article 10 of the Italian Constitution: '*A foreigner who, in his home country, is denied the actual exercise of the democratic freedoms guaranteed by the Italian constitution shall be entitled to the right of asylum under the conditions established by law'*. The recognition of refugee status has entered Italian system with the accession to the Geneva Convention of 28 July 1951 ratified by the law No. 722 of 1954. Overall, EU law mainly regulates the subject; most importantly, the Dublin Regulation establishes when an asylum seeker irregularly crosses the border into one of EU member states, that member state will be responsible for examining the asylum application (Camera dei Deputati 2018). Italian refugee law included three different forms of international protection that might be granted: refugee status, subsidiary protection, and permit on humanitarian grounds (Bove 2017). International protection permits – refugee status and subsidiary protection – are both granted for 5 years. Humanitarian protection permits are granted for 2 years (Bove 2017). More recently, decree–law No. 113 of 2018 has significantly

reformed the whole subject in restrictive terms; suppressing permit on humanitarian grounds as a form of protection, extending the duration of detention in return centres, extending the list of offences resulting in exclusion or revocation of international protection and introducing the exclusion of asylum seekers from SPRAR system of reception aimed at inclusion (Camera dei Deputati 2018, Bove 2018).

In Italy, the refugee determination process entails a first instance procedure, in which the Territorial Commission for the Recognition of International Protection[30] (Commissioni territoriali per il riconoscimento della protezione internazionale) interviews the applicant (Bove 2017), and there is a subsequent judiciary appeal, if a negative decision is issued by the Commission (Bove 2017). The decree–law No. 13 of 2017 has introduced major changes including a reduction in the number of appeals allowed in case of rejection of the asylum application, from three to two levels of judgment (Strati 2017).

[30] Located throughout the national territory, Territorial Commissions are the only entities competent for the substantive asylum interview (Bove 2017). Each Territorial Commission is composed of 4 members: a) 2 representatives of the Ministry of Interior, one of which is a senior police officer; b) 1 representative of the Municipality (or Province or Region); c) 1 representative of UNHCR (Bove 2017).

TABLE 1 APPLICATIONS AND GRANTING OF PROTECTION STATUS AT FIRST INSTANCE: 2017

Applicants in 2017		Pending at 2017	Refugee Status	Subsidiary protection	Humanitarian protection	Rejection	Refugee rate	Sub. Prot. Rate	Hum. Prot. Rate
130,119		145,906	6,827	6,880	20,166	42,700	8,4%	8,5%	24,9%

Source: Italian Ministry of the Interior's data elaborated by ASGI (Bove 2018)

As a result of gender patterns of the Central Mediterranean Route, men constitute the vast majority of asylum applicants in Italy. In 2017, asylum women submitted only 16% of asylum applications.

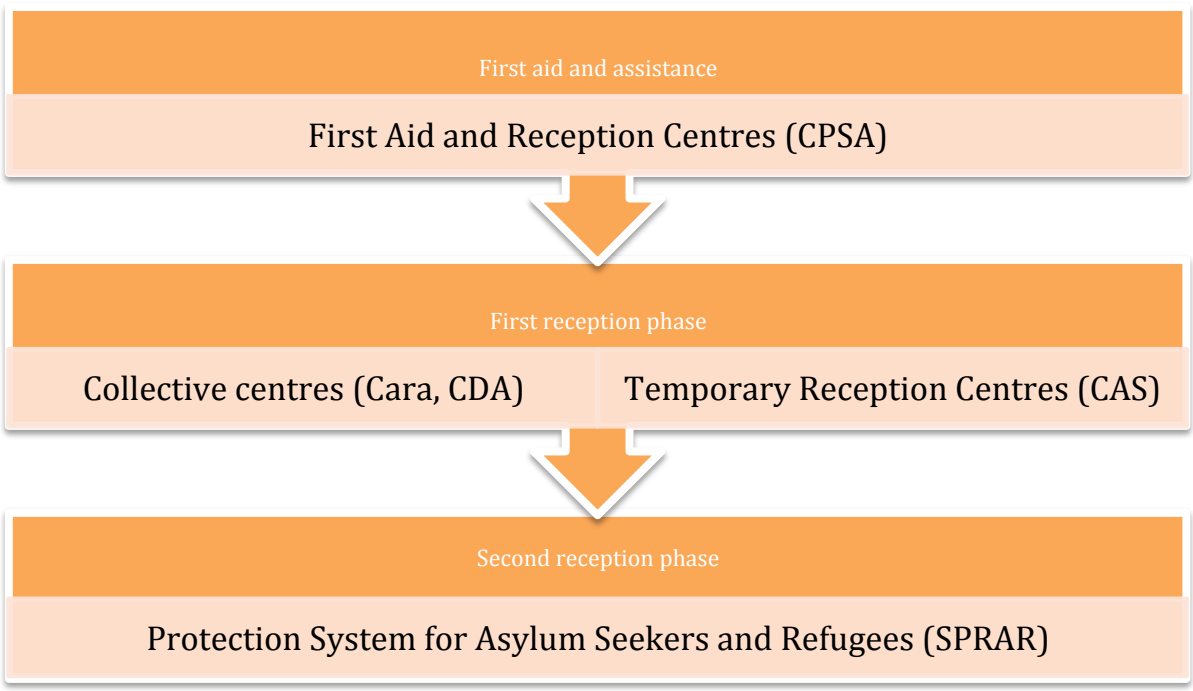
TABLE 2 ASYLUM APPLICATIONS IN ITALY 2016–2017

	2016	2017
Men	105.006	109.066
Women	18.594	21.053

Source: Italian Ministry of the Interior

Until recent reforms promoted by the Interior Minister Matteo Salvini (decree–law No. 113 of 2018), the refugee reception system was organized around two main levels of reception.

FIGURE 3 SHORT OVERVIEW OF THE ITALIAN ASYLUM RECEPTION SYSTEM



Source: Bove (2017, 2018)

It is worth noting the difference between the two levels of reception is significant in terms of governance. CDA or CARA are governed by the Ministry of the Interior while SPRAR are in partnership with local authorities (Mori 2016). Another important characteristic is that CARA/CDA and CAS structures usually are larger reception centres where high numbers of migrants and asylum applicants are accommodated (Bove 2018); the SPRAR is usually formed of smaller structures, such as reception centres, flats, and community homes (Bove 2018). They thus distance themselves from the logic of large camps and they are immersed in the urban landscape of the community. SPRAR structures provide a wide range of services aimed at the integration of its beneficiaries. These include housing, food, educational and language training, cultural mediation and legal assistance (SPRAR 2017). SPRAR local centres are funded by local authorities and managed by non– governmental organisations and social cooperatives (D'Angelo 2019). Till the approval of the decree–law No. 113 of 2018, SPRAR structures hosted both asylum seekers during the course of their refugee application and international protection holders at the beginning of their integration path (Bove 2017). With the new legislation, SPRAR system restricts its beneficiaries – and therefore its service aimed at holistic inclusion – to international protection holders and unaccompanied minors (Camera dei Deputati 2019).

During the fieldwork I visited 12 different facilities, most of them part of the SPRAR system. The centres were usually small structures located in the peripheral areas of the town or village; with the smallest being a flat for only two people. Only one centre resembled a more complex organization being a small compound of a few buildings. Generally, the centre had communal spaces with a kitchen, and a few bedrooms to share among two or three beneficiaries.

Gathering refugee stories within the asylum system

With particular reference to power imbalances associated with field experience, further considerations should be given to the wider discursive field of the asylum system in which interviews were produced.

At this juncture, a reflection on the significant similarities between my interview and the oral testimony in front of the Commission, both in terms of format and topic of inquiry, is required. First of all, my primary aim was to not replicate the same bureaucratic scrutiny and degree of stress associated with an asylum hearing. In this sense, the choice of qualitative interview method required as careful thinking on how to distance the research encounter from the asylum interview. This includes taking into account what Blommaert (2001) calls narrative inequality. This affects asylum seekers with limited communication resources who are required to meet the discursive practice of asylum system, not only linguistically but also narratively and stylistically (Blommaert 2001, 414).

At the same time, one should keep in mind that the asylum interview not only constitutes the base through which any asylum claim is evaluated at once; but it becomes also a yardstick against which subsequent versions will be measured (Kirmayer 2003). This puts a degree of pressure on asylum seekers' and refugees' storytelling, with the original testimony always to be confronted together with the wider discursive expectation of the asylum system. This clarifies the complex politics of storytelling (Hammack and Cohler 2011, Jackson 2013) in which my interviews are necessarily located. In particular, the asylum–hearing interview becomes the main base to determine whether or not the applicant is a 'genuine refugee'– with the price of failure being very high (Eastmond 2007, Andersson 2014).

Negotiating access in refugee communities

Once I entered the fieldwork I encountered a complex pattern of racial relations associated with the Sicilian landscape. First of all, migrant and native communities appear to be highly separated in terms of socialization spaces. Secondly, the emergency response to the 'refugee crisis' produced a high level of scrutiny and bureaucratic control that surround refugee reception facilities. For these reasons, this study required multiple strategies in order to negotiate access in the refugee communities. In this phase, it was fundamental to rely on refugee aid organizations.

The choice of second–level refugee centre was mostly associated with issues to do with access. After I was authorised by the SPRAR central office in Rome, I had to negotiate access with the local authorities and the organization in charge of the project; being Sicilian myself, I used my personal connections and language resources to access these gatekeeping actors. Five different organizations authorised my access in their facilities. In Town n° 4, n° 6 and n° 7, I was granted this type of access to their facilities from a minimum of three weeks to a maximum of eight weeks. Where I was not granted this type of access – specifically town n° 1, n° 2, n° 3 and n° 5 – I would access the structure on the dates agreed with the organization.

In order to access refugee communities outside the SPRAR system, I undertook some voluntary work teaching Italian to migrant people (not only refugee) and joining a youth group, organised by a faith–based NGO with the purpose of promoting intercultural dialogue between migrant communities and the native population through social activities and discussion. Both the group meetings and Italian language course had a weekly engagement and were undertaken throughout the fieldwork. Compared to the SPRAR system that deals with asylum seekers and refugees beginning the process of integration, this allowed me to meet refugees that are more permanently settled, who are more likely to have families and reside in autonomous accommodation outside the reception system. Usually, they live in the poorest areas of the town. Much like the SPRAR beneficiaries, they constitute a cheap workforce at risk of being exploited in agriculture, hospitality or construction sites, often in illegal jobs (Caritas Italiana 2015, MSF 2016).

TABLE 3 RECRUITMENT OF PARTICIPANTS

Town	Through Asylum Reception System	People outside the Asylum Reception System[31]
n. 1	3.0	
n. 2	4.0	
n. 3	3.0	
n. 4	3.0	
n. 5	2.0	
n. 6	6.0	
n. 7	5.0	
Total	26	10

Even though I will not include observational data from the voluntary work I undertook, mainly for ethical considerations of my role as teacher, this was very significant for my research experience; in particular, the youth group provided me interesting insights into the lives of my study population. First of all, I observed how the integration path for refugees is abruptly interrupted once they are out of SPRAR systems (SPRAR 2017), with the faith-based being one of the few providers of services aimed at inclusion and support of the refugee population.

In the youth group, I was the only Sicilian person, including those who organized the meeting. This created an interesting dynamic, as I would often be perceived as the representative of the 'white' Sicilian community, which was absent in that venue. Other participants included different migrant communities, including African refugees and asylum seekers. During meeting discussions, participants would address me with their concerns about their interaction with the native communities, including experiences of discrimination. I registered a great degree of interest in establishing cordial relationships, even friendship, with the Sicilian population. The organizer of the group was very talented and used group discussion and activities to promote dialogue between group members, acknowledging both difference and commonalities across cultures and faiths. The group, although run by a faith-based organization, was not composed only by

[31] For confidentiality reasons I prefer to not say the location of these participants.

members who shared the same religion. What I found interesting was the fact that being the only Sicilian (including the group organizer), I could observe interactions between African members and other migrant groups – mostly European, Arab and South American.

The choice of the life history approach

This research is based on 36 qualitative interviews collected in Sicily. Formal follow–ups occurred with seven interviewees. Informal follow–ups recurred with many participants during time spent in reception centres or other facilities. While formal follow–ups were transcribed as interviews, informal follow–ups were included in my field notes.

Before starting my fieldwork in September 2017, I was oriented toward semi–structured interviews as a qualitative research method. During the pilot, I met an African asylum seeker who in the end did not agree to participate at the study. He explained the reason for his choice, saying something that stayed with me throughout the course of the fieldwork: 'For you it's easy, for us it's not'. The young man referred to the complexity for refugees and asylum seekers to narrate their story and the implications that this might have on a personal level, including repercussion on their asylum application. I realised imposing a rigid set of topics to the interview schedule would not help in making the interview process 'easier' for participants. Reflecting on this interaction and the work of Seckinelgin et al. (2010) on gender and conflict in Burundi, I opted to undertake life history interviews, as the flexibility and openness associated with the life history method were regarded as more effective in order to empower participants' storytelling. In particular, I view the dialogical nature of life history as the main reason why the life history approach worked better with my participants compared to the semi–structured interview. Working with the life history method, indeed, the interviewer is never completely in control of the story being told (Atkinson, 1998). The absence of a rigid set of questions provides the interviewee a platform to express his or her concerns and priorities; in this way, I distanced myself from the bureaucratic scrutiny associated with asylum hearings and I developed a more familiar and informal approach to gather participants' stories. This was acknowledged by participants: Hakeem, for example, asserted the interview constituted a way to finally bear witness to some events/themes/experiences that he was not able to reveal during his encounter with the Commission. Leaving the interview situation I had the impression that this was taken as an opportunity to symbolically overcome those feelings of frustration and failure associated with his original testimony

Atkinson defines the life history as 'the story a person chooses to tell about the life he has lived, told as completely and honestly as possible, what is remembered of it, and what the teller wants others to know of it, usually as a result of a guided interview by

another' (Atkinson 1998, 8). Storytelling is part of our daily life (Riessman 2008); we use stories to communicate and interact with each other across different settings and circumstances. Recounting the stories of our lives, we engage reflexively in the construction of identity, defining who we are in relation to others and interpreting our location in the wider socio–cultural landscape.

The contribution of the life history method in both masculinity (Connell 2005) and forced migration research (Eastmond 2007) is well documented. Connell (2005) deems life histories to be a fruitful method in the analysis of masculinities as configurations of practice that are constructed, unfold, and change through time and space. The dimension of time and space is particularly significant in the case of refugee people as the flight implies dealing with turbulent changes and radical alteration of life circumstances (Eastmond 2007). The journey to Europe, here, is regarded as the entry point to participants' personal narrative; in most of the cases, due to their young age, the refugee experience represents the most important event in their life trajectory; as a consequence, the whole life history necessarily develops and unfolds around this experience. The experiences of mobility, thus, might be seen as a site for process of 'self–searching, self–reflection, transition and transformation' (Christou 2011, 253).

A personal narrative represents an account of lived experience that is structured as part of a story (Hammack and Cohler 2009). The primary aim of narration is to provide a sense of coherence, order and meaning to fragmentary events (Kirmayer 2003). Through storytelling the teller is able to reflect and interpret his past experiences. This represents a significant chance to study social change and transition (Powles 2004, Adriansen 2012, Connell 2010) associated with migration and gender. In particular, we are able to explore how gender relations change in relation to different socio–cultural context and temporalities (Heyse 2013). Most importantly, in line with the research question, we can explore how these changes impact and shape processes of identity work.

From a masculinity perspective, the life history emerges as a project, a unification of practice through time (Connell 2005). Following Connell (2010), through this method, changes – that in other qualitative methods are identified as 'incoherencies'– might be seen as divergence and convergence of identity projects through time and space. Participants can look back at what happened at a certain moment of their life and express how they perceive the changes that occurred from their renewed positionality. That is why such approach is deemed to help refugee and migrant subject to recover a sense of agency (Powles 2004, Eastmond 2007).

In line with integrative approaches, through personal narratives, we are able to explore respondents' perceptions of their individual agency and their understandings of structural forces affecting their subjective experiences (Hubbard 2000). We are thus able

to link micro and macro/meso levels of analysis (Lewis 2008). This makes the history method particularly well–suited to follow Boyd and Grieco's (2003) multilevel framework to incorporate gender in migration theory. Boyd and Grieco (2003) aim at illuminating the complex processes that mediate between micro, meso and macro levels and the changing relations of power which produce, and are the product of, these both in sending and receiving countries. They operationalize this research aim in relation to three major stages: pre–migration, transit and post–migration. I extended these phases to participants' stories organizing their personal narrative across three different phases: life at home; the journey to the EU; and life in Sicily.

The choice of the life history method, however, is not without problems or limitations. Following Riessman (2008) and McAdams (2008), we need to be aware that personal stories are never produced in a vacuum; they always inhabit larger discursive formations associated with the culture where the individual narrative is being created (McAdams 2008). In other words, the individual personal narrative cannot be analytically removed from the narratives of social identity available in a particular cultural and historical context (Hamamck and Cohler 2009). Engaging with these cultural scripts (Somers 1994) or master–narratives (Hammack and Cohler 2009), we interpret our lives and construct identity (Hammack 2011). Hammack and Cohler (2009) describe this as a process of narrative engagement. In the case of participants, this process includes not only engaging with participants' culture of origin (how hegemonic masculinity is defined in their home communities) but also the international refugee regime from where they speak.

Then, we must be aware of the micro social functions that narrative serves for the teller (Kirmayer 2003). Stories aims to persuade, argue with or mobilize the listener (Riessman 2008). They are not a mere account of event, but rather demand imagination from the narrator: he or she will organize the facts in order to make claims to his or her advantage. In this sense, narratives do political work: they are strategic and functional to the teller's agenda (Riessman 2008, 8). That is, focusing on personal narrative we are able to explore how subaltern groups engage with the representations and moral imperatives imposed by the dominant groups (Fivush 2010).

I take a performative view of each refugee story I gathered as situated and accomplished dialogically (Langellier and Peterson 2004) with the interviewer but interrogating multiple audiences. I could clearly see this during the pilot when this Gambian man, Bai, arrived in the room where the interview was meant to be conducted, ready to tell his story. I remember that this greatly surprised me. As a novice interviewer I was not expecting this. Literature on forced migration warns about the difficulty of making an asylum seeker retell his or her story. However, this was not the case of Bai. He entered

the room and started telling his experiences as an asylum seeker, knowing exactly how the storytelling was meant to be constructed for an audience like me – an Italian researcher who works on refugees. I used prompt and probes to test his narration, and successfully managed to establish some sort of conversational partnership. However, I was also interested in following Bai's narrative flow and necessarily his agenda, as everyone has one, as a means to illuminate the discursive patterns that underpin, complicate and, in Foucauldian terms, discipline refugee storytelling. In other words, his personal narrative embodied his asylum claim so that his masculine performance was always produced in relation to this.

During the pilot, I had one government official directly warning me that refugees and asylum seekers 'all lie' when telling their stories. I thought this unrequested piece of advice was very interesting as it highlights the tensions that the storytelling of asylum enacts both ways: the teller and the listener. The issue of 'lying' is central to the refugee discourse as it helps to identify the 'bogus asylum seeker' figure and provide a justification to issue a negative decision on an asylum application. Thus, while participants had the necessity of citing 'refugeeness' as a discursive category, in order to prove the grounds of their claim. Credibility, trustworthiness, and consistency are not neutral criteria, but they are evaluated through a complex set of discursive practices and expectations which are not always easy to meet (Blommaert 2001). This always results in a careful consideration of what is the safest thing to say (Jackson 2013), and also how to frame it, although this process is never an easy one to navigate.

This awareness helps me to locate my research within these politics of repetition that is constitutive of the refugee story, and cannot be ignored. At the same time, it provides a basis to reflect on the possible ways for empowering muted, marginalized, and subaltern voices (Langellier 2010) such as asylum seekers refusing a view that sees them as endemically disempowered and helpless. Therefore, rather than establishing if what participants would tell me was true or false, or if my participants were 'genuine refugees', replicating the Asylum Commission job, I was interested in why the story was narrated in a certain way; what larger, broader social, political and cultural discourses where inhabited by the life history (Powles 2004).

A further limitation of the method, according to Connell (2010), concerns difficulties of corroboration. This leads us to the socio–historical dimension (de Gaulejac 1997) that these narratives inhabit. In life history research, we attempt to understand how the patterns of different life stories can be related to their wider historical, social, environmental, and political context (Adriansen 2012). Large–scale patterns or structures are contextualised in the life history as circumstances that participants' encounter and must find a way through (Connell 2010). People, however, are not always conscious of

structural effects mediating their personal experience (Hubbard 2000). In the case of participants, this relates to the socio–historical context of the 'refugee crisis' in the Mediterranean Sea. In Chapter 2, we explored how patterns of refugee and migrant movements in this area have created a distinctive discursive field. For this reason, participants' stories should not be understood in the singular, but as interconnected among each other. With participants sharing the same type of migration trajectories, I was able to compare experiences, events and turning points associated with their journey to EU. Thus, life histories of participants offer an opportunity to analyse the gendered characteristics of the CMR, gaining a contextual understanding of the role of masculinity in this arena. This, of course, requires a triangulation with evidence emerging from research work focusing on this specific area. In particular, from the scholarship that has incorporated a gender perspective in the study of women's experience along the Mediterranean routes (Gerard and Pickering 2013, Freedman 2016a, Freedman 2016b).

Lastly, we should be aware that limitations of conscious memory (Rubin et al. 1986) – especially in relation to traumatic events – might significantly impact or distort the capacity of reconstructing a personal narrative. For people forced to migrate, the past is often marked by profound physical, psychological and emotional trauma (Mackenzie at al. 2007). In the case of forced migrants, narration involves making meaning of such traumatic experiences (Powles 2004). Culture determines what types of experiences are considered reportable – and not reportable; what canonical narratives the individual life story might embrace and what kind of information might be disclosed to certain people but not others (Fivush 2006). As a consequence, personal narratives might emerge as fragmented, often loaded with symbolism (Leydesdorff et al. 2002, 1) and interrelated with the enactment of silence (Fivush 2006). This poses great challenges to the researcher, who needs to be familiar with the words, genre, and images invoked by participants' stories (Kirmayer 2003). It also clarifies the dialogical nature of personal narrative, always co–produced by the interaction between the interviewee and interviewer and sensitive to power dynamics, which are located in the field.

Facing the risk of re–traumatization

Life history is a particularly intrusive and potentially exploitative qualitative method. This means that narrating the refugee experience might result in negatively affecting interviewees' lives in a variety of forms (Powles 2004). Among these one of the main concerns was the risk of re–traumatisation.

As already mentioned, the life history method, with its flexibility, was regarded as more effective in the goal of minimising this risk. Participants have space for deciding the trajectory and the scope of their storytelling. They can avoid discussing specific topics or events that make them feel uncomfortable. I remember one particular case, Issa, who

did not wanted to disclose the reasons why he fled because they were very traumatic; so that the interview focused mostly on his journey and his life in Sicily, and we ended up talking about romantic relationships. As a general point, drawing on Rubin and Rubin's concept of conversational partnership, I thus approached the interview situation as a cooperative experience, a mutual process of discovery between the interviewer and the interviewee (Rubin and Rubin 2005). Interviews were therefore conducted with a very conversational manner (Åkerström et al. 2011) that privileged simple open–ended questions. I let participants decide where to start their storytelling across the three main stages associated with their migration experience: life at home, journey to the EU and life in Sicily. I also tried to provide an opportunity to talk about the experiences of greatest importance to them in relation to these different phases (Bek–Pedersen and Montgomery 2006).

At the same time, the researcher has the responsibility to understand the boundaries of the conversation (Powles 2004). Participants need to be informed of having the right to not answer any questions they wanted. At the end of the interview, they should be asked about their psychological comfort and given the chance to ask questions or clarify any points made previously.

Interviewees could realise in the course of the interview that some memories of their journey are particular painful to tell or hard to remember. This is something that a participant cannot know in advance (Mackenzie et al. 2007) and it cannot be established with informed consent. The researcher must be ready to abandon lines of investigations or stop the interview. In just one case, I decided to not interview someone who had accepted to be interviewed. My judgement was driven by a consideration of the participant referring to a headache produced each time he would recount his experience in Libya. In that case, I decided to interrupt the conversation, after the informed consent form was signed, and I expressed my reasons why to him, suggesting he seek professional help in the local refugee centre where I met him. I informed the social worker there about my concerns.

In this regard, realizing when interviewees may need referrals to services was of paramount importance. I planned in advance a strategy to deal with issues which come up in my interviews. Reception facilities usually have psychologists and other professionals dealing with the mental health of beneficiaries. If appropriate, I planned to advise my interviewee to contact them for proper counselling (it happened only once). For people outside the reception centre, I will refer them to local health community centres. From my observations in reception facilities, however, I saw a clear resistance in seeking this kind of professional help, even when available. The reason of this distrust might be connected to several causes, including dynamics associated with

the gender of the psychologist (usually a woman). Most of the time, the primary support came from peers and other professional figures in the facilities, such as social workers or educators, whom they trusted best. This affected the way I approached my participants. In each refugee centre, it was fundamental to understand trust relationship between staff and beneficiaries and among refugee people. By doing this, I was able to recover a layout of support systems created by refugee people in the centre. For example, in his centre, Hakeem appeared to be a key leadership figure due to his seniority. In other centres, social workers were deemed to be more trustworthy than the centre's psychologist. In some cases, where available, the support system might come from faith–based organization NGOs outside the centre.

Working with refugees requires, as Mackenzie et al. (2007) argue, further efforts that go necessarily beyond a strategy for harm minimization associated with research protocols. I will always remember as the most difficult moment in my fieldwork when this young Gambian participant, Yaya, after recounting his journey to Sicily, at the end of his first interview, started crying. When I ask him why he was sad, he told me: 'After all I have been through, my situation hasn't got better'. For a young man who survived a difficult journey through a desert, Libya and the crossing of the Mediterranean Sea, and ended up sleeping in a train station, before being relocated to another refugee shelter, this awareness was a source of deep frustration and sadness. Where did the promise of a better life end? In that moment, I wanted to cry with him. I was destroyed by the feeling of powerlessness I had in front of such injustice. I stopped the interview and tried to think what was the best thing to do in that situation. I decided to leave the grey walls of the NGOs where I was conducting the interview, and brought Yaya to a café where we had some iced tea and talked about football. There, Yaya's tears disappeared and a smile appeared on his face. Surprisingly, he thanked me saying that he had never shared these feelings with anyone before. This made me feel even worse, as it burdened my role of researcher with further responsibility. In that moment, I thought about that asylum seeker who told me that for me it 'was easy' listening and gathering these refugee stories. It was not true, even if I completely understand his standpoint. Interviewing refugees is not easy, and it will never be; no matter the methodological debate in the field of forced migration studies, which I see often marked by paternalism, with the refugee subject conceptualised as subject unable to make his or her own decision. Here, a galaxy of ethical dilemmas, which one has to navigate constantly and sometimes lays beyond the mere research encounter, constellates the research process. Academic bureaucratic approaches seem to resolve these on the grounds of research protocols, but this means very little in the field. The pain and the suffering will not be erased through signing an informed consent form; neither will the experience of social injustice which surrounds the lives of people in displacement. For instance, what would I have done if I had met

Yaya a few months before, while he was still sleeping in Palermo's central station at the age of eighteen? What kind of responsibility does the act of receiving someone's story assign to the teller? At the same time, one has to be aware of, and honest about, his or her role as a researcher, who is not there to provide psychological, pastoral or social support.

Going back at my experience with Yaya, I am convinced that what really matters in our research encounter was the relationship that we developed through our conversation at the bar, where we were not interviewer and interviewee, but just two human beings sharing an iced tea on a sunny Sicilian day. In that relationality, based on the profound respect I had for Yaya's suffering, which necessarily went beyond the research scope, I found a base for navigating my ethical quandaries towards my participants, without falling into a paternalistic approach. After the interview was done, I continued to meet with Yaya during my fieldwork. I helped him with his learning of Italian and on one occasion I drove him to the local GP for a health issue he had. Here, I am not saying that research protocols are not important; nor am I saying that reciprocity dissolved the complex relations of inequalities across multiple social divisions – in particular, race and class.

On the contrary, I am arguing that working with refugees involves a continuous reflexive account of the researcher's struggles; in order to question his or her own choices, attempts and failures. As a general principle, influenced by the work of Collins (2000) and drawing on the concept of conversational partnership (Rubin and Rubin 2005), I see the emphasis on cooperation and reciprocity as a way to navigate the risk of re–traumatization. Such epistemological choice, of course, is not infallible. Most importantly, it needs to include an account of the power imbalances between all the parties involved in the conversational partnership. Collins (2000) writes from an identity politics perspective, where researcher and researched share mutual experience. In the case of my research, being a white Sicilian researcher interviewing black African migrants in Sicily, the intersubjective construction of meaning was doubtless shaped by my racial, socio–economic and language privilege. Although I reject a reductionist view of power as determined by prefixed identity lines, I recognise the complexity of the field relationship as a fundamental component of my research struggle. The only possible way to deal with these issues is to locate myself in the research process as an active participant (Phillips and Earle 2010), both in the data collection phase and in the interpretative process.

Locating the conversational partnership in the field

As I was a white Sicilian native man interviewing black asylum seeking and refugee men in Sicily, a central aspect to consider was the complex dynamics of power inhabited by

the conversational partnership in the field. On this matter, I am very much influenced by the work of Coretta Phillips and Rod Earle (2010), which explores the role of researchers' subjectivities and biographies in the framing of research relationships and analysis. Within this framework, reflexivity, far from being just a way for self–positioning in the research process, provides a base to constantly question, re–examine and redefine the researcher's own interpretative paradigms (Phillips and Earle 2010) recognising his or her role in the research relationship as an active participant, 'whose identities, like those of research subjects, may be variously shaped by powerful hierarchies of race/ethnicity, gender and class' (Phillips and Earle 2010, 362).

Given that my research scope is masculinity, one has to start from gender. There is a significant theoretical debate about what does it mean being a male researcher interviewing men on their lives, especially with regards to the dynamics that masculinity can enact across the lines of competition, conflict, homosociality or compliance. As Salles and Harris (2012) recount in their work on the impact of gender on research, some feminist researchers like Oakley (1981) advocated for gender symmetry between researcher and participants as a strategy to minimize the impact of the power dynamic; others instead have opposed this view, arguing for a more intersectional account of power. Looking back at my field notes, I tend to agree with Troyna: 'researchers bring multiple identities to the research process and . . . these [identities] are constantly being negotiated in the course of interviews in ways which might strengthen the insider/outsider status of the researcher' (Troyna 1998, 101).

Race evidently was the key factor: from the moment I entered a new reception centre, I was regarded as another white person coming to question black asylum seekers and refugees. This illustrates the powerful role of race, together with citizenship status, in the making of the insider/outsider positions within the asylum system and, I argue, in Sicily; so that my role of outsider was immediately to be located in the wider asymmetrical social relations between black and white, natives and foreigners, in the locale.

Racial relations also involve consideration on language privilege. The interview process was majorly affected by the fact that participants were not using their first language. On the practical side, this requires the researcher to use simple wording and informal lexicon when asking questions. The use of prompts, probes and scenarios were also important to push the conversation forward or ask for clarifications on the meaning of specific utterances or episodes. Informal conversations outside the interview situation were relevant for the development of the intersubjective construction of meaning, suggesting lines of investigation or analytic levels. For example, the opening vignette of this thesis – Razak and his provocative stance about going back to Libya – was part of an informal conversation that happened outside the interview situation. Some of the themes I picked

up in Yonas's interview developed from our previous exchanges in one of the research settings when he started telling me his story. These aspects were included in my field notes.

The choice of not using interpreters was based mainly on the fact that I registered many complaints by participants about the quality of interpreters' work during asylum hearings with people reporting mistranslation of their account. Given the location of my fieldwork, and my resources, it was very difficult to recruit interpreters outside the asylum system. Plus, I did not want to use interpreters that were working for my gatekeepers or for the asylum commission. In two cases, participants required their female partners to be there in the room with us to assist with language. This complicated the conversational partnership and resulted in poor–quality interviews.

This trans–cultural dimension of the research impacted the quality of data. The life history method heavily relies on the communication skills of the teller. Interviews with participants like David, Kams or Yonas, who possessed more effective language resources, inevitably resulted in a higher level of quality, in terms of clarity of the content, length and structure. Overall, participants were given the choice of language among the three (Italian, English, French) spoken by the researcher. The primary goal here was to comply with participants' request in order to make the interview encounter more comfortable.

Interestingly, I found Anglophone migrants were surprised to find in Sicily someone who speaks English. Sharing their stories in English, for people like Kams and David, was acknowledged as an empowering experience. This should be understood in relation to the difficulties that these men face when using Italian in their everyday experience with the Sicilian community.

With regards to the two interviews conducted in French, participants understood Italian but they were given the opportunity to choose their preferred language. Despite this being the language I spoke the least well, the two interviews resulted in long and rich accounts, mostly thanks to the communication skills of the participants.

Italian was the language chosen mostly by participants who have resided for a longer period in Italy or who have attended language training in the reception centres. Some of them used interjections of colloquial Sicilian dialect so that these become consequently part of our interview conversation. For example Ousmane, a Malian participant, used recurrently the Sicilian word 'iddu' instead of the Italian pronouns 'lui', meaning 'he'. Being a Sicilian allowed me to immediately detect and respond to such dialect; here, it worth noting that Sicilian dialect is frequently used in oral conversation in Sicily so that we should not be surprised of its use in the interviews.

With regards to development of the conversational partnership, my migrant status being a Sicilian researcher based in London, which on the contrary was openly discussed with participants. Here, I want to make a small but fundamental premise with particular reference to the Sicilian history of migration – each Sicilian family, including mine, has a relative who left for the US or continental Europe during the last century. This history is maintained still to this point, especially after the financial crisis, with many Sicilians moving abroad in search of better job opportunities. My grandfather was a migrant worker in Germany in the 60s; many members of my family migrated to northern Italy and abroad, and lastly I am a migrant too; even though a very privileged one, in London now.

Maintaining the incomparable difference between my situation and the one of participants, this shared condition of living far from home, in a foreign country, although for very different and incomparable reasons, was a commonality that helped building a frame of connectedness between participants and me. In general, we would often compare our experiences, as participants, especially those from English–speaking countries, would look at London with great fascination. For example speaking English – in an area where its proficiency is very low – was received very well by English–speaking participants and ultimately was important to build rapport. However, my location in London must interrogate once again my privilege at the intersection of class status and race/ethnicity. This privilege not only determines the different right to migrate and the choice of destination, but also the possibility of coming back home whenever I want, which was precluded to my participants. The issue here was not the risk of being perceived as a privileged migrant, given that this was with no question true, but how my privilege would impact on the way participants' stories were coproduced. On this matter, I want to cite an interesting activity that we did at the youth group. As stated above I was the only Sicilian in the room and I was living in London, so the group leader asked each one of us how long did it take to reach Sicily. Those who were from Eastern Europe responded from 5 to 12 hours; the Italians, including myself, said an average of 2 hours; the African members answered from 6 months to one year. My journey to London was on a few hours plane to Gatwick Airport while my participants had to deal with incomparable experiences.

In the case of participants who were older than me, age difference opened up issues to do with seniority and maturity, which are fundamental frames in the enactment of masculinity for African men. The case of David is particularly interesting; David's style of talk and gestures would aim at conveying a message of masculine competence and wisdom as he was trying to kindly educate me about research, life, marriage and the Bible. Interestingly, he would often refer to me using expressions such as 'if you carry out a proper research' or adding 'you understand?' at the end of each sentence. For him,

it is also very important to clarify that thanks to his education he is capable of not only understanding but also evaluating what I was doing compared to other illiterate asylum seekers. Kams, who was a researcher in Gambia before fleeing, seemed to share some of the same concerns. Again, the capacity of 'understanding' my research endeavours was used to outline his level of education, distancing him from the rest of his comrades. For him it was really important to clarify his understanding of the scope of my research and its relevance. He mentioned other fellow asylum seekers who in the same centre did not agree to be interviewed because they did not understand what I was doing.

Interestingly Hakeem was the only participant across the whole fieldwork experience who asked to see my LSE badge as proof of identification during the informed consent negotiation. Again, the goal here was to reclaim a space of authority and competence. On one hand, I read this as an attempt to locate himself outside the racialised narrative of African refugee as uneducated, dull and incapable of making informed decisions over their lives. At the same time, I think this concerned also my positionality in the field; being a young man, who should be educated about life and gender relations, but also a PhD candidate in a very prestigious British university created complex, shifting power dynamics where masculinity was always at the forefront. I do not know if my queerness was part of this power dynamic on the participants' side as I have never shared this information with participants. It certainly was from my perspective when I had to navigate these re–claimings of spaces to perform the dominant version of masculinity. That is why an account of power dynamics should be considered, especially how the asymmetry of power, within the interview situation, is fluid and continuously shifting.

In many cases, my participants would take over the lead and put me in my place, which was sometimes a place of masculine inferiority. For example, the fact that at 28 years old I was not married and did not have children was problematized by some participants. I am not able to say if this element opened up issues to do with my sexuality; it is possible that it created suspicion on that level but it is also plausible that it was seen merely as a consequence of my location in Europe, where people get married later in life (as noted by participants). Instead of being preoccupied with my emotional reactions, I am more interested in taking these power struggles as an integral part of the research encounter; for this reason, the interview situation was an arena for participants to perform gender, rather than simply talking about it.

With regards to younger participants, my age helped me to divest from the serious role of researcher, building rapport across this shared commonality. For example, with Lyon it was really important to disclose my interest in hip hop music so that we had space for knowing each other and establishing trust. With another participant, Thierry, this opportunity was provided by our common interest in clubbing and fashion. The young

man would talk to me about the amazing nightlife in Abidjan, showing me pictures and videos of him and his friends in Ivory Coast before the flight. With these younger participants, issues to do with masculine authority were less visible, while the performative struggle was to present themselves as 'ordinary' young men, contesting on one side the same racial/class dynamics enacted by their refugee positionality, while on the other hand, contesting the reduction of their lives to the reasons that prompted them to flee. Hip hop music, football or talking about girls or future plans became a means to reclaim not only a 'normality' that was suddenly lost as a result of the flight, but also a complexity that is often denied in refugee categorization. The case of Lyon's interview perfectly illustrates this. He largely talks about his struggles as a young artist in urban Nigeria, trying to emerge in the local rap scene and what music represents for him. During the interview he would always come back to this main theme, his desire of becoming a famous artist in the music industry, making this the main stage where masculinity was negotiated; even more than in the refugee journey. Learning that the international protection he was granted was not the only thing that defined his life was an important and necessary discovery in my research journey. In this case, reflexivity becomes a necessary tool to reflect on the questions I did not ask and what was left out from the interview process (Phillips and Earle 2010).

My research looks at participants' masculinity in the context of refugee mobility, given the significance of this experience in their life history. However, the intent is not to oversimplify their lives into a single event, denying that other experiences might be relevant too in the performance of masculinity. On the contrary, I am aware that mine is necessarily an incomplete view; as a consequence, this thesis aims to provide insights into, rather than to neglect, the complexity and richness of refugee lives. The hope is that such focus on the significance and meaning of their experiences as 'men' might also provide an important corrective to the discourses swirling around and affecting them in Europe.

Sample and Access

The sample of this study was composed of Sub–Saharan African men. They all were either seeking asylum or being granted a form of protection, whether refugee status, subsidiary protection, or permit on humanitarian grounds. One participant had transitioned from these to citizenship and one had converted to a familiar residence permit as a result of marriage with an Italian woman.

For the selection of participants, negotiating access with gatekeepers was of primary importance. My gatekeepers were mainly two: the social cooperative in charge of each refugee centre and the faith–based NGO providing language courses. Participants were therefore selected among those residing in the refugee facilities or gravitating around the NGOs. The only exceptions were three cases I recruited via snowballing.

The rationale for sampling was that all participants applied to asylum in Italy; they thus transited at one point in their life history within the asylum system in Sicily as beneficiaries. For this reason, they all passed through the same institutional procedures and were eventually allocated for a period in a reception centre as part of the refugee determination process. This commonality makes the experience of such a diverse sample comparable in terms of stages associated with the migration project. That is why in the sample, I included also people who had a negative decision by the Territorial commission ('first instance procedure') but were still pending a response from the second level, the judiciary appeal. In other words, I was not interested in determining whether they were 'real' refugees or not, but my aim was to capture their refugee experience across the CMR resulting in their location in Sicily.

The sample size took into consideration the heterogeneity of the total population, the number of selection criteria, the type of data collection method (life history interviews), and issues to do with theoretical saturation and resources available. The sampling strategy involved purposeful sampling with some elements of stratification. The objective was to select groups that offer variety in regard to a particular phenomenon, but each of which share a frame of characteristics, allowing the comparison of subgroups (Aurini et al. 2016). The sampling strategy was not understood as an attempt to provide any sort of statistical representativeness or generalizability but rather to systemize, at least to some degree, participants' selection, across specific criteria which, drawing on the literature on forced migration and masculinity reviewed above, I regarded as relevant to answer my research question. The selection criteria I followed to recruit interviewees were based mainly on age and nationality.

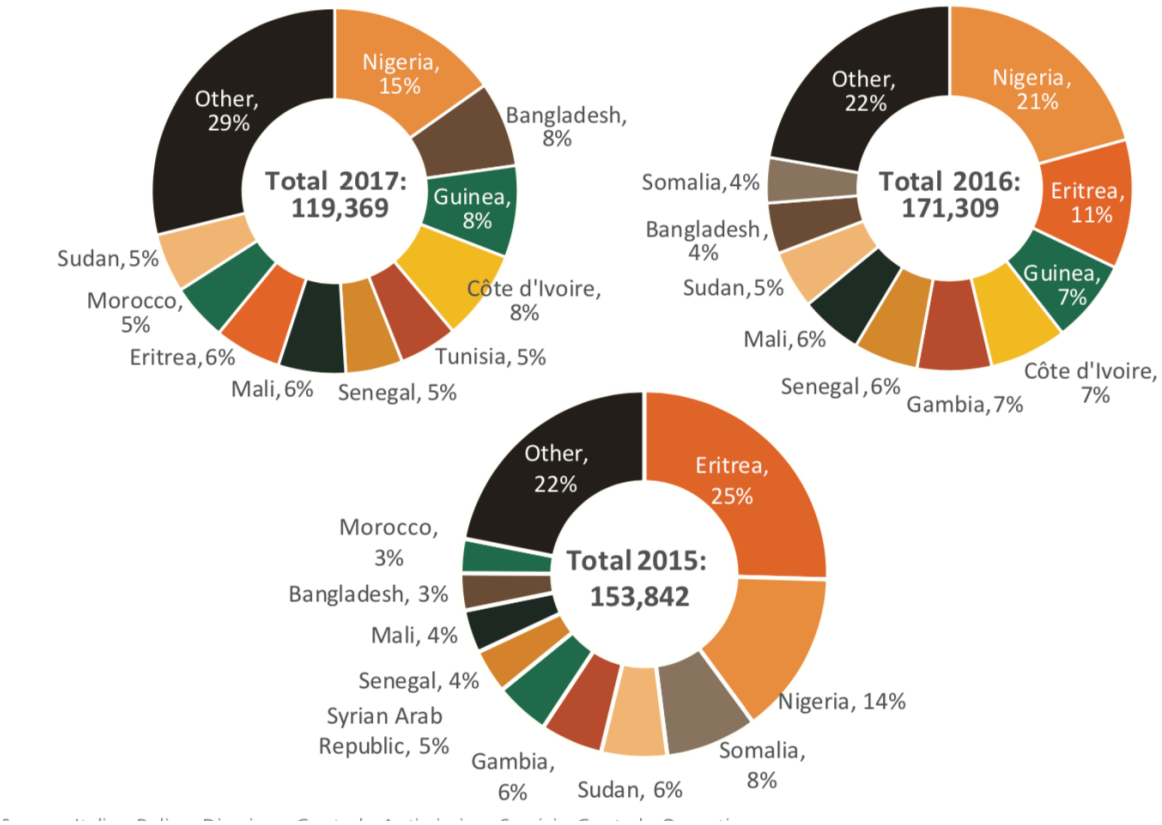
From a masculinity point of view, age is a very important signifier operating at the juncture of race, gender and class (Nayak and Kehily 2013). The age range (18–40) is determined by the fact that young adult men represent the largest population of asylum

seekers and refugees in Sicily. According to the Atlante SPRAR (2018), 68.6% of SPRAR beneficiaries were in the age range of 18–30.

In terms of nationality, comparing among different national groups was considered relevant to highlight the dynamics of the refugee experience, with particular regards to the pre–migration phase and the reason why participants left. Here, the performance of masculinity could be linked to an analysis of macro and meso level factors, including the socio–political landscape, household dynamics and the role of culture. Thus, refugee/asylum seeking men who were from non–African countries, such as Pakistan, were excluded because, as mentioned above, I see dominant masculinity as a cultural ideal so that including a non–African sample could potentially compromise the possibility of comparison. Restricting the focus to Sub–Saharan African men allowed me to compare not only participants' life histories but also their migration trajectories as participants moved across the same African routes to Sicily. Participants share indeed similar turning points in their refugee experience, including the way they reach Sicily through the CMR[32].

[32] Only one participant, Kams, arrived by plane.

FIGURE 4 SHARES OF ARRIVALS IN ITALY BY THE CENTRAL MEDITERRANEAN ROUTE, BY CITIZENSHIP DECLARED AT LANDING, 2015–2017



Source: UNODC (2018)

The criteria of nationality was thought to be operationalized with a non–proportional quota sampling in order to organize relationships between different sub–groups of African refugee and asylum seeking men. Given the difficulty in accessing the target population, purposive sampling required sustained, prolonged efforts; sometimes its configuration resembled more of a convenience sample as I could not reach the prefixed quotas for certain nationalities (e.g. Ghana, Ivory Coast). This interrogates not only the distribution of refugee populations across Sicilian provinces, but also the availability of participants in the locale. Nevertheless, the top four national groups in my sample – Gambia, Nigeria, Mali and Senegal – are the first four African nationalities within SPRAR beneficiaries' population in Sicily in 2017 (SPRAR 2017).

TABLE 4 NATIONALITIES OF PARTICIPANTS

Nationality	Participants	Nationality of SPRAR beneficiaries in Sicily (%)
Gambia	12	12,9%
Nigeria	9	16,4%
Mali	6	9,3 %
Senegal	3	6,3 %
East Africa	2	
Other West African Countries	4	
	36	

Source: SPRAR (2017)

TABLE 5 AGE RANGES OF PARTICIPANTS

Age Range	Participants
18–24	23
25–40	13
	36

Six participants were working in the reception centres where they were allocated – helping with cleaning, cooking and translation; so they were also employees of the organization which runs the reception centre. Others – recruited outside the reception system – had worked for the asylum regime as translator and cultural mediator. This is easy to explain, as this type of job is one of the few available in the locale for African nationals, given the high pressure of asylum requests and the racial segregation of the job market (Corrado et al. 2018). These participants used their insights in the refugee

regime to provide further understanding of asylum practices and policies, locating themselves as key informants as well as former recipients of these.

Sampling limitations

At this point, we must question what remained outside of the sample. First of all, given my choice to not use an interpreter, I recruited people that spoke either Italian, English or French. Those who did not speak any of these languages were automatically excluded.

Secondly, consideration should be given to nationalities of the sample. The small percentage of Eastern African participants reflected issues to do with recruitment. In the centres I accessed, there were not people from that region (like there were not Syrians or Afghans). I think this might be connected to how the EU system of relocation works for the nationalities that demonstrate an asylum recognition rate of 75% (Mentzelopoulou and Luyten 2018). According to recognition rates from 2017, only Syrians and Eritreans were eligible for relocation (Orsini and Roos 2017). These nationalities tend to be allocated in hotspot facilities where the relocation process is organised and implemented (Mentzelopoulou and Luyten 2018). I was not able to negotiate access in these centres. What remains in the SPRAR and other centres are mostly West Africans or people from Middle East (D'Angelo 2019).

Another significant consideration should be given to sexuality. At the beginning of the fieldwork, I was very interested in including people who identified as LGBTIQ; however, this was not possible. All my participants identify as heterosexual and cisgender. I also tried to approach an organization that supports this specific group of refugees/asylum seekers, but I was not able to interview any of their members. Being a queer researcher, and also an LGBTIQ activist, I confess that I saw as this as a 'limitation' of my sample, which was very disappointing for me. Then, I questioned my own disappointment and understood that this was indicative of that hierarchy of refugee subjects, based on a politics of vulnerability, which I aim to criticize with this thesis. In this hierarchy, heterosexual refugee men, because of their gender and sexuality, are constantly put at the bottom, being considered 'less vulnerable', and therefore less deserving, than other groups. Thus, I embrace this situation as one of the most interesting aspects of this research, the fact that I am focusing specifically on heterosexual men's masculinities in the context of refugee migration. As a consequence, I view my study as embedded in the heteronormative frame of male refugee facilities. Based on my observation, I am inclined to think that even if one of the participants identified as queer, being located within the asylum regime facilities, compromised the conditions of tellability. As a researcher, and a proud queer activist, I could have challenged more such conditions, asking direct questions on homosexual practice and sexual fluidity or further disclosing my own sexuality; however, this was considered as

extremely risky with the possible outcome of compromising my access. My position was indeed extremely precarious and forced me to constantly negotiate my insiderness in each facility across the lines of gender, race, and age. This included being located in the middle of intra–male socialization practice and interaction. Here, I realised my only possible insider position was to describe rather than contest the hetero–normative meanings, symbols and practices that I was observing all around me, in these masculinised spaces. This means that although homosexuality was eventually raised as a general topic by a few participants, and was questioned by myself in terms of their views, I took the heteronormative frame as an integral part of the masculinity performance within the asylum regime I was located. As a result, I decided to leave the participant the option to define and identify his own sexuality in line with the methodological choice of the life history method.

Lastly, I chose to recruit participants through the SPRAR system and my voluntary work so that some consideration should be given to potentially better–off refugees being excluded from the sample in terms of class. This however does not mean I did not diversify my sample in terms of education level and socio–economic position. Among participants, I have people with degrees and those who came from middle–class background. What, if anything, it is missing is refugees that successfully transitioned into higher status jobs in Sicily. Based on my observations, knowledge of the research site and information gathered with participants, this type of refugees do not stay in Sicily, where job opportunities are sparse both for migrants and natives. As I result, I would tend to not consider this as a distortion, but as a consequence of the choice of research site.

More relevant is the issue of focusing only on Sub–Saharan African men. This choice as stated before provided some interesting insight into the lives of African refugees who have, according to participants' accounts, more difficulties in obtaining refugee status compared to people from the Middle East. However, this sampling decision implies also some limitations impacting on the study. Such gender hierarchies that race enacts across the refugee experience, for example, are only explored from the point of view of African participants. Perhaps having another 10 participants from the Middle and South East, as long as they arrived through the Central Mediterranean Route, could have added a comparison frame among refugee groups, maximising the information collected.

Negotiating voluntary participation

Issues of power are embedded in all research relationships (Hugman et al. 2011) but they are particularly challenging in the field of refugee lives, so everyone researching this population needs to deal with the risk of exploitation. For this reason, I decided to not use economic incentives throughout the recruitment phase. Asylum seekers and refugees

in the SPRAR system receive on average 2 Euros and 30 cents per day (SPRAR 2018). Linking research participation to economic incentives would have produced significant ethical dilemmas on what constitutes voluntary participation in a context of such deprivation. However, working with a disadvantaged population, I tried to apply the principles of reciprocity and beneficence, whenever it was feasible and deemed to be ethical. In one case, for example, after the interview was concluded and consent negotiated, I decided to give 20 euros to a participant for calling his family. The interviewee who was really young and just arrived in Sicily, disclosed to me the fact that he had not talked to his mother since the day he left his home country. On another occasion, I provided books for learning Italian to two participants who were attending an Italian literacy course for migrants after they disclosed to me their inability to buy these items with their own financial resources. In the closing section of the interview, I usually asked participants if they wanted to ask me a question. Usually, this involved some personal request. For example with Evans, we decided I would help him write a CV for possible job applications. Dickinson asked me to help him finding a job. It was the beginning of my fieldwork, this request was not expected and I struggled for a moment to find the right answer; after the interview was finished, I offered to talk to the social worker of the municipality about his case. That episode makes me realize it was important to recognise the boundaries of what I was able and not able to do for potential participants. This is not an easy task when working with people constantly struggling to find a job. For instance, an asylum seeker told me that he would talk to me only if I found him a job in a town near the village where he was allocated. This was beyond my possibilities so that interview never took place.

In order to establish a genuine voluntary participation, negotiating consent was a fundamental phase in which we developed a research partnership based on autonomy, reciprocity and informed decision. In particular, it was important to illustrate the scope of my work as an independent researcher and discuss my obligations toward each participant together with their rights. These include issues to do with confidentiality, anonymity, the possibility to withdraw consent and decline to answer specific questions and the use of data. A significant challenge, here, was the cross–cultural nature of the research relations. Although people navigating the asylum system become generally familiar with notions of confidentiality and informed consent, I viewed the negotiation of informed consent as an opportunity to develop an open dialogue with the participant which went beyond the interview situation. Here, it is worth noting that not all participants possess the same cultural and language resources so that each negotiation of informed consent should be considered at the individual level; in some cases, for example, this required prolonged efforts.

As a general strategy, I provided the cultural mediator or social worker in the selected reception centre a copy of the information sheet in advance so that she/he could have the opportunity to discuss this with potential participants without me being present. The information sheet and consent form then circulated among the reception centre's beneficiaries before my arrival in the locale. This allowed them to discuss among each other my research project. In one occasion I asked a participant who was very familiar with research protocols – Kams, who was a researcher in Gambia – to discuss it with his fellow asylum seekers. In another particular case, I asked the cultural mediator to join me for the negotiating consent phase. With many participants the phase of negotiating consent lasted for many days until we reached a degree of familiarity that only my permanence in the reception centre or in the organization would allow.

The information sheet provided was slightly modified a couple of time as a result of the feedback I received from participants and cultural mediators together with the feedback received from the LSE Ethics committee, which reviewed and granted its approval to this research. First of all, it was very important to underline that data gathered were not linked to the service they were beneficiaries of as international protection seekers/holders. Secondly, it was important to clarify if participants had unrealistic expectations of the benefits of the research, with particular regard to their legal or resettlement processes (Mackenzie et al. 2007, 303). Thirdly, I tried to take this as an opportunity to explain that the informed consent process is intended to inform/empower them, making clear that procedures and regulations govern the research process, holding the researchers accountable – it is not another layer of scrutiny from Western asylum regimes. In particular, one way to do this was the use of colloquial lexicon instead of formal language, which might intimidate people who are subjected to a great deal of bureaucratic scrutiny and who are not familiar with academic terms in English or Italian (the two languages in which the information sheet was provided)[33]. For example, I changed the term 'pseudonymous' into 'fake name'. This scrutiny also should be considered when explaining the issue of mistrust and caution that this particular group of people, and in particular asylum seekers who have not their status finalised yet, has developed due to its precarious position.

Most of the motivations for potential participants' refusal – which is estimated to 15 to 20 – was connected to their conditions within asylum structures, spending their days in a state of apathy and frustration associated with the waiting of refugee determination bureaucracy. These emotional dynamics usually manifested under the statement 'I'm tired of telling my story over and over'. Another important reason was the relationship

[33] For the two interviews conducted in French, both participants spoke in Italian but were given the opportunity to respond in French.

between potential participants and the organization which ran the centre; in town n° 4, for example, I was able to recruit people only in one out of three reception facilities I accessed. I suspect this might be as a form of protest for the late payment of pocket money and condition of hospitality in that centre. Another asylum seeker told me (in town n° 6) that he did not see any benefit for his personal situation – being waiting for his asylum claim to be reviewed. Others added that they did not have time to participate to the study or they simply were not interested. A member of the youth group told me that he did not feel comfortable in re–constructing his journey to Sicily as he was now focused on his future. In one case, a participant withdrew after completing his interview, adding that it was too difficult for him to re–listen to his story. Interestingly, Nelson, a participant, who in town 4, refused my request, changed his idea once I met him again in town 6 (he was being reallocated there). This participant, however, refused to be recorded or to sign any consent form document. Given the absence of audio material, I agreed with his proposal and respected his decision. What I think made Nelson, change his mind was an afternoon conversation I had with him and a group of asylum seekers around the kitchen table. Again, the most important aspect of negotiating consent was the issue of rapport and trust enabled.

Establishing trust and rapport

According to Powles, 'the most important ingredients for a successful life history or personal narrative interview are trust and rapport' (Powles 2004, 14). With some participants, like Yaya, trust was immediate, driven by some sort of personal connection, mostly associated with my voluntary work in the NGO. With others like Nelson, it needed time to be built and nurtured. Spending time together with the participants, becoming familiar with the people who both live and work in the facility, with an ethnographic–oriented approach, constituted a key factor for the success of the interview encounter. This obviously required prolonged efforts across multiple sites.

Where I was not granted this type of extended access, establishing good relationships with those involved in the day–to–day activities in the reception centre – social workers, psychologists, cultural mediators – was essential. That is because refugees and asylum seekers tend to trust them while they are often in a conflictive relationship with the head organization in charge of the structure; most of the time, these conflicts originate from delays in the payment of pocket money, which asylum seekers rely on for their living. In these occasions, as argued above, refugees and asylum seekers would problematize my positionality for their political purposes. In some cases, some would refuse to participate in my research in order to make a statement against the organization – or even against the failings of the asylum commission – no matter how much I explained to them my total impartiality and independence. Some participants would talk to me only when realising that I was not in any way related to the gatekeepers, seen as the organization

which ran the reception centre. As Evans told me, 'I decided to talk with you when you explained that you are not from them…'. In other cases, they were interested in having a platform to bear witness and express their thoughts about what was happening to refugees in Sicily. This illustrates the room for agency, and even for contestation and resistance, that asylum seekers and refugees I met constantly try to exercise when dealing with asylum bureaucracy and actors, including research projects like mine. That is why I refused paternalistic methodological approaches that see refugee subjects as inescapably vulnerable and helpless; my ethical standpoint was, on the contrary, focused on that act of storytelling as a way to enable agency.

Influenced by the seminal work of Jackson (2013) and Eastmond (2007) on refugee storytelling, I see participants' choice of (re)telling their refugee story as a political act, and their silence is as well. First of all, because asylum narratives are also testimonies to the injustice, violence and discrimination enacted by the refugee experience. Secondly, because for people living at the margins, insulated in the asylum system conundrum, where they are often unable to work or study, the act of telling their 'refugee' story becomes one of the few opportunities to negotiate agency, possibly even resistance, over their lives and experiences. At the same time, it must be fully acknowledged that journalists, migration authorities, police guards, and even researchers like me – who at the time of the so–called 'refugee crisis' overcrowd places like Sicily, Greece or Spain – are hungry for these stories, and see these as a valuable commodity in the global spectacle of the 'refugee crisis' (Andersson 2014). There is an intrinsic exploitative risk in this act of seeking refugee stories. As one participant told me:

> *[T]he thing is that since you arrive in Italy they don't stop to ask you those questions. "Why you came in Italy?" "Why you left your country?" Everybody asks this question. Why do you want to know? You're not the police! Why you ask? I have a friend of mine when people ask "why you left your country?" he tell him things that you don't want to hear...* (Evans).

Evans argues that it is not only those circulating around asylum system but also regular people in the street who enquire about his status in Sicily. When he says 'why do you want to know? You're not the police' he is implying the complex power relations underpinning the question 'Why did you come to Italy?'. This question locates the refugee/asylum seeker and the interviewer in an unbalanced relation, embedded in the act of repetition this group of people are subjected to, as 'foreigners' and recipients of state aids. This awareness invests the researcher of a further responsibility so that the act of listening and interpreting becomes necessarily political too; but it also makes clear the limits of such research endeavours in relation to refugees' own positionality – as subjects who are not in a position to control the fate of their stories, and demand considerably

more of the researcher in terms of sensitivity to questions of power, confidentiality and accountability than in many other fields (Eastmond 2007, 261).

The interpretative process

Thirty participants out of thirty–six agreed to be taped so their interviews were fully transcribed in the language used. Information that might directly identify the interviewee – names, addresses, specific locations and dates – were removed, omitted or modified to preserve confidentiality and anonymity. Pseudonyms were used instead of real names. Even though this, in some cases, might limit the reader's ability to assess the validity of the conclusions, participants' safety has been given first priority (Bek–Pedersen and Montgomery 2006).

Three research assistants were involved in the transcription of interviews conducted in English and French. Six participants did not agree for their interviews to be recorded; in this case, detailed field notes summarising the interview were taken by the researcher and a full report was written. Given the language of this thesis, it is important to acknowledge that the researcher did not translate the whole material collected, but only selected quotes arising from data were translated into English. For the translation of material in French, I asked the help of someone who is fluent in that language. In the process of translation, my main aim was to maintain the style, jargon and sense of sentences of the original text. Acknowledging that I have some experience in translating text from English to Italian, it is very important to clarify that while obtaining grammatical and syntactical equivalence is a complex task, the main challenge was achieving conceptual equivalence (Birbili 2000). Drawing on an interpretative, social constructionist epistemology, I see this process of translation as an integral part of the process of knowledge production (Temple and Young 2004). In particular, I am influenced by Simon, who writes:

> *The solutions to many of the translator's dilemmas are not to be found in dictionaries, but rather in an understanding of the way language is tied to local realities, to literary forms and to changing identities. Translators must constantly make decisions about the cultural meanings which language carries, and evaluate the degree to which the two different worlds they inhibit are 'the same'. These are not technical difficulties, they are not the domain of specialists in obscure or quaint vocabularies. . . . In fact the process of meaning transfer has less to do with finding the cultural inscription of a term than in reconstructing its value.* (Simon 1996, 137–8 cited in Temple and Young 2004)

For each quote, I interrogated the cultural inscription that the text inhabited across multiple settings: participants' native culture, their local experience in Sicily, and finally the meaning of the word in English. The act of translation therefore includes a degree of interpretative reconstruction drawing on my analysis of the wider participant's narrative as a text. For example, talking about his father, Bai used the Italian word 'gigante' which in English means 'giant'. However, it was clear to me that the meaning of such word was

better translated as 'big man', as this figure in Western African culture mediates a specific masculinity discourse associated with senior and respected manhood (Miescher and Lindsay 2003) In the countryside, the big men were at the top of the social hierarchy, followed in decreasing order of power by other adult men, uninitiated young men, boys, women and girls (Barker and Ricardo 2005). Exactly, this position of superiority associated with senior masculinity (Lukunka 2012) is what Bai was trying to convey in his description of the idealised lost father. Thus, I see this choice much more as part of data analysis than merely translation efforts. That is why, in order to assure transparency in this interpretative process, I will map out, whenever they occur, such choices in footnotes.

Acknowledging that translation is not a neutral exercise (Temple and Young 2004), as a consequence, transcripts should not be intended as duplicates of some original reality but as intersubjective construction of meanings and interpretation between participants and interviewer (Simon 1996). On this matter, it is important to acknowledge that I am very much influenced by Ferguson et al.:

> *As soon as we, as researchers, become involved in telling our stories of their stories, we present our interpretations of their interpretations. Not only are there multiple perspectives, then, but there are multiple layers of perspective as soon as one enters the reflective process of research.* (Ferguson et al 1992, 299)

Following Hubbard (2000), interpreting personal narratives requires a balance between the respondent's account of past experiences and the researcher's interpretative framework (mine was evidently influenced by masculinity theory). These are interwoven to create the final story (Eastmond 2007). Specifically, Hubbard argues that 'the final account of a respondent's story is not strictly their story, but an interpretation of their life history by the researcher' (Hubbard 2000). Accepting this interpretivist stance, we must 'situate ourselves and our research participants within these accounts' (Harrison et al. 2001, 338). This requires a continued reflexive account of the ways 'we may distort, misrepresent or have subjects' experiences obscured from view because of our biographical experiences or subjectivities' (Phillips and Earle 2010, 374).

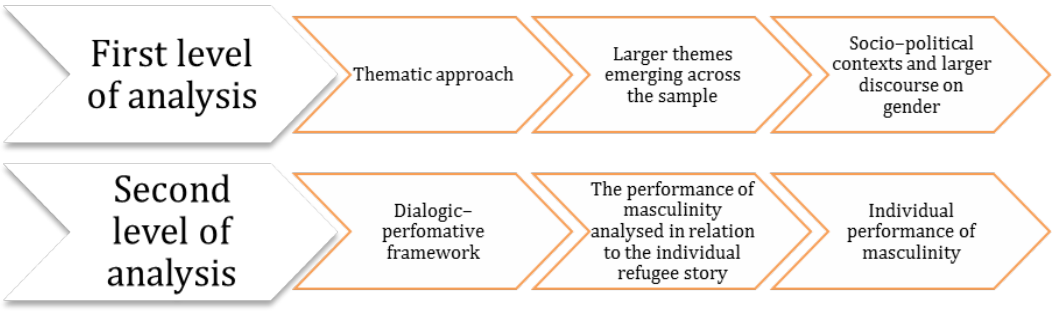
I have already discuss how being a migrant myself and having in my family history, people that migrated with way less privilege and opportunities, constituted an unconscious terrain which mediated my analytic work. The figure of my grandfather, together with the stories about his experience of discrimination, hardship, precarious housing and work conditions as a builder in Germany, came up often in my mind during fieldwork and in the data analysis. Another important source of empathy grounded, as Phillips and Earle (2010) argue, in my own life history/biography was my experience of prejudice as a queer man in Sicily. In the same locale, many years before, because of my

queerness, I was the object of 'othering' strategies, although in a very different, and less tragic, configuration. Looking back at my fieldwork experience, I read my experience of prejudice and oppression in Sicily as a key terrain that, although unconsciously, mediated my relations with research subjects (Hunt 1989) in terms of empathy, emotional identification and reciprocity. The already mentioned case of my encounter with Yaya and the relationship that I developed with him is an example of this. In that case, I read my empathy towards him driven by Yaya's young age. I connected emotionally, perhaps on an unconscious level, with this young man who as a child found himself alone, in a foreign – sometime hostile – land, with no family or friends. But this aspect was confined to my internal thoughts. I have never disclosed any of these experiences, feelings or memories to my participants.

Data analysis process

According to Eastmond, refugees 'are in the midst of the story they are telling, and uncertainty and liminality, rather than progression and conclusion, are the order of the day' (Eastmond 2007, 251). In order to grasp their experience, she argues, participants' narratives need to be tied to social and political contexts that have shaped and continue shaping the circumstances of their lives. This includes analytically taking account of the larger socio–cultural discourse, through which experience is given structure and meaning by the people involved (Eastmond 2007, 252). This methodological consideration works well with my theoretical framework interested in seeing masculinity performance as an emerging project unfolding through time and space (Connell 2005) and consolidated in biography (Brickell 2003). The data analysis process was therefore organized in two integrated levels.

FIGURE 5 DATA ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK



In the first, I drew on a thematic approach to explore the larger landscapes that participants inhabit, including the socio–political contexts associated with each different stage of the refugee experience and the relevant socio–cultural discourse on gender. Here, a thorough reading of materials, as well as the reflexive process of fieldwork, generated initial codes, which then produced larger themes. Themes in relation to the research question were both thematic (e.g. 'gender relations') and descriptive of events (e.g. 'the crossing of the desert'). The emergence of themes was an open–ended, iterative process. This allowed the researcher to constantly modify and review each theme until the data analysis phase was concluded.

Following Nowell et al. (2017, 7), data were coded in as many different themes as they fitted and as many times as deemed relevant. Each theme provided a framework to analyse data in terms of similarities/differences across cases. In the first level, the analysis of gender performance was therefore thematic following the unfolding of specific thematic elements across research participants, the event they report and the action they take (Riessman 2008, 74). On this matter, participants' location within the asylum system in Italy and the commonality of their experiences across the Central Mediterranean Route provided a frame for a cross–sectional analysis of participants' life histories that lead to the emergence of larger shared themes/events across the sample. This approach informs the choice of presenting the findings in each chapter as a constellation of different participants' experience in relation to significant stages of their refugee experience: home, the journey and life in Sicily. That is why the write–up instead of following one single life history aims at combining thematically participants' trajectories in terms of similarities/differences and convergences/divergences.

On the second level of my framework, I focused on the individual trajectory of each participant. A life history approach enables us to investigate how 'personal goals, aspirations and experiences of the self are continuously interpreted and re–interpreted in the course of migration, in interaction with the surrounding environment' (Heyse 2011, 219). Influenced by the seminal work of Riessman (2008, 2004) and Langellier and Peterson (2004), and Goffman's idea of performance (1959), I applied a dialogic–performative framework. By doing this, the whole interview can be seen as a performance where gender is enacted and accomplished dialogically (Langellier and Peterson 2004) with an audience. Starting with the themes identified in the first level of analysis, I organize vertically each life history, identifying major turning points across each participant's story as part of a personal narrative. Here, the performance of masculinity was analysed in motion, as part of a life–course project unfolding across the individual's plot and in relation to the socio–cultural discourse identified in the first round of analysis. The performance of masculinity was therefore analytically located in relation to the ordering/sequence of the participant's personal narrative. This includes

focusing on the changes produced as a result of transnational mobility and how each participant individually perceives/deals with these changes from their renewed positionality. Following the narrative ordering of their refugee stories, we were able to explore how each masculine performance engaged with a selected narrative genre which shape a specific positioning of the participant in the story and positioning of secondary characters in relation to the participant. As part of this narrative engagement (Hammack and Cohler 2009), I thus investigate how the situated personal narrative intersected larger gendered discourse shaping a unified narrative of masculine self (Toerien and Durrheim 2001) in relation to participants' life course. Lastly, I interrogate how this process of identity work was the result of the intersubjective construction of meaning between researcher and participant. In this context, I assigned myself the role of immediate audience, and I used field notes involving reflections on the interview situation to sustain such analytic efforts. These include observational material regarding time spent in refugee facilities and organizations, informal conversations with key informants, observational material about the wider research sites, descriptions and analytical commentary of events and personal reflections. Moreover, I also took into account the wider audience to which these narratives, being embedded in the refugee regime, are subjected.

To emphasize the performative element is not to deny the 'materiality' of participants' experiences; on the contrary, the aim is to throw light upon the ways in which narratives mediate, and therefore make meaning of these events through the act of storytelling; central to this view is that stories are produced with and for an audience; with regard to masculinity, this approach recognises the relationality of gender; thus, narrative becomes a site of exploration of the complex cultural, psychosocial conflicts (Langellier 1999) that gender performing embodies at the intersection of experience, discourse and subjectivity.

CHAPTER FOUR. Engendering men's decision to migrate along the Central Mediterranean Route

In a Sicilian town, in the middle of the day, African men appear in small groups, hanging around the square in front of the Prefettura, the central government office in charge of asylum procedures. A little bit farther, another larger group waits patiently at the local bus station. They talk and laugh in their native languages. They also are all men. In the countryside, a bunch of young men are cycling tirelessly, from the reception centre where they live to their destination, a tomato field or a vineyard, where they contribute their labour for a few euros. In the port of Catania, the Diciotti vessel has just docked, after saving 177 lives in the Strait of Sicily. Among the people who are not allowed to disembark by the Italian government, only 11 are women. These four sketches are all happening in the same locale, Sicily, my homeland and my field site. They all capture what quantitative data are telling about the current migrant flows on the CMR, characterised by a great prevalence of men (UNHCR 2017). This is acknowledge by Thierry, a young Ivorian man, who fled violence associated with the 2011 political crisis in his country:

> *The majority of those who flee are men…Yes,[they] leave their countries to look for money to come back to their [own] countries, you see. Leaving the country for a stable life, a family, to get married...that's why men…men are those leaving.* (Thierry)

Thierry's quote attempts to make meaning of gendered mobility along the CMR. He clearly conjuncts the journey experience with a culturally desired trajectory toward reaching manhood (Vlase 2018). By doing this, he highlights the gendered expectations associated with migration to Europe. These, as argued in Chapter 2, are commonly ignored by mainstream 'refugee crisis' discourse; or worse, they are 'used' by anti–migrant groups to question the 'genuineness' of men's need of protection. As a result, in the discourse of the 'refugee crisis' the same notion of 'male vulnerability' emerges as unimaginable (El–Bushra, Naujoks, and Myrttinen 2014, 7). In this chapter, my aim is to challenge this gender essentialist framework (Carpenter 2005), which simplifies refugee and asylum seeking men's reasons to flee and, therefore, overshadows their need of protection.

In order to do this, I will explore the role of gender in mediating participants' decision to leave their countries. As argued in Chapter 1, I see gender as a framework for understanding individual experiences of, and resilience to, vulnerability (Misztal 2011, Kofman 2019). This, however, requires participants' individual experience to be located within wider gendered

structural characteristics of the sending communities such as patterns of violence, socio–economic inequalities and gender relations in the family. For this reason, I regroup participants' decision–making in three different scenarios: political violence and state persecution; generalised violence and failure of the rule of law, lack of livelihood opportunity and conflicts over land rights. These scenarios are corroborated by evidence emerging from various studies on migration drivers across the Mediterranean region (McMahon and Sigona 2018, Wittenberg 2017, Crawley et al. 2016, Cummings et al. 2015, Altai Consulting 2013) and express the mutual shaping of migration drivers such as socio–economic threats, violations of human rights, state persecution and failure of rule of law (Zetter 2018). In each of these scenarios, I will follow at the individual level how participants, as gendered actors, make the decision to migrate in interaction with the structural forces that prompted them to flee. By integrating these levels, we are able to highlight the gendered expectations culturally associated with participants' migration trajectory and how these are produced at the interplay between the subjective and structural levels (Howson 2014). In the second part of the chapter, I will examine the CMR as a site wherein to negotiating these gendered expectations activated by the flight. By doing this, we can grasp the key role of masculinity in participants' decision–making regarding onward mobility along this route.

Political violence and state persecution

Yonas is a 27–year–old Eritrean refugee who fled from his country to avoid compulsory military conscription when he was an adolescent. He grew up in the capital of the country, Asmara, with his mother who was the only carer in his family. His father died while serving the country as a soldier. Thanks to his mother's job as a nurse, his childhood was relatively peaceful, despite Eritrea's dire economic situation. They were not rich, but his mother could economically support the whole family, including cousins who like Yonas, remained 'orphans' as a result of Eritrea's forced conscription system. The memories associated with this period of his life are happy: Yonas grew up in a big house with many kids and a loving mother. The days passed by playing volleyball, or singing to the traditional guitar, the Krar. Unfortunately, things changed with time as Yonas was turning into a young man. Slowly, he started realizing how forced military conscription deprived his family of all male members, exposing the women and children to economic hardship and vulnerability.

> *Until I was young I did not understand this situation, then slowly growing up, you understand these situations because you start asking "where is uncle? Why doesn't he come around?" and you ask where is your father and they tell you he is dead [doing] that… us [him and his cousins] growing up we see what the problem is…because there are not males of [in] the house, there are not the men of the house…and the women struggled to raise us* (Yonas)

The absence of adult men, in this small community inhabited only by women and children, profoundly marked Yonas's life. Approaching the Christian Pentecostal Church on the advice of a neighbour, Yonas found 'many fatherly figures' in the pastors, affirming 'they were what I was lacking'. Unfortunately, this exposed him to further clashes with the government; Evangelical and Pentecostal Christians have been subjected to state repression in Eritrea (Human Rights Watch 2009)[34]. On a personal level, the absence of adult men in the family made Yonas feel responsible toward his mother and the other female members of the house; when he was 14 years old, he started doing small jobs while attending school in order to make up for the lack of income providers in the house. These different drivers – socio–economic inequalities and religious persecutions – fed into each other in shaping Yonas' decision to flee; however, the threat of forced conscription as appeared to be the key trigger. As years go by, Yonas realised that being a man in Eritrea, that future of soldiering – a modern form of slavery (Kibreab 2009) – was also effectively a compulsory path for him.

The threat of forced conscription into the military and a general lack of freedom are universally recognised as main triggers for those who left Eritrea (McMahon and Sigona 2018, Wittenberg 2017, Crawley et al. 2016). Across the almost three decades of an oppressive regime, 12% of the population has fled the country (Human Rights Watch 2017). Eritrea's system of indefinite military conscription is a product of decades of military rule (Wittenberg 2017). Kibreab (2009) compares the Eritrean National Service to forced labour, with people being subjected to indefinite forced conscription under the threat of severe forms of penalty, including imprisonment. Meanwhile, national service conscripts are employed in both military and civilian development projects while being underpaid (Human Rights Watch 2009). Young people on national service are underpaid, and the provided salary is

[34] In 2002, the Eritrean government banned unregistered religious activity, essentially making it illegal for anyone to practice worship of any but four recognized faiths (Catholic, Lutheran, Eritrean Orthodox, and Sunni Islam) (Human Right Watch 2009, 59).

particularly unfit to support those who live in urban areas with a family (Dorman 2005, Bereketeab 2004). Moreover, draft evaders, deserters or individuals approaching the age of conscription who are caught fleeing the country illegally are subjected to inhuman treatment (Kibreab 2009) such as torture, arbitrary detention or being shot on sight at the border (Human Rights Watch, 2009).

At this point, it is important to highlight how forced military service in Eritrea is also extended to women, who also flee the country (Kibreab 1995). However, as the next extract shows, Yonas argues that forced conscription has different repercussions for men, who are expected to serve their country with no exceptions:

> *[W]omen sometimes they have children, if they have them, they get married to not doing the military service, because a mother cannot do it, she cannot leave the son, they [might] decide to stay, but [among] young Eritreans, men always flee!*(Yonas)

This might not be necessarily true; but I think it expresses the range of different gendered vulnerabilities in the social landscape of Eritrea. Yonas argues that for Eritrean women, a significant way to come to Europe is via family reunification while for young men it is really difficult to leave the country legally. The comment 'men always flee' therefore illustrates the centrality of gender in shaping the refugee flow from Eritrea. Yonas insists on 'forced conscription' being not 'a personal issue' but 'a country's problem'; I read this as a way to express the structural dimension of the forced conscription in Eritrea, that Yonas sees as generational. Yonas acknowledged how he came to know about the possibility of the flight within the family, from those who managed successfully to complete the journey. From a masculine perspective, it is worth noting that 'becoming a soldier for life' fosters a specific gendered project for young men like Yonas to take up; this is based on the military–nationalistic masculine warrior ideal (Weber 2011) in a country created through military force (Dorman 2005). For those who aim at an alternative version of masculinity, the ultimate answer seems to be the flight:

> *[T]he youngster [are those who fleeing], because they look for a future…they try to be, like we have been knowing for many years till now, a man that provide for [his] family, make a family, being a father for the family, so he has a certain future; so to make that, you know what he needs, he needs to work, he needs to study, he needs to arrive to [be] a person like this…to become a man, because if not there [in Eritrea]*

> *you cannot become [a man]…because you don't work…and you don't work… not only you don't work…you don't study…so you cannot do anything…* (Yonas)

When he affirms '*there [in Eritrea] you cannot become [a man]',* Yonas is depicting forced military conscription as an obstacle in the achievement of the culturally located masculinity ideal, which in his case values family ties and the male breadwinning model. When asked 'why' he cannot become a man in his country, Yonas answers: '*because you don't work and you don't study*'; at this juncture, interestingly, he locates himself specifically among those 'youngsters' who '*look for a future'* so that the quest for a better life (Azaola 2012) directly interrogates a quest for masculine realization:

> *[a] family, you establish a family, you make a baby that you won't see…[for] long time…and you won't help [him]…both when he needs [emotionally]…and in terms of money [economically]… because you do only military conscription…* (Yonas)

At this stage, Yonas seems to present the causes that prompted him to flee as affecting his capacity to perform the idealised model of hegemonic masculinity. My use of performance is much influenced by Goffman (1956) and the ethnomethodology tradition (Garfinkel 1967, West and Zimmerman 1987). Rather than being studied as the 'internalized product of structural features' (Beynon 2002, 11) or a core essence, this scholarly work has proposed a view of 'gender' as a 'performance or accomplishment achieved in everyday life' (Brickell 2003, 159); 'something that one does, and does recurrently, in interaction with others' (West and Zimmerman 1987, 140). Here, the interview situation provides the context, which frames, in Goffman's terms (1956), the performance.

At the same time, due to the selected interview method, I see participants' gender performance as embedded in the reflexive process of constructing a self with a biography (Garfinkel 1967), which is the primary aim of narrating one's life history. This requires participants to organize the events of their journey to Europe as part of a coherent and unitary story. At the same time, it involves them engaging with the narrative of social identities available in a specific context (Hammack and Cohler 2009). This process of narrative engagement (Hammack 2011) includes navigating what constitutes the 'competent', always context–specific, ideal of hegemonic masculinity (Brickell 2003). Drawing on discursive psychology[1] (Whetherell and Edley 1999), I view these organized in discourse, intended as cultural resources (Toerien and Durrheim 2001) through which the performer is able to strategically (Hopkins and Noble 2009) locate himself as a gendered actor in his refugee story. This

includes an account of performativity, as different performances will produce different effects –and sanctions– for the performer to deal with; both at the subjective level and in relation with the audience (Brickell 2003). Thus, we need to embed Yonas' gender performance in the masculine life–course trajectory that his personal narrative inhabits and represents.

For Yonas who grew up without a father, fatherhood appears as a key signifier of masculinity; being a father, however, is not only about providing economic support but it involves emotional care and presence in the lives of children (the same Yonas missed when he was a child). Another important element of competent masculinity is taking care of other members of the family (in particular, the mother). By fleeing Yonas seems to negotiate a space for meeting these expectations that are jeopardised by Eritrean forced conscription. In this sense, the decision to flee appears to be indicative of a moment of engagement with masculine duties. Connell, in her work on men's life histories, identifies the moment of engagement with hegemonic masculinity as 'the moment when the boy takes up the project of hegemonic masculinity as his own' (2005, 122). I view the project of engagement more as a process[35], rather than a single moment in a man's life.

Following Howson (2014), that is because hegemonic masculinity requires all men to position themselves in relation to it (Howson 2014); so that we might see aspirations as a way to uncover this process of engagement. Drawing on Appadurai's (2004) capacity to aspire, Howson (2014) sees aspirations as socially determined and bounded in the specificity of social location. From a gender perspective, they thus 'represents the expression of the difference between what men can achieve and what men should achieve' (Howson 2014, 27). In other words, they capture the symbolic tension between hegemonic masculinity as an ideal and the reality of participants' lives. According to Kabesh (2013), this tension creates a 'visceral anxiety' of being not the 'man' one is expected, or 'aspires', to be. We can see this in Yonas' narrative. As soon as he approached the age of conscription, Yonas was confronted by feelings of anxiety, and fear about his future. At this point, we should ask: what kind of man would Yonas become if he stayed in his home country? What other possibilities are there for him to negotiate a different path?

[35] On this matter, I am influenced by Trąbka and Wojnicka when they argue that Connell should give more attention to 'the processual character of both hegemony and masculinity' (Trąbka and Wojnicka 2017, 146).

To answer the latter question, Yonas is ready to face and embrace further risks. One morning, after spotting military operations near his school, aimed at gathering young people at the age of conscription, Yonas decides that the time has come for him to flee. The young man is aware that he will not be the same after this decision. It is a painful separation from his family, as he left without saying goodbye. Instead of entering his school, he ran away, eventually reaching the Sudanese border. There he had some personal connections that helped him to cross the border into Sudan despite the serious 'shoot–to–kill' policy in operation (Human Rights Watch 2009) and the dangerousness of the path. The flight began much like as a fugitive in search of '*another life! A better life'*. This quest implies a different masculine trajectory from what it is expected by his government from him as an Eritrean man. 'Another life' means primarily not becoming a soldier. In a way we can read this as way to escape his nationally expected masculine duty of military life and thus the decision to flee opens up the possibility of an alternative gender performance. This however has a great cost: the world he knew so far, his family's house, his cousins with whom he played and sang, his church where he managed to find those fatherly figures he missed for his entire life; all was to be left behind in the promise of a new life. In his narrative, therefore, Yonas' decision to flee can be read as turning point in his life, which mark a profound social rupture. As a result of this, Yonas became a 'man–on–the–move'. The separation from his family, therefore, represents a critical moment of differentiation for his masculine identity in the context of his life–course masculine trajectory.

In the neighbouring country of Ethiopia, Hayat, a military man, was forced to flee after he refused to follow a military order from his superiors. He refused to shoot some anti–government protesters and was subsequently jailed. Abel to flee detention, Hayat faced the necessity of leaving the country. Central to Hayat's motivations is the issue of honour, which impeded him from shooting against his own people, who he was sworn to protect. The participant recalls how his decision was dictated by an 'inner feeling', a sense that what he was doing was 'a duty' for him: 'because before I love my country!'. At this point, it is worth noting the place of military life in his life trajectory as an apical moment in the making of manhood. Hayat joined the army due to the profound love he nurtured for his country, clarifying the ideological texture in which this choice can be located and possibly the masculine discourse that this is situated within. Growing up in a military family, Hayat mentions how he saw a military career as a service for his beloved country and possibly a

source of great honour and prestige. Hayat affirms that he joined the army 'willing' to serve. That is why for him military training was a significant turning point in his existence through which he finally started his life on his own. Prior to that he was depending on his family. Joining the army thus represented a key moment in the transition into manhood. Not only did he gain financial independence, but he was able, working for the government, to have a piece of land on which to buy a house for him and his wife.

> *I feel like a man…responsible…responsible meaning I can take economic responsibilities …I have my own salary, I built a house, a small house…for me!* (Hayat)

Financial independence as a signifier of manhood means further responsibilities towards his family. Hayat asserts that in his culture, becoming a man means 'helping your family', especially the elderly ones and minors. The security of his military salary made this task relatively easy to accomplish.

Hayat's account is pervaded by a sense of nostalgia recounting his life in Ethiopia. Both him and his wife had established careers: *'I was going further with my life, I was improving…my life… to give me a better life!'*. Before the events that triggered migration, he was able to proceed further in his career, becoming in charge of a team; at the same time he had the chance to attend university so that his life was projected towards the future full of hopes and aspirations. This imagined life trajectory, however, was brutally interrupted by the imperative of departure. Refusing to follow his orders, Hayat was accused and incarcerated. At this stage, Hayat expresses his feeling of anger and frustration towards what he feels like a profound injustice. Not only because he was wrongly accused of being a traitor – the worst of accusation for a man who diligently served his country – but also because his life was completely destroyed at once. As a result he was forced to take the road to Europe, but the cost was immense: '*I lost a life! Because here [Sicily] I restarted my life from the beginning…'*. This awareness enacts a complex web of emotions mediated by his masculinity:

> *When I think about, I am sorry. There is regret. Nobody in his life want to go down. I went down!* (Hayat)

The flight is perceived as a degrading, humiliating experience due to the process of downward mobility that this entails; in the case of Hayat's case, it means not only the loss of his job, but also a loss of economic, social, cultural,

symbolic[36] and human capital (van Hear 2006). Hayat insists that he cannot go back in his country and that the other soldiers who refused to follow that order like him disappeared in Ethiopian prisons.

At this juncture, it is important to state that these two participants arrived in Sicily via the CMR, but before the beginning of the 'refugee crisis'. They thus provide an important benchmark for the other stories that follow in this chapter[37], understanding the role of masculinity as a mediating factor in participants' decision making. Yonas fled to negotiate an alternative path to manhood in spite of the hegemonic military model promoted by the Eritrean regime, while Hayat was driven by his sense of honour to be faithful to that ideal of military masculinity that was corrupted by government practices. In both cases, masculinity is central to understanding the vulnerabilities that prompted these men to take the road and become a man–on–the–move. From the beginning, thus, their refugee story emerges as a narrative field through which their masculine identity is performed and upheld in interaction with the audience (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009, 279).

Generalised violence and failure of the rule of law

Lyon left Southern Nigeria at the age of 16, due to problems connected with gang–related violence. In his account he reckons how problems with gangs intersected others factors – he defined what prompted him to flee as 'three different stories' – including issues to do with lack of job opportunities. But the trigger, in his account, was the death threats received by a cult group:

> *I was having a problem with some, some groups of bandits… they'll try to get you into this group…so if they have too much interest in you…then you don't want to come into this group…they keep on disturbing you…it's very very hard… This creates more problem for you! Some people got killed! Through gun shots!...You might get killed through the process…* (Lyon)

Lyon's account mirrors what other Nigerian participants said about the role of what they call 'cultism' in forcing men to flee.

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[36] As Jaji writes: *'Flight entails loss of the status and authority that come with being a husband and father in societies that conceptualize adulthood and confer respectability more on the basis of marital status and parenthood rather than chronological age' (2009, 183).*

[37] The two stories, here, interestingly represent two cases that fit well with the 1951 Refugee Convention framework; both Yonas and Hayat fled political persecution performed by state actors and they were both granted refugee status in Sicily.

> *There is cultism, I don't know if you know what is cultism? A group of guys coming together, and doing a particular thing like saying we are this, we are that…if any guy has a problem with either a cult group, who wants to kill him because he belongs, or he does not belong…because he's forced to join…then he has to flee…* (Ezekiel)

Rotimi (2005) writes that secret cults have always existed in many parts of Nigeria, and sees its proliferation as a product of many decades of military rule in Nigeria and its attendant culture of institutionalized violence. Best and Von Kemedi (2005) argue that these secret cults include 'criminal gangs, spiritual and politically motivated groups seeking power and control, gangs that control waterways and passages, as well as those involved in oil bunkering activities' (Best and Von Kemedi 2005, 21). The major cause for the formation of these groups is either poverty or chronic unemployment among the youth population (Ibrahim 2017). However, drawing on Galtung's concept of 'structural violence'[38] (1969), we know that structural relations of inequalities often translate into everyday forms of interpersonal violence (Gamlin and Hawkes 2018). For these reasons, I think participants are using 'cultism' as an umbrella term for the state of generalised violence and criminal activities associated with growing socio–economic inequalities and frustrated economic opportunities in various parts of Nigeria. Despite Nigeria being Africa's largest economy and one of the fastest–growing in the world, more than half of the Nigerian population is in extreme poverty (Mayah et al. 2017). One of the consequences of these socio–economic inequalities is the spread of violence, criminal activities, and conflicts over the years in many part of the country (Ibrahim 2017).

> *The major trigger is economic issue. After school and don't have job. What will be your mind set? You cannot get married! You cannot raise a family! Now this can trigger somebody to go and do the wrong thing.* (Ezekiel)

[38] Scott–Samuel et al. (2009) considered the impact of hegemonic masculinity in determining unequal social and political relations, which are deleterious for both men and women. On this matter, they argue these effects play an important role in creating and maintaining forms of structural violence. Thus, structural violence helps to uncover these bringing together 'in a single concept issues as diverse as poverty and income inequality, unacceptable living and working conditions, aggressive economic and trade policies, institutionalised forms of discrimination, denial of human rights, sickness or disability caused by unaffordable health care, and the suffering resulting from war and genocide' (Scott–Samuel et al. 2009, 290).

From the literature on violence and masculinity, we know when men and boys are denied access to power and resources necessary for constructing masculinity, they must seek other resources to revalidate their gender project (Messerschmidt 1993). The literature on masculinities, socially excluded youth and gang–related violence explains well this process (Barker 2005). With regards to Nigerian masculinities, Smith (2017) argues that the place of money, as means through which masculinity is evaluated, pushes Nigerian men into a difficult position and renders their lives perilously precarious and insecure. For many men of the Global South, thus, the link between structural and interpersonal violence produces a violence continuum, which impacts on their lives from very early stages (Gamlin and Hawkes 2018). On this matter, another Nigerian participant, King, who fled the country due to the clashes with his wife's family, asserts:

> *Yeah, too much fight in Africa. Every day a problem. Europe is good. You understand. Africa, a lot of problem… If you go to a club, like club, any [Inaudible] like European, there's you with your fellow white man. You cannot fight, we cannot draw blood. If we draw blood, problem! Police will come, arrest two of them, you understand?...But in Africa, no…No, no it's [fight] most every day.* (King)

Evidently, this violence affects men and women differently; but here, participants suggest a direct relation between this continuum of violence and their masculinity in the production of gendered vulnerabilities. Here, I see vulnerability as gendered because it is produced by different patterns of gender relations in their country of origin, implying the men and women experience different form of vulnerability to violence (Boyd and Grieco 2003). These experiences are produced at intersections with other social divisions such as age, class, sexuality and race. In Nigeria, as Ezekiel sums up: 'men are upon to violence…so if you can ask me that is the major reason [why they are fleeing]…now'. The link between masculinity and interpersonal violence in Sub–Saharan Africa needs a few clarifications. We must be aware that the West's engagement with masculine violence in Africa has often served to promote racist discourse that politicizes African men as not fully human (Mbembe 2001). In this regard, far from portraying Africa as a continent pervaded by violence, we need to locate violence on a continuum that affects/generates refugee transnational mobility across the CMR, from refugee home countries to their permanence in Sicily.

Like other participants, Lyon recalls how most of the Nigerian youth coming from southern states across the CMR are escaping this type of continuum of interpersonal violence and social exclusion, while in Europe we are aware only of jihadi terrorist violence perpetrated by Boko Haram. Similarly, Ezekiel argues:

> *I know that everybody knows about the Northern part….it's all about the TV, the news; apart from the Northern part, there is lot of problem in the South… There are more problems than that of Boko Haram. There are problems which are already there before Boko Haram.* (Ezekiel)

Ezekiel is probably referring to long–standing socio–economic inequalities and the colonial divide–and–rule policies resulting in the high segmentation of Nigerian population across ethnic–religious and regional lines (Osaghae and Suberu 2005). This can be seen in the stories of Nigerian participants like King and Onyeka, where clan–based conflicts are the main triggers of forced displacement. In such context, Ezekiel's quote questions the hierarchy of existential threats[39] shaped by the Western asylum regime:

> *Now you come and go to the [asylum] Commission and tell them I flee [because]…. They will not understand! Because they feel it's only when the problem is on the news! That's when the problem is there! That is what the Commission thinks! If you say you're from the North, "ah, yeah! Boko Haram!". Good! They give you documents! But they don't know that there are enough, enough problems!* (Ezekiel)

What Ezekiel is saying connects with long–standing difficulties for Nigerian men to have their asylum claim recognised in Europe (Bagnoli and Civellini 2017). This group of men is usually regarded as economic migrants, without considering the complex nexus between impoverishment, violence and failure of rule of law. In 2017, the recognition rate for First instance decisions on applications presented by Nigerian asylum seekers in the EU was 22.5% (Sturge 2019). Nigerian failed asylum seekers are also those who are more at risk of deportation, Nigeria being one of the few countries that has bilateral agreements for fast–tracking deportations with Italy (Bagnoli and Civellini 2017). Disputing these hierarchies of protection needs associated with the asylum system implies, in my opinion, a contestation of the neglected men's vulnerabilities. Among these failed asylum seekers fleeing gang–related violence is David, who, at the time of the interview, was waiting for his appeal

after a negative First instance decision was issued by the Territorial Commission. Interestingly, his wife who fled with him, was granted a form of protection:

> *[M]y wife, and my baby they were giving [given] document…I alone…I am…I am a refugee!* (David)

David fled his country after he came in possession of a sum of money which exposed him to threats and gang–related violence in his local community. For this reason, his wife was kidnapped by a group of bandits and a ransom was demanded. When David decided to ask for the help of the police, he received a request for money to intervene and got beaten up after he protested.

Eventually, David's wife was released, but he realised that in his country he could not exercise his main masculine duty as a husband. Protecting his wife in the face of such continuum of violence, enacted by poverty, criminality and police corruption becomes almost an impossible task for him. This challenges directly David's position as the 'man' of the family. The masculinity discourse cited in David's account is one culturally located in Christian religious beliefs, based on the Biblical value of marriage as the most important item in a man's life. Here, manhood coincides with the capacity to protect other members of the family. His decision to flee appears to be the product of his inability to meet this expectation.

A central theme in David's account is that this inability is associated with the generalised state of violence affecting his community. In particular, David mentions the failure of the Nigerian state's rule of law and its police corruption. This is a common pattern across West African participants, often signifying the main difference between Europe and Africa. On this matter, Lyons argues:

> *If you have a problem here now, maybe we're siting and you are interviewing me, and I have a problem right now, I can just easily call the police "Excuse just come to this place, I have a problem with someone". And they would come. I didn't pay one dime, I didn't pay a dime for it. I didn't pay one euro, I didn't pay two euro, I didn't pay any money! But in Africa you can't try that! You can't just try that! Because first if you have to call, you can only call, they would tell you "ok, come to the station!". Now they will ask you, now…we want to go now…we need fuel…to fuel our car…you have to be responsible because you have a problem, not them! So you have to pay for the fuel! They will brought [bring] you paper and tell you that*

> *this paper is maybe, let me see, ten euros. You have to pay for it, before we can write on the statement.* (Lyon)

In this case, it is worth asking how the continuum of violence impacts on the construction of their masculinities; meaning what types of gendered discourse are produced as a result of this interrelation. Violence is a central in creating hierarchies of power among men (Connell 2002). In both David and Lyon's stories, fleeing the violence perpetrated by other men appears to affect their capacity to perform credibly masculinity. However, a narrative appears to be created in response to the complex web of emotion associated with their experience of victimisation. Instead of highlighting the capacity of reacting to other men's violent behaviour, participants emphasize their capacity of endurance and resilience as masculine qualities. On this matter, they assert:

> *I made a song…and I tried to say "It's not easy!". It's not easy! I was just talking about the stress, the stress…the hardship of life…the hardship of life… for you to be a man, you just have to work hard! You must pass through stress! You must pass through difficulties! This makes you a man…you have to keep on going, keep on struggling, till you get to your destination…* (Lyon)

> *Life is not always plain! You understand? You must endanger [encounter] some difficulties along! You understand? Before you be a man you must encounter difficulties! So I just believe you have to take these risks ... for you to get where ... will be beneficial to you! You understand? [Inaudible] we must have that in mind! You understand?* (David)

This is a common narrative configuration across my participants. During my visit to a reception centre, Nelson, a Nigerian asylum seeker, summarized this in the phrase: 'To be a man is not one–day job'. This phrase resonated with me until I found out that it was a popular West African saying which was also used as the title of an interesting book on masculinity and money in Nigeria, written by Smith (2017). According to Nelson being a man in his local community 'it's not easy…too much stress'. The word 'stress' brings us to the capacity to cope with masculine expectations, culturally located in participants' pre–flight experiences. In participants' accounts, masculinity is presented as a struggle, with difficulties and stress being beneficial for the making of manhood. This narrative frame is culturally constructed in relation to a traditional discourse of masculinity, which in line with work on African masculinities, sees manhood as a status progressively constructed along the socially legitimized steps (Sinatti 2014). Here, the agentic capacity to endure difficulties, as shown by David and Lyon's quotes, is seen as a central

symbolic necessity of competent manhood (Sinatti 2014, Ricardo and Barker 2005). In this sense, participants' decision to 'take the road' might be read as an adaptive gendered strategy (Broughton 2008) in response to complex social landscapes of their sending communities.

Lack of livelihood opportunities and conflicts over land rights

Bai is the son of a farmer who fled his country due to problems with contested land rights. After the death of his father, Bai recalls, the family became vulnerable in the eyes of the community until a powerful 'uncle' with connections with the government reclaimed the farm for himself, despite it being Bai's family's only source of income. What it is often overlooked by researchers is how the nature of these disputes and intra–familiar conflicts are gendered for young men like Bai. The uncle tried unsuccessfully to marry the widow; when she refused, he and his sons started to threaten and use violence toward Bai and his family. His sister was brutally raped while Bai and his brother were beaten and, thanks to the 'uncle's connections with the government, wrongfully incarcerated.

Bai's story concerning contested land right and intra clan–based conflicts is particularly common for participants coming from West Africa, in particular Gambia and Mali. Doudou, Yaya, Bakary, Moussa and Hakeem, for example, shared with me similar reasons to Bai. The Gambia is a low–income West African country, where agriculture is crucial to the livelihoods of two–thirds of its population (Moseley et al. 2010). Generally, literature recognises Gambians as people fleeing poverty and lack of livelihood opportunities rather than persecution. However, under the regime that ruled the Gambia for more than two decades –and was recently removed– the country has been characterised by a high level of corruption, persecution of minorities, torture and arbitrary detentions (Amnesty International 2018).

According to Amnesty International (2018), Gambian prisons do not meet international standards due to inadequate sanitation, food and access to medical care. This is acknowledged by participants who define their detention experience as profoundly traumatizing.

> *Yes, then we are in the prison for one month…they [the inmates] told me if we don't [escape] we are going to die here. Because there is nobody…like they beat us here is too bad…There is no food, every day they beat us.* (Bai)

> *They [prison guards] maltreated me, they beat me…in sleep…with toilets the place where I eat…one half meter …to sleep an in the sleep…in that room…you do*

> *toilet there…we drink there…we eat there…we urinate there…you do whatsoever in that single…we have like one of….one half–litre cup they will give you every morning…they will give….if you come to that place…they will give you one half–litre cup, that is your toilet…* (Hakeem)

The detention experience was the main trigger in their final decision to flee. Both Hakeem and Bai eventually managed to escape from prison but as fugitives they faced the imperative to leave their country for good. Hakeem recalls the episode with great pathos. Being hospitalized as a result of prison abuses, he managed to escape at night walking for many kilometres in the bush to reach the close Senegalese border:

> *I escaped from the window in hospital…I run in bush… I walked there….but…at night! I was running full night…because it was like… it's like about six, seven hours I was running….and walking hard…[Inaudible] in the bush…because I don't know the streets directly…but in bush, because I can't go with the direct street…then they will see me…* (Hakeem)

Like him, Bai fled also to Senegal with the help of a friend who lent him a small amount of money. The young man recalls the moment when he realized that his only option was the flight, constrained by the fear of being imprisoned again or, even worse, of being found by his uncle's associates: *'I have to go, otherwise they kill me'.*

At this stage it worth remembering that when Bai fled, around 2014, Gambia was one of the main asylum seeker–producing countries. Interestingly, these migrant flows were extremely gendered. According to SPRAR (2017), almost the totality of Gambian asylum seekers in Italy are men. This significant flow of young men to Europe was called by Washington Post's journalist Kevin Sieff (2015) the 'biggest export' of the country. Interestingly, Crawley and Skleparis (2018) argue that in the U.K. Gambians are on the list of those nationalities invariably considered 'migrants'. The country, however, is deemed to be 'safe' by the U.K. only for males. Thus, Gambian men are often subjected to detention and accelerated procedures (Crawley and Skleparis 2018, 52).

Reflecting on why so many young men are fleeing across the Central Mediterranean, Hakeem, a Gambian asylum seeker, states that '*in Gambia men fight for the survival, man fight for anything…My mother she's always home, relaxing…she do nothing…how can she have a problem with the government?... She's always home… Her job is only to provide food for her husband and…'* What Hakeem is trying to say is

that due to profound gender inequalities that affect the lives of Gambian women and confine them in the domestic realm, men are expected to navigate public life which might expose them to forms of criminal/political/intra–familiar violence connected to business–related activities, land rights, or political activism. Much like in the case of Nigerian gang–related violence, it is the fragility of the state and the lack of rule of law that expose young men to this continuum of violence. Women are not immune: the fate of Bai's sister is indicative of this. As Freedman (2016b, 2008) notes, refugee women may face family and conjugal violence, sexual violence, exploitation and human trafficking, underpinned by socioeconomic inequalities.

Although more must be done to tackle gender–specific vulnerability of refugee women, in the case of men, gender is rarely contemplated as a cause of vulnerability to violence. In particular, when it comes to violence perpetrated by non–State actors and happening in private spaces such familial context. The case of Bai illustrates this well; the dimension of violence perpetrated by the uncle against Bai and his brother is gendered and reconnected to his boyhood. As Bai said, with his father still alive, nobody in his local community would have contested his right to the family's piece of land and he would be protected, much like his mother and sister. Similar to Bai, other participants, such as Doudou, Bakary and Yaya, fled their country as a result of intra–familial tensions over land resources. In participants' narratives, these disputes are quintessentially gendered as patterns of violence are activated by the gender status of participants in the family. They are also intergenerational conflicts being usually associated with the death of the father and the claim over the family land advanced by another adult man (usually the figure of the 'uncle' or the 'stepfather'). In these narratives, violence is therefore produced by the inability for the boy to react to the 'uncle's' claim over the family land.

In many societies, masculinity operates as a powerful structure to set a clear demarcation between adults and boys. Masculine authority therefore is strongly associated with the supreme manhood status of the chiefs informed by rigid community hierarchies between the elders and the young (Barker and Ricardo 2005). This can be seen by looking at the figure of the father, described by Bai as a 'big man'[40], a strong farmer, respected by the entire community and kin; on the other hand, two sons are located relationally to

[40] He used the Italian word 'gigante' which literally means giant. I translated it as 'big man' as this is consistent with terms used in literature on African masculinities.

this ideal figure, represented as 'boys' too weak to fight back the uncle's clan. In particular, the older brother is depicted as *'a small person'* who *'does not have any strength*'. The discourse of 'big man'– shared by other participants like Moussa– clarified the dimension of masculinity as a place of imagined superiority and power (Kabesh 2013). Bai is convinced that the uncle would have never made his move if the father were still alive. 'They knew this was his land!" he argues. Talking about the brutal rape of his sister, Bai asserts: *'When my father was alive, nobody, nobody, among them, would have the courage to do this…'* These admissions are particularly painful for Bai, so that the imperative of departure opens up a complex dynamic of meaning making associated with the impossibility of living up to dominant masculine expectations of familial protection. As Ricardo and Barker have observed, in areas where men work primarily in subsistence agricultural production, manhood, marriage and work are highly associated with having access to land (Ricardo and Barker 2005, 6). In rural societies a boy becomes a man when he is able to generate an income, take a wife and establish his family (Townsend 1997, Silberschmidt 2001, Miescher and Lindsay 2003). That is why what came after, as a result of the decision to flee, must be located in relation to the traumatic loss of his father's land, which compromises and affected his masculine trajectory. Talking about the decision to cross the border to Senegal, the young Gambian man asserts: '*Now I must go too. It is that now I have nothing, nothing, to do in here [Gambia].'*

Banna, an 18–year–old Gambian asylum seeker, recalls how after his dad's death he had to divide the farm among a number of brothers, most of them who had their own families established. Being one of the youngest, the loss of the father meant immediate impoverishment for him and his family, with tensions arising among the brothers: '*Because family, every day since my father died, we brought us, it's not easy. It's difficult to be together again. Because everybody now is fighting for him [himself], how to survive with his family. Because my brothers, they are married'*. Banna compares himself to other friends in Gambia who 'have their support' because 'their father is there. Me, my father is not there… So the time he pass away, everything change'. These changes had the primary effect of forcing this 17–year–old boy to abandon his boyhood position in the family and to rapidly transit into manhood/adulthood. This entails financial responsibility towards other members of his family of origin – especially toward his elderly mother.

Presenting the motivations why he left, Banna recounts a conversation with his mother: *'I said, 'Mom, I'm going to hustle for find for my own.'* The choice of the verb 'hustle' indicates the masculinity project associated with the flight. His

masculine boyhood position is constructed in relation to his brothers who are married and therefore have responsibility towards their wives and children. Interestingly, Banna affirms that if he were married, it would be a problem for him to migrate. Marriage is presented as a key signifier of masculinity which marks the definitive passage into manhood across the life course. That is, because, as argued by, Cresswell and Uteng (2008) narratives of mobility and immobility play a central role in the production of gender difference as a social and cultural construct. However, Banna, much like Bai, presents this as something too far from him to achieve at the beginning of the migration enterprise, as the possibility of getting married first entails the ability of gaining financial independence, through work or property ownership. In both Bai and Banna's narratives, lack of livelihood opportunities in their home country means that these men are unable to complete this key life–course transition.

Masculine trajectories activated by the decision to migrate

Following participants, as gendered actors, in their pre–migration phase, we have highlighted how the decision to migrate activates a specific set of gendered meanings; mostly associated with participants' gender–specific stages in the life cycle and status/roles within families (Boyd and Grieco 2003). Based on these expectations, migration can be configured and interpreted by those who undertake it as a project over time (Kõu et al. 2015, Kõu and Bailey 2014).

At this point, it is important to acknowledge how in many Sub–Saharan African communities, migration is a socially and culturally sanctioned strategy for male youth to negotiate a trajectory toward manhood (Jónsson 2008, Sinatti 2014, Erulkar et al. 2009). Through migration, young men can acquire the socio–economic and cultural resources necessary to perform competent masculinity (Ricardo and Barker 2005). In participants' narratives, I see this cultural discourse[41] interacting with the events that triggered the flight. This is a complex relationship as it directly challenges the West's dichotomy of voluntary–involuntary migration. On the contrary, it highlights that migration involves both aspirations and constraints (Carling 2014). This model is particularly fit for participants like Banna, Razak, Ousmane and Dramane,

[41] On this matter, I am influenced by Hammack and Cohler's work (2009) on narrative engagement and human development. The two scholars argue that a life course perspective should embrace the co–constitutive nature of culture and identity. Thus, when combined with a narrative approach, the life course approach reveals the significance of discourse and master–narratives in orienting individual performance (Hammack and Cohler 2009).

who fled for lack of livelihood opportunities. But it can be extended to those fleeing violence and persecution. As Yonas case exemplifies, the journey to safety involves a quest for masculine realization which inhabits the complex decision making associated with the flight.

For these reasons, I propose to see participants' refugee experience as a rite of passage into manhood as a proxy for social adulthood (Ricardo and Barker 2005). Transitions to adulthood in developing economies are different from those in industrialised countries and are likely to be undertaken using different strategies (Azaola 2012). Blum (2007) argues that Sub–Saharan African youth are experiencing rapid social change, but they remain the most disadvantaged in both the developing and the industrialised worlds; poverty, high level of unemployment, lack of education opportunities, the highest prevalence of HIV in the world, maternal mortality, are among the major issues impacting young people in Sub–Saharan Africa. The region continues to be characterized by such deficiencies as a political landscape dominated by civil war, corruption, and totalitarian regimes (Blum 2007).

Given the life history approach of the study, I am influenced by Hammack and Toolis (2014, 43) in seeing adulthood not as stage of biological maturation but rather as a social and cultural discourse to which participants orient their personal narratives. As argued in the previous sections, in participants' narrative this discourse is extremely gendered and linked to hegemonic masculinity. According to Vlase (2018), indeed, the key passage from boyhood to manhood captures the progress of masculinity from childhood to adulthood. This involves different societal expectations regarding the performance of masculine identities at young and adult ages. Therefore, such gendered transition marks a pivotal passage in men's life courses and end up to irreversibly shape their present and future biographies (Stauber 2006).

Oumar, an 18–year–old international protection holder, who fled Guinea Cornaky after his elder brother was killed in a youth protest against the government. This created a masculine, breadwinning void in the family. When he turned 16 years old, found himself being the oldest of numerous brothers, feeling the responsibility to search for better economic opportunities in order to be able to help his family.

> *Now I am grown up….there is no work [opportunities] to stay there, [it is] hard for me! Because [I] want to help my mama and dad, and all of my brothers so…* (Oumar)

By looking at his life story, Oumar locates himself as a 'bambino' (child) in the context of the journey. 'When I left my country, [I was] young…I am [was] a child'. When I asked if for this reason he was afraid to confront such a difficult journey, Oumar replies: 'I am thinking about my future, just this!' That is why Oumar told his mother 'If I stay here, I don't do anything'. The journey is presented, like in the case of Banna, as a window of opportunity, one of the few available, for this Guinean young man:

> *If I think about my future…really I never attended school in my country, never!...if I think about them [his brothers], maybe it is compulsory [to take the road] to achieve my appointments [goals]…so I think if I [had] stayed there still…difficult very difficult.* (Oumar)

In Oumar's story, age and his gender role in the family appears to be a key factor in framing his decision to leave and helps to locate the migratory experience in relation to the wider life story. The young men recalls how both his parents and friends were not supportive of his decision due to his young age and the risks associated with the journey. In particular, his father considered Oumar too young to take the road. However, his mother told him: *'Oumar…you are still a child! But if you say it is compulsory that you must go, I cannot say you can't go, because you are a male! …now you are also the oldest among my sons, among males [the oldest among my male offspring] …so you have responsibilities towards your brothers!'.*

In this extract, the powerful link between masculinity, age and responsibility in determining the structure of gendered propensities and vulnerabilities, which affects who leaves and who stays, is evident. Interestingly, Oumar's mother considered him too young but she recognised the migratory choice as compatible with his masculine trajectory. This indicates the gendered opportunities (Sinatti 2014) associated with the journey across the CMR. But also the gendered constraints that 'push' a young participant like Oumar on one of the most difficult migration routes in the world. That is why, at one point, he affirms: 'it is compulsory that you must go'. The perceived risk associated with his permanence in Africa, namely being stuck in a prolonged status of boyhood, appears to be greater than facing the odds of the migration arena. This is, first of all, a risk of economic marginalization for the entire family. Indeed, the mother reminds Oumar of his responsibility toward his younger brothers as the eldest of her male offspring. Secondly, at the individual level, it is a risk of social marginalization into a boyhood position,

and therefore, being incapable of marrying and establishing a family as expected from an adult man (Barker and Ricardo 2005).

The frame of rite of passage into manhood (Monsutti 2007) is produced in response to the structural forces that prompted participants to flee; but it also reflective of the profound economic asymmetries between their countries of origin and Europe. Central to participants' narratives is the view of Europe as an idealised space of opportunities.

Yaya, another Gambian young man, who fled his country due to clashes with his step–father over land rights, asserts, '*I heard that people used to go to this journey…people say "when you come to Europe, if you can play a football, when you come to Europe, eh …you can make a lot of money! Be a millionaire like other footballers"*. For many participants, successful stories of African players in European leagues such as Didier Drogba or Samuel Eto'o emerge as a point of reference in which locating the desired trajectory toward hegemonic masculinity (Vlase 2018) associated with the journey. Similarly, Malick, another young Gambian young participant, said: '*I hear many things in [about] Europe…. Because I know in Europe if you behave, unless…you can get the things you want to do.'*

Differently to Yaya, Malick is from a middle–class family; his father, who had a job in the government, had a driver who brought Malick to school every day. A clash with the government forced his whole family to flee and lose everything. His mother went to Ethiopia. The young man did not want to stay in Africa as a result of his flight; in Gambia he had a comfortable life, and he knew that in other African countries this would not difficult to achieve. Based on these grounds, the Gambian participant decided to not follow his mother in Ethiopia, proceeding instead toward Europe. Much like Yaya, the aspirational trajectory towards competent manhood appears to be associated with access to economic resources and livelihood opportunities. From the beginning, for participants, the refugee experience appears as a gendered arena wherein to realize these instrumental and identity goals (Broughton 2008).

In this respect, we need to outline a further difference between younger participants and participants, like Hayat, David or Kams, who had already transited into manhood in their pre–migration life, having married and established their own family. Crivello writes that 'the relationship between biological age and social age is complex and is produced and practiced in culturally–specific ways, yet embedded in both local and global systems of power and hierarchy' (Crivello 2009, 4). Given the cultural significance of marriage as a definitive transition into African adulthood (Sinatti 2014; Baker

and Ricardo 2005), in both Hayat and David's stories, the refugee experience is not an arena where one can transit into socially recognised manhood; on the contrary, it becomes a contested space wherein one can deal with the loss of status associated with the flight.

Travelling with his wife from the very beginning, David appears to confront this loss and failure by proving his capacity of 'protecting and providing for' his wife in the context of his refugee story. This capacity will be the central theme in David's masculine performance. Similarly, for Hayat, migration is perceived as a degrading, humiliating experience due to the process of downward mobility that this entails, which in Hayat's case, means not only the loss of his job, but also a loss of economic, social, cultural, symbolic and human capital (van Hear 2006). A well–educated military man, who was in charge of a team, as he highlights in his interview, suddenly found himself immersed in a process of downward mobility. Under these circumstances, from the beginning, the flight expresses a personal crisis associated with an abrupt loss of masculine status– which both Hayat and David felt they had achieved in their pre–migration lives. Thus, the refugee experience emerges as a site for renegotiating and reconstructing competent masculinity in relation to this original loss.

Although a different dynamic that gender and age enacts in relation to participants' life trajectory can be grasped, the rite of passage frame associated with the refugee experience involves negotiating, symbolically and ideally, a route to manhood. That is why, for both married and unmarried participants, despite the diverse range of drivers, the decision to flee is always thus invested in an active masculinity project (Connell 2005) through which the hegemonic masculine ideal can be negotiated as men–on–the–move. Here, I argue that gender is key mediating factor in prompting these men to migrate along the CMR instead of remaining in the Sub–Saharan African region.

Gendered expectations associated with mobility along the Central Mediterranean Route

Issa is a Senegalese participant who refused to disclose the reason why he left home. I have reason to think that this was associated with a particularly traumatic experience. On this matter, he argues:

> *A serious problem…I mean…I had…I didn't come here [Sicily]…to sleep…to eat…to go out…to dance…no! Uh I am a man, understand? And…I have to…I have…[my] projects!* (Issa)

Like Issa asserts, 'being a man', or better 'becoming a man', involves projects, aspirations, and responsibilities. Once on the move, the same masculine expectations located in the pre–migration phase are therefore reconfigured in relation to the social possibilities of the flight. Here, given the primary aim of storytelling is to provide a sense of agency (Jackson 2013), we need to make a clarification on how we theorize the relation between the individual and the social landscape of the CMR.

Following the recollection of participants' experience along their refugee stories requires seeing them as purposive actors, embedded in particular social and historical circumstances (Turton 2003, 15) of mobility. In this context, I am influenced by Mainwaring's (2016) reading of migrant agency as 'room for negotiation' in relation to structural forces and changing landscapes. Far from presenting agency as a matter of mere free will or choice, this approach grasps this situated room of manoeuvre (Anderson and Ruhs 2010) associated with participants' social location as displaced men in Sub–Saharan Africa. By doing this, we are able to uncover the gendered meaning that they assign to their northward migration trajectories. For this reason, I see the mobility experience along the CMR as a 'gendered enterprise'.

The term 'gendered enterprise' is used by Connell (2005, 187) in her book 'Masculinities' to illustrate the gendered dimension of colonial empire where men were at the forefront of its bureaucracy and military personnel. Connell's use, in my understanding, is much more oriented toward grasping the gendered structural features of the 'empire', as a system. Although one could argue that the migration complex across the CMR is a gendered enterprise in Connell's terms, as men occupy all the positions of powers, my use of 'gendered enterprise' is completely oriented at the individual level. Here, I want to highlight the refugee experience as an active masculine project for men–on–the–move. I use the term 'enterprise' to underline the complexity and fragmentation of this project in relation to patterns of fractured mobility and continued displacement associated with CMR (Wittenberg 2017). This involves undertaking a journey across different stages while confronting multiple existential threats. The gendered enterprise frame thus does not imply that transit across CMR is a unitary experience from sending countries to point of arrival in the EU. On the contrary, it aims to locate these patterns of obstructed mobility in relation to participants' narrative engagement (Hammack 2011) with hegemonic masculinity discourse.

For African men, as argued by Pasura and Christou, masculine competence is not simply 'a measure of one's economic and/or social capital but also of morality and proper norms of gendered behaviour as well as maintaining transnational obligations' (Pasura and Christou 2009 12). Most participants, indeed, recount how the family left behind expect to receive financial support once they were on the move despite the dire condition of the flight. Obligations are also particularly strong with regards to mothers especially when the father is dead, or in polygamous households where the father has responsibilities to numerous wives and children (Sinatti 2014). From the beginning, the imperative of earning money as a resource to perform competent masculinity across transnational relations interacts with issues to do with personal safety and the search for a sanctuary.

After leaving Gambia, Banna thought that Mali would be the right place to start a new life; the plan was to bring his brother with him and start some business together. After transiting through Senegal, he entered Mali and started selling clothing and shoes on the street; unfortunately, things were not going well and Banna was even tempted to go back home to his mother. In that moment, one of the older migrant men with whom he was sharing a house warned him: 'you are a man, you have to hustle'. Banna recalls this as the reason why he moved further to Libya in search of better livelihood opportunities:

> *I need to just to go further because Mali also was difficult… The place I was in Mali, I came with my friend to Burkina. I tell him that now I want to go to Libya. So people are working in Libya. So I try to go to Libya because there are people are building their compounds again. So I say let me go to Libya, maybe I will hustle there, also.* (Banna)

In line with Banna's quote, compared to other African states, Libya emerges across the sample as a place where essential resources for constructing 'competent' masculine performance – such as high salaries and better job opportunities – can be found.

> *Then….that place [Mauritania]…why I leave it….friends influenced me to come…they told me that Libya is more better than here…that Libya is more nicer than here… Libya, these dinars…you know…* (Hakeem)

> *One of my friends, one of my colleagues, he come, he said, "There's work in Libya," I should come in Libya. I said, "Okay no problem".* (King)

Because I met a friend over there, so he was trying to tell me that there was one man that he just take people to Libya. You go there, you work... I say okay, why not take that chance. So I took that chance and I came to Libya. (Evans)

That's why my brother said to me "we must proceed! We have to go!" "Where?" "Anywhere. People are going to Libya because there are a lot of jobs." That's why we left Senegal. We went to Mali, Burkina Faso and Niamy [Niger]. (Ebrima)

Participants recall how the decision to go to Libya was influenced by other fellow male travellers, signifying the gendered dominant narratives operating across these routes. I see these as connected to the historicity of Sahara as a transit zone for people on both side of the Sahara (de Haas 2006). Being at the centre of old trans–Saharan routes, Libya has been a major destination country for many Arab and Sub–Saharan African men in search of jobs within the ambitious programmes of economic and social development associated with the increasing oil wealth in the 70s (Hamood 2006, Triulzi 2012). Following the perceived lack of support from fellow Arab countries during the embargo, Colonel Gaddafi during the 1990s embraced and encouraged this labour migration flow as part of his new pan–African agenda, which aimed at strengthening Libyan relations with African countries (de Haas 2006, Hamood 2006). 1.5 million Sub–Saharan workers were attracted by this open door policy to sustain the economic growth of the country and soon came in contact with the southern regions of Mediterranean Europe (Triulzi 2012). As a result of the repressive anti–migrant policies the Schengen countries imposed on their North African allies like Libya, these ancient trans–Saharan routes were reshaped by the new geopolitical circumstances, making Libya one of the major migration hubs in the world and the main entry point for irregular crossing into the European Union (Triulzi 2012, 7). As argued by Schapendonk, 'Markets for border control actually reinforce markets for migration facilitation, and vice versa' (Schapendonk 2018 664). As a result of this a large network of smuggling agents and intermediaries now populate this arena (UNODC 2018, Andersson 2014). According to UNODC (2018) migrant smuggling along the CMR is a male dominated business, making masculinity a central frame of interaction.

Much like other participants, Yonas initially considered Sudan as a possible place of relocation, suddenly realising that his aspirations and objectives – specifically with regards to education – could not be realised in the camps at the border with Eritrea.

> *I thought once in Sudan my life will be realized…I can start…instead no! Once in Sudan I found I cannot go to school* (Yonas)

He thus decided to move onwards to Khartoum, a city with more opportunities. There, he met with one of the many smugglers' agents which overcrowd Khartoum's cafes and streets[42]. Yonas recalls that, talking about the risks of the crossing, at one point the agent said:

> *"What kind of man are you if you are afraid? You got out from your country to stay here in Sudan where there is nothing?"* (Yonas)

Recognising the manipulative strategy behind this statement, we can see the agent in his speech is making two considerations. First of all, he is implying that a man who is in fear cannot be considered a 'real man'. This is a powerful discourse for young boys like Yonas, who aim to transition into manhood/adulthood. Secondly, the agent says that in Sudan, Yonas will not be able to improve his livelihood, interrogating that masculine quest of self–realization around work, future and money associated with traditional gender discourse. This is similar to what West African participants are saying about being 'influenced' by other travellers on the grounds that Libya is place where finding plenty of livelihood opportunities. In both discourse, masculinity ideal offers a cultural template to make meaning of mobility in terms of masculine competence. In face of these performative necessities, mainly associated with the process of alignment to hegemonic masculinity (Connell 2005), the traveller has to accept these risks as part of his gendered enterprise:

> *Actually they [the agents] make you realise that there is nothing, no future there [in Sudan]. And then you are truly afraid of the risk, because you are aware of the risks that there are, it is not like if you don't know! But at one point you have no choice!* (Yonas)

As argued above this requires a reflexive engagement with masculine ideals and codes. For these reasons, as Yonas' encounter with the smuggling agent points out, I see the CMR as providing a rich landscape of meaningful symbols associated with traditional masculinity discourse. These should, once again, be understood in relation to the structural instabilities and uncertainties that prompted participants to flee. The crossing into Libya, like in a rite of

[42] According to UNODC (2018), smugglers constantly advertise their services in railway stations, cafes or bazaars where migrants can be found. This mirrors Yonas' account.

passage scenario, offers participants an opportunity to engage with tropes of masculine competence such as courage, strength, mastery and risk–taking. The literature on masculinity and health has provided insights into the processes that lead to men preferring facing risk and physical discomfort rather than be associated with traits which could be perceived to be feminine, such as vulnerability, dependence and weakness (Courtenay, 2000), illustrating the way in which masculinity operates within an informal but powerful ideology of gender difference (Evans et al. 2011). In the next chapter, I will directly link the realization of the masculine engagement paradigm (Janssen 2007) to the gendered enterprise, highlighting the performative role of 'test' in the doing of masculinity.

Conclusions

In this chapter, I explored the role of masculinity in shaping people's decision to flee and their further onward mobility. Instead of providing a static analysis of these, I connected them to the performance of masculinity located in participants' personal narratives with a life course approach. By doing this, we grasp the gendered meanings men–on–the–move assign to the events that prompt them to leave their homes; and the gendered expectations that the flight embodies from the beginning.

Moreover, influenced by feminist research on refugee women, exploring migration choices and decisions in relation to gender–specific stages in the life course and gender roles within the family, we are able to illuminate the gendered vulnerabilities affecting men and boys in the pre–migration phase. The three scenarios I presented – political violence and state persecution, generalised violence and failure of the rule of law, lack of livelihood opportunities and conflicts over land rights – are indicative of different political and socio–economic circumstances affecting both men and women across Sub–Saharan Africa. Here, participants' accounts suggest a key relationship between violence victimisation and masculinity as a trigger of displacement. Such relationship is often overlooked by refugee regime and discourse.

In particular, this chapter provides insight into how men and boys are also subjected to violence and existential threats in private domains such as the family. Focusing on the relational character of violence allows us to reveal those men who are at the receiving end of this violence continuum (Løvgren 2015, 18); challenging gender essentialist narratives that see men only as perpetrators and violence as a necessary part of male socialization. If we

accept this premise, then we can examine vulnerability as a category of masculinity in the context of transnational mobility and forced migration.

Moreover, recognising the diverse and shifting circumstances that prompted participants to flee (Crawley and Skleparis 2018) we can grasp how masculinity informs, and complicates, participants decision making. I view such similarities across the sample as produced by the fact that hegemonic masculinity requires all men to position themselves in relation to it (Howson 2014). Here, individual aspiration reveals the dimension of the migration project as a gendered enterprise, where the refugee man undertakes a quest for masculine realization and recognition as a result of the flight.

Within this framework of gendered mobilities, age and marital status help to contextualize the meaning of such quest. For unmarried young men, the gendered enterprise entails a transition into manhood, as proxy for social adulthood (Barker and Ricardo 2005), in response to the structural forces that prompted them to flee. For married men the flight might involve a parallel process: an opportunity to renegotiate masculinity as a result of loss of status associated with the imperative of departure. In both cases, the refugee journey signifies a critical moment of transition and differentiation for their masculine trajectories. Therefore, the decision to flee always entails an active masculinity project (Connell 2005) through which a 'road' toward manhood can be negotiated. In this context, the CMR emerges as a landscape of meaningful symbols associated with the process of engagement with hegemonic masculinity (Howson 2014). I view this as produced by the historical patterns of gendered mobility in the Sahara region and the smuggling industry's modus operandi. In the next chapter, I will locate this process of engagement with hegemonic masculinity in relation to one of the key experience emerging from participants' refugee stories: the crossing through Libya.

CHAPTER FIVE. Men's Journey towards Europe

The interview with Dramane, an 18–year–old Malian who fled for lack of livelihood opportunities, happened in a corner of the refugee centre's kitchen on a sunny spring day. The light Sicilian weather conflicted with the themes of the interview as soon as we started talking about the journey through Libya. Like all participants, Dramane argues that the crossing through the North African country was 'too difficult to bear'. It was an answer I was prepared to receive. During the last eight months, I had witnessed and observed the effects of Libya on participants. Not only in terms of physical scars, but most importantly, on their mental health. What I remember clearly is the change in their eyes as soon as they would start recounting this phase of their journey: 'Crossing into Libya, my god, is too difficult! Problems! Because there is war there…they are all divided [in factions], so…and [there are] armed group, the people [there] so… they all try to make money for themselves'. At this point, Dramane explains that these armed group are not associated with the official Libyan government so they can do 'whatever they want' to travellers like him. In this context, I see Dramane's statement on the 'difficulties' of the journey as a way to express the vulnerabilities associated with his condition as an illegal migrant in Libya. In Libya, entering (or exiting) the country without the appropriate visa or through unofficial border posts is a crime, with no distinction between voluntary and involuntary migration (Amnesty 2013). The vulnerable position of irregular migrants seems to have worsened due to the political instability and ongoing conflict in the context of the post–Gaddafi scenario. Dramane, indeed, mentions directly the proliferation of armed group as the main source of risk for people–on–the–move. At this point, the young Malian participant seems to make meaning of the vulnerabilities associated with irregular migration as part of his masculine trajectory. When Dramane arrived in Libya he was just a child. But as he would explain to me, someone who passes through that experience cannot be a child anymore. This is how the journey changed him: '[A] man must think…today I die or I live…understand? Always thinking this!...if you are a man, you have to think….today I live or I die, you don't have to be afraid'.

In the previous chapter, I illustrated how based on the gender expectations posited by my participants' decision to migrate the refugee experience emerges as a rite of passage into manhood. Here, the journey across the CMR provides men with a landscape of meaningful symbols associated with hegemonic masculinity. Based on Dramane's account, following participants' narrative of crossing we can thus explore the unfolding of the process of

engagement (Connell 2005) with these masculine symbolic necessities such as courage, mastery and risk–taking. The rite of passage frame, symbolically captured by the frame of the gendered enterprise, requires thus action and recognition; without a test, there cannot be confirmation (Davis 2003).

In this chapter, by looking at how participants located themselves as 'men' in their stories of crossing through Libya, my aim is to uncover how men navigate the complexities associated with crossing through Libya and its implications for their masculine identities. By doing this, we can illuminate the relationship between gender and vulnerability, illuminating not only that men are vulnerable too, but also how these vulnerabilities are produced in their transit experience along the CMR. In particular, due to the fact that intermediaries, smugglers, drivers, armed groups and militias are all men, we can further note the gendered practices of the illegality industry (Andersson 2014) and how these shape men's experience of violence in Libya. Lastly, in the final part of the chapter, I will engage with how make meaning of these vulnerabilities as part of their personal narratives. This will provide an understanding of the gender expectations they associate with their new life in Europe.

Negotiating border crossing into Libya

The Mediterranean borderlands is a complex space of mobility in many directions (Mountz and Loyd 2014). Libya has been a key hub for movement across the region for many years (Hamood 2006) due to its geographical location at the centre of the transnational migratory routes of what Brachet calls a 'cosmopolitan desert' (Brachet 2009). Authors like Andersson (2014), Streiff–Fénart and Segatti (2012), Scheele and McDougall (2012) and Bensaâd (2007, 2005a) have illustrated the historical dimension of the Sahara as a cosmopolitan space of transit. Triulzi (2012) argues that these mobility flows across the Sahara were accentuated in the last forty years by the worsening environmental and economic conditions and multiple conflicts flaring up throughout the Sahelian region. Starting with pastoral nomads from Niger and Mali in the mid–1970s, across the years a number of Central and West African agriculturalist and urbanized youth and refugees from Eastern Africa found in the Sahara a space for livelihood opportunities – mostly associated with the oil industry. Due to restrictive anti–migrant policies implemented by European Union member states, these travellers found in the area a network of illegal routes to Europe (Triulzi 2012). According to Bensaâd (2007, 51–52) these renewed trans–Saharan corridors directly linking black Africa and the Mediterranean made the Sahara both a 'suburb' and an outpost of the European border regime, where illegal migrants should be stopped.

Due to its proximity to Malta and Italy, Libya assumed a strategic position in this context. Depending on the circumstantial political convenience, Libya has assumed the role of defender of the EU fortification process or a crack into its system. Colonel Gaddafi has been the best interpreter of this ambivalence, capitalizing both financially and in terms of his international image on Libya's potential policing role against illegal immigration from the Global South to Europe (FIDH 2012). Since the 2000s, following the improvement of multilateral (EU–Maghreb) and bilateral relations (Libya–Italy), Colonel Gaddafi aimed at negotiating a role for his country in the EU external border control project, capitalizing on migration flows management from Sub–Saharan countries in exchange for money (Bredeloup and Pliez 2011, FIDH 2012). The 2008 Treaty on Friendship, Partnership and Cooperation between Italy and Libya marked a turning point in this sense: the number of sea arrivals on Lampedusa from Libya decreased from 20,655, between August 2008 and 31 July 2009, to 403 during the same period in 2009/2010 (FIDH 2012, 14).

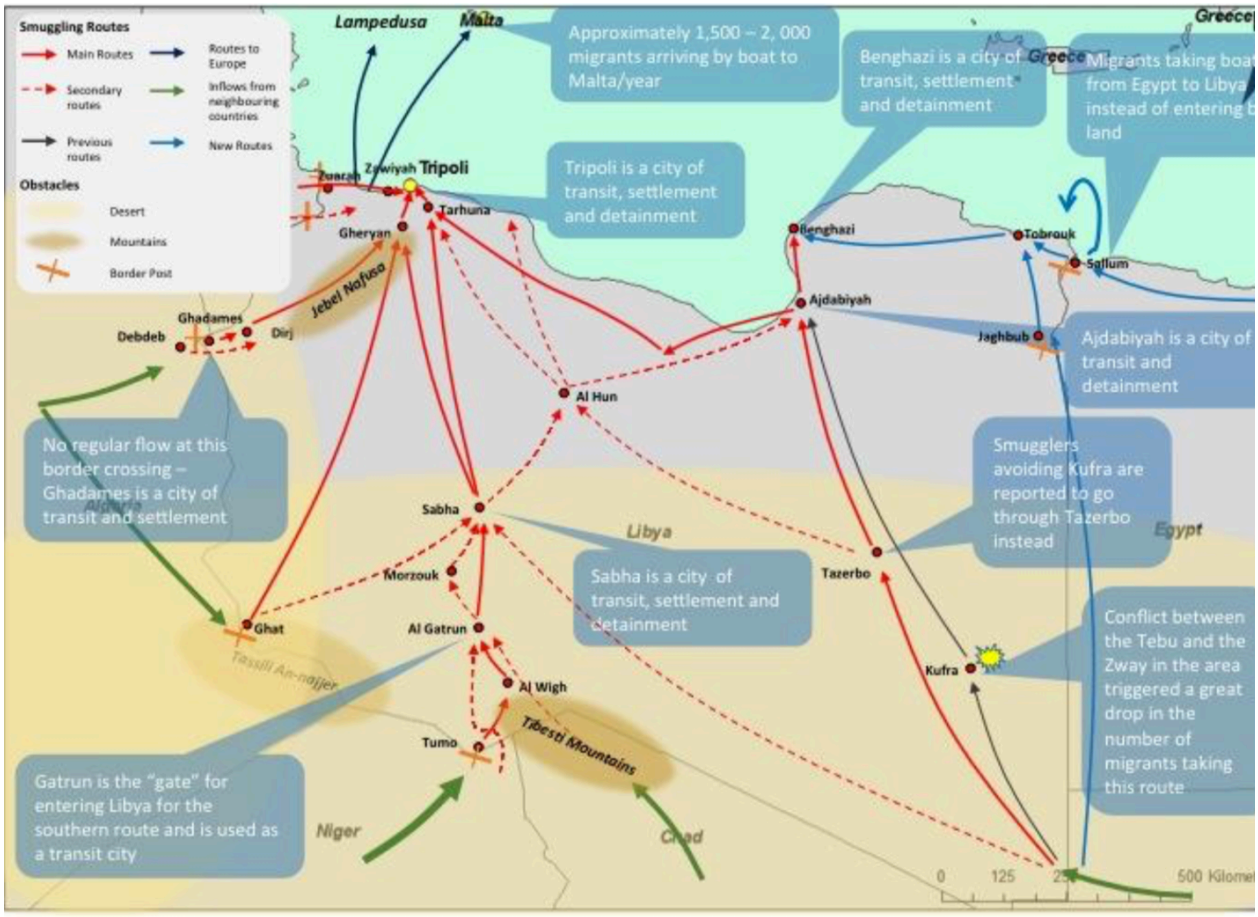
After the collapse of the Libyan regime, the country became a key hub for smugglers' networks. In particular, as a result of the EU–Turkey Agreement, post–Gaddafi Libya became the main entry point into Fortress Europe for hundreds of thousands migrants and refugees travelling undocumented across the Mediterranean Routes. Although, authors like Cole (2013) rightfully note, the control of Libyan Southern borderlands by the Tripoli central government was never full, many NGOs and other actors, including the United States Department of State (2017), argue that smuggling networks are proliferating due to the collapse of the Libyan judicial system associated with Gaddafi's fall.

At this point, it is important to highlight that Libya is not a signatory member of the UN Refugee Convention; however, it is a member of the OAU Refugee Convention, which calls on signatories to accede to the UN Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol (Hamood 2006, 19). The Law n°19 of 2010 related to the combating of irregular migration allows for indefinite detention of irregular migrants, followed by deportation (Amnesty 2013). Access by land from Niger, Chad, Sudan and Algeria is exclusively reserved for nationals from these states unless special authorisation is given (Al–Atrash et al. 2013).

The lack of legal opportunities to enter the country makes the journey to Libya characterised by complex and fractured mobility with extensive periods of immobility, detention and waiting (Schapendonk and Steel 2014). According to Hamood (2006, 43) the journey entails three stages: a desert crossing through the Saharan borderlands, traveling within Libya from the frontier to the northern coastal towns and cities, and a boat trip across the Mediterranean Sea to Italy. The consequence of this fractured mobility is the length of the journey. McMahon and Sigona (2018) write that disjunctive journeys could extend over many months or years before reaching 'a final destination'. As Ezekiel recounts:

> *[The journey] was very long, you should know…you get to Niger, you stay in Niger for some time…For three months I stayed there before I got in the desert… I stayed in the desert one week!...I stayed in Libya for one year and twenty–one days.* (Ezekiel)

Map Routes within Libya



Source: Altai Consulting (2013)

Participants negotiated passage into Libya via three main entry points: Niger, Algeria and Sudan. The city of Agadez– historically an ancient crossroads of trans–Saharan trade routes – emerges as a key hub for West and Central African migrants (de Aguilar Hidalgo 2018). In particular, for West Africans entering Niger is theoretically a 'smooth' journey due to the free movement policies within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) [43] (Wittenberg 2017). This is acknowledged by participants compared to their experience of entering Europe where the hard border is much more evident; however, travellers are often being forced to pay off border patrol officers to reach Libya. As Hakeem recalls, "If you ever see a checkpoint, [you] have to pay [the police]". Once in Agadez, people–on–the–move find a well–established smuggling network, often led by former Tuareg rebels or former Sub–Saharan migrants, which take advantage of the porosity

[43] Current member states are: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Côte D'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo.

of desert borders (de Aguilar Hidalgo 2018). Here, cattle trucks or pickups periodically take migrants mainly to the Sebha oasis in Libya (de Aguilar Hidalgo 2018). Finding the right 'driver'– or smuggler – is a decisive task in the desert passage.

> *When we arrived in Agadez we had to find a driver. The driver must be Libyan. There is no government right now in Libya, people are fighting on the streets. You need to find a Libyan as driver so he can negotiate with criminals in the streets. When you are there, he can tell them "I brought these men, here". Black Libyans usually are the drivers.* (Ebrima)

Ezekiel clarifies that these drivers are usually Chadians; he argues that 'they are not really full Libyans'; meaning that they are black Africans. Some West African participants, like Bakary, Konaté and Doudou, entered in Libya via Algerian border. The journey from Mali to Algeria, according to Doudou, is equally complex. In his case, it involved walking long distance at night with the fear of being intercepted by rebels. Once in Algeria, Doudou found a safe passage to Libya with the help of an Arab man. The man smuggled Doudou in Libya as his 'worker'. The young Gambian participant argues that he did not have to pay the 'Arab man'. The negotiation, however, was conducted by another fellow traveller who spoke Arab and took Doudou under his protection.

For Eritreans, Ethiopians and Somalis, traveling from the Horn of Africa, the key hub is usually Khartoum, the capital of Sudan. The main route for smuggling is the one that connects to the Kufra District in South–eastern Libya; another alternative is to enter the country via Egypt (Altai Consulting 2013). Compared to ECOWAS countries, smuggling became the dominant mode of mobility because most migrants have to break immigration laws to cross international borders within the region (Horwood 2014). This makes the journey less safe and more clandestine. For Eritreans, for instance, this involves the crossing of a highly militarized border with the risk of being shot or arrested. Once in Sudan, people from the Horn of Africa may be vulnerable to kidnapping, abduction or detention by local tribes and criminal groups (Altai Consulting 2013, Trulzi 2012) and they have to constantly negotiate onward mobility with different actors[44] in the area. Yonas argues that his journey through the desert took one month.

[44] In his study on Ethiopian refugees' journeys through Libya, Triulzi writes: '*The long journey in fact, was broken into continually negotiated tracts, travelling migrants being retained and freed alternatively by different 'captors' and 'saviours', under the changeable guise of guide, mediator or policeman'.* (Triulzi 2012, 224)

A dangerous journey through the Sahara

In participants' accounts, the experience of desert crossing through Libyan border is depicted as an extremely dangerous journey associated with multiple life–threatening situations. This is expressed in relation to three main themes: the wilderness of the Sahara, the dangerousness of smuggling practices and the chaotic lawlessness associated with post–Gaddafi scenario.

With average temperatures of 38 degrees Celsius (Black et al. 2017) in the day and extreme cold at night, in participants' narratives, the desert is described as a place of hardship and extreme conditions. David, for example, described the desert as the Biblical cursed land: 'Desert is a cursed land! In the Bible! You know that the desert is a cursed land! Whereby you can't find any living thing! You understand?'. Ezekiel asserts that one day in the desert is '…like two hundred years!'

Beside the extreme conditions of the Sahara, the confrontation of the wilderness is exacerbated by the dangerous smuggling practices of migrant convoys. According to the majority of participants, desert crossing into Libya happens usually in overcrowded pickup or cattle trucks where people are crammed on top of each other. Yonas describes how during the day these trucks run at high speed, only stopping at night for people to rest. The young Eritrean man recalls an unbearable heat in the day and a terrible cold at night. In such conditions, many people suffer from dehydration, starvation and other medical conditions given the scarce availability of water and food.

> *Desert, when your food is finished, your water is finished then you will die.* (Souleymane)
>
> *Everywhere we're on desert, there are lot of people who died….of starvation… of being thirsty of water….* (Lyon)
>
> *Die… Because you don't have enough food, don't have enough water, our water was finished two days in Sahara, no one drinks…many people very very suffer.* (Hakeem)

Yonas narrates that smugglers often mix water with fuel in order to discourage travellers from drinking. Ezekiel says that the drivers will be in charge of the water provision: 'at times the water can be finished…before you get to Libya…that is the worst part of everything'.

Participants recall how pickups and cattle trucks would be stopped in the middle of the desert and people would be searched for money. These stop and search operations are usually undertaken, according to Yonas, by 'criminal groups' that are in accordance with the drivers.

> *[Drivers] tell you that in the middle of the road there are criminal groups*[45] *who will make us stop, we can't escape from them, the only way out is to pay these [criminals]* (Yonas)

On this matter, Bensaâd (2007) points out the double role of smugglers earning money by guiding and by robbing, with robbery reinforcing their necessary functions as guides. Triulzi (2012) adds that these predatory rules of the smuggling economy are associated with the fractured mobility of the crossing; with each new start providing a chance for smugglers to abuse, or impose new levies on people–on–the–move. According to Bensaâd (2007) the double role of conveyor/robber has led to the rise of a slave economy in the Sahara with people being forced to labour to pay transit fees (Bensaâd 2007). Talking about the 'drivers', meaning the smugglers, David asserts 'they all criminals'. He recounts how during the crossing of the Sahara, travellers would be searched for money even in their anus, beaten and robbed. For similar reasons, Ezekiel describes smugglers as 'very wicked people'.

These impositions and abuses are enforced by the smugglers' position of power. Smugglers are usually armed, and essentially 'own' migrants until they decide to release them, blurring the lines between smuggling and trafficking (Horwood 2014, RMMS 2013). Moreover, Triulzi (2012) explains how arrest by police on the road is often agreed by smugglers themselves and used as a way to ensure obedience and subordination. This is recounted by participants who describe a continuous fear of death associated with passage along the route. This feeling of fear is connected to a suspension of all normative frameworks and rules:

> *[Here] nobody rules…nobody rules… meaning they [the smugglers] can do whatever they want to do.* (Issa)

> *[In the] Sahara, the law is this people [the smugglers]. They can do whatever they want to us.* (Ebrima)

> *It's like no man's land. Just going…you are just going. The other thing is you pray that your reach for your destination.* (Evans)

[45] Yonas used the word 'mafioso' which might indicate patterns of organised crime.

The Sahara emerges therefore as a no man's land, where participants are hidden from the rest of the world. Hakeem uses the powerful metaphor of 'a well' to express such concept: 'if you enter there, you will never come back...'. Participants assert that here anything can be done to refugees and migrants by smugglers and armed groups. At this point, it is worth mentioning that the smuggling economy – for its violence, brutal profit–making and dehumanization – resembles the memory of old enslavement practices across the Sahara (Triulzi 2012). Yonas, talking about these smuggling practices, cites directly the trope of slavery: '*They push you [on the pickup truck] like sheep…they flog you to say "hurry up, hurry up, jump on it!"…you become almost a slave…you are not master of yourself!'*. Many other participants recall similar dehumanising process with them being treated like things or animals:

> *[You are] like a thing ... they load you and take you away,* (Hayat)

> *They throw us inside the car like you throw wood into a truck.* (Bai)

Following Mae Ngai's definition of the illegal migrant as an impossible subject (Ngai 2004, 5), Coutin argues that that when embodying the condition of illegality and clandestinity, their bodies need to disappear while still occupying physical space. This makes the illegal migrant's body some sort of 'absent space or vacancy, surrounded by law'; a 'thinglike', capable of being transported and smuggled while still disappearing (Coutin 2005, 198). This absence ultimately represents the core essence of the crossing experience. Many participants, like Hakeem, insist on how in Europe we do not perceive such dimension of the risk associated with the Sahara crossing, caring only about what happens in the Mediterranean Sea.

> *[In the Sahara] you face a lot of risks…people are seeing in TV only risks in the Mediterranean [sea]…no!... The risks are not in the Mediterranean…* (Hakeem)

On the contrary, it is in the Sahara where they locate the threshold between life and death.

> *To get to Libya…it was…between life and death…desert… it was between life and death…it was really really stressful…* (Ezekiel)

According to Ezekiel, this is caused not only by the practices of the smuggling industry in the Sahara but also by the proliferation of weapons associated with post–Gaddafi scenario. Here, it is important to notice that smugglers are not the only armed actors in the desert. As Ezekiel asserts: 'in Libya everybody have guns! Ev–ry–bo–dy–ha–s–guns!...Because after the war, they all have

guns'. In particular, after the fall of Gaddafi's dictatorship, post–conflict Libya is characterised by a constellation of armed groups[46] often representing tribal allegiances, or in most cases, the local interests of a city (Toaldo and Fitzgerald 2016). In the south, these armed groups, often called militia brigades, take up border patrol duties, often operating beyond the control of the two government authorities in Tripoli and Tobruk, (FIDH 2012). These armed groups are often responsible for kidnapping of travellers. As soon as he entered in Libya, Doudou recalls how he got 'kidnapped' by an armed group:

> *[T]hose people they want money, they kidnap, they tell you "call your country! Ask for money!" they send money, they will leave you good, they can even kidnap people, they pay the money, they leave you, tomorrow they see you they catch you again and you will pay again.* (Doudou)

He recounts to be detained in a camp with many other travellers. The camp was described as a 'house with no light'. In these spaces, the traveller needs to employ his agential capacity to continuously negotiate passage in order to continue his journey; whether escaping, using bribes or using social connections to get out.

Desert crossing as a liminal experience

Much like Dramane's opening vignette, across the sample, the dangerousness of the journey is immediately reconnected to engagement with the symbolic necessities of manhood (Janssen 2007, 217). I see this as part of the rite of passage narrative signifying a 'test' in their life as 'men'. This can be seen also by looking at Yaya's reflection on the journey; '*This journey was so tough!...a lot of things I faced!*' He argues that he would not do it again; at the same time he discloses a conversation he just had with his younger brother in Gambia. Yaya was informed that he was thinking of migrating too. As soon Yaya heard these words, he started crying and attempted to convince him to stay. Yaya

[46] Strazzari and Tholens describe very well how the power vacuum created by the collapse of Gaddafi's regime led to a proliferation of armed groups in parallel to the proliferation of weapons, in particular small arms, with the country becoming a hub for arms trafficking in the entire region (Strazzari and Tholens 2014, 357). With weapon ownership being severely restricted to certain groups under Gaddafi's Libya, as soon as the rebellion started, the two major concerns to the anti–Gaddafi front were: 'arms procurement' and 'organising armed groups'. With weapons becoming increasing available in the field, a process of fractionalisation/splintering is registered among armed groups (Strazzari and Tholens 2014, 346).

sees his brother, being a boy, as not ready to take the CMR as much as he was. As Lyon recalls, being away from home, a boy 'has to learn'. He specifically locates the threshold in the journey's exposure to adversities when he argues that 'in the middle of that stress, then it comes change'. This understanding of the Libya crossing, as a phase of passage in their gendered enterprise, allows us to study this experience with the lens of liminality.

The concept of liminality is maybe one of the most used in social science to explore social change and transition in many aspects of social life. As illuminated by the work of Arnold Van Gennep (1909) and Victor Turner (1967, 1969), it refers to an indeterminate condition 'in between', which marks a transition between two social positions or states. Gennep's seminal text (1909), singled out rites of passage as consisting of three sub–categories, namely separation, transition and incorporation, with the middle stage identified as the key liminal period (Thomassen 2009, 6). Turner's (1967) work focuses specifically on this in–between condition, where all limits, much like an Alice in Wonderland situation (Szakolczai 2009), are suspended or removed. In Turner's view, the liminal personae is therefore 'neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremony' (Turner 1969, 95). Usually, in liminal situations[47] the neophyte is required to pass through a test/trial. Through a successful performance of the assigned task, the initiate experiences 'ontological change'; meaning that the transition from one social position to another is accomplished (Stetuppat 1992). For example, a boy is 'converted' into an adult man (Szakolczai 2009, 148).

We can distinguish between controlled and time–limited rites of passage and liminality emerging as a result of social rupture or crisis (Turner 1999)[48]. According to Stepputat (1992), Victor Turner extended Van Gennep's concept of liminality to a number of non–ritualized social processes; with particular regards to 'any condition outside or on the peripheries of everyday life" (Turner 1974:47 cited in Stepputat 1992). As a consequence, liminality has been used to grasp the in–between condition of refugee and migrant

[47] Liminality as a concept, aimed at singling out the role of transition is deemed applicable to both space ('borderlands') and time ('moments', 'periods' or even 'epochs'), and single individuals and larger groups (Thomassen 2009).

[48] Turner distinguishes between 'ritual liminality' and 'crisis as liminality' (Turner 1974, cited in Turner 1999).

lives[49] (Stepputat 1992, Malkki 1995, Dudley 2010, Turner 1999) to indicate the state of exception of lives in exile. With regards to the CMR liminality – with its emphasis on the suspension of taken for granted social structures and norms (Turner 1999) – offers a theoretical framework in which to locate the condition of existence associated with illegal migration. Agier (2016) described this as the cosmopolitan condition of wandering, marked by risks, uncertainty and waiting. According to Agier (2016) liminality denotes the symbolic function of borders: crossing the threshold we enter a new 'realm' and renegotiate a new identity. For the migrant subject this involves the embodiment of a new political subjectivity as men–on–the–move or travellers. At the same time, he argues that liminality is also social, denoting life at the margins characterised by a state of uncertainty and suspended temporality. The intersection between two dimensions marks the liminal experience of crossing.

Being on the move on a truck full of people, Malick was thinking about his previous life, particularly his father's car which would bring him to school every morning with a driver. Malick recalls what he was thinking during the crossing: 'In life you always change…because in Gambia…I didn't think I should have done this'. He describes his experience of crossing as 'disaster' – adding that this was not his 'dream' of a new life in Europe. Confronting the hardship of the journey, Malick realizes, maybe for the first time since he fled home, that his life has drastically changed as a result of his decision to take the route to Europe. He is suspended in an in–between–state between what he was and what he aspires to be. The journey, thus, is depicted as an interstitial moment in his life trajectory, where this young man found himself in a new vulnerable condition as a man–on–the–move.

Men's impotence to smugglers' violence

In order to explore the relationship between gender and vulnerability in the liminal experience of crossing, I want to start from gender relations as a site of power. The CMR is predominantly inhabited by men– with men being smugglers, members of armed groups and militiamen (Andersson 2014, UNODC 2018). In participants' narratives of crossing, women are almost

[49] With regards to refugees, the seminal work of anthropologist Lisa Malkki illustrates how they are 'liminal in the categorical order of nation–states', thus fitting 'Turner's famous characterization of liminal personae' (Malkki 1992, 14) due to their uprootedness and marginality in the nation–states world system (Dudley 2010).

invisible and they are mentioned 'only' to narrate tales of violence perpetrated by smugglers and armed groups.

Witnessing smugglers' and armed group's violence towards women is a particular traumatizing experience for participants; they cannot intervene, as 'masculine' codes of honour – especially within a religious discourse –would prescribe due to the fact that smugglers are their gatekeepers to Libya; without them it is almost impossible to survive the Sahara. Ebrima recalls vividly this experience:

> *When I was coming we were seven pickups. I think it was the second one where there were a group of Nigerian ladies. There were also some virgins there. They got raped. The drivers took them, during one of the breaks. It was really sad. I saw it with my eyes. I was asking myself "Why are you coming?" You coming here for prostitution… Blood was coming everywhere, a girl came to me and said "Why don't you help me?". I told her in the Sahara, the law is this people. They [the smugglers] can do whatever they want to us. Only god can help you.* (Ebrima)

This story is particularly challenging. Ebrima, who is just a young boy travelling with his elder brother, first refers to the presence of some 'virgins' in his convoy. When he asks himself 'why are they coming?', Ebrima is implying something common in many participants' accounts of desert crossing: the Sahara is narratively constructed as a place for men, so that participants struggle to locate women in the crossing arena. Some would suggest that there is an element of sexism or paternalism in this thought; I read Ebrima's question as an expression of what he has seen/experienced, namely, what the journey entails for female refugees. When the young woman–on–the–move asks Ebrima for help, he sadly answers that he cannot intervene. This is terrible admission of powerlessness. In the Sahara, they both are at the hands of smugglers who can do whatever they want to people on the move because they are armed and because they know the route to Libya.

> *In another situation I would act different, I would beat the guy. Even before police was coming I will do something. In Africa it's different, I would kill this man and tell the police. That's our mentality, when we see brutalities in Africa. A man need to do something. In the desert we couldn't do anything. If you kill the drivers, what are you going to do? We outnumbered them, we could have killed them. If we kill this people we'll die in the Sahara, we decide not to kill them. We could have left the car before entering in Libya, because if they see you coming by car without Libyans they will get suspicious. Only the Libyans can help with these criminals on the streets.* (Ebrima)

For Ebrima, the witnessing of rape involves a great feeling of shame as a result of a moral obligation that has not been fulfilled (Kabesh 2013). In other circumstances he would have acted differently. 'A man need to do something' he said. But in the desert, a traveller can do little. He or she needs to focus only on one goal: survival. The incapacity to react to smugglers' abuses is such a key item in the liminal experience of crossing; it creates specific hierarchies of masculinity between smugglers and travellers; men–on–the–move cannot contest or resist this violence perpetrated not only against women, but also against themselves.

With violence being so essential in the framing of smuggling practice, it is important to highlight that participants' sense of disempowerment against other men's violence blurs the boundaries between past and present. Bai, when recalling his experience of witnessing smugglers' violence toward refugee women, affirms this:

> *First thing, my thoughts went directly to my sister. This thing [rape], they have done it to my sister…* (Bai)

Bai is referring to his sister being raped in Gambia by the same men that prompt him to flee. In that case, Bai blamed himself and his brother for being unable to protect her from that masculine violence. He is convinced that if his father was alive, this tragic event would have never happened. In the desert, Bai revives the same emotional dynamic; still he is not ready to live up to the masculine obligations. This feeling haunts him profoundly, causing him to question his value as a 'man' across different temporalities. The crossing experience, thus, is narrated in a continuum with the experience of violence associated with the pre–migration phase. Immediately, he comes back to his sister, asking the question for a man–on–the–move, '*If she had come on this road, what would she have had to do?'* This is a central question for participants like Hayat, who attempted the journey alone, purposely leaving their female relatives behind. He asserts that he would never let his wife come through the same 'route'. Similarly, Yonas recalls how currently he is trying to dissuade a young female relative who wants to embark on the same journey, so he is looking for legal ways to bring her to Italy:

> *Nobody of us wants [anyone] to pass through what we have passed through…especially for a woman who has never left home…for me it is really hard to say it…she can suffer all that there is there…* (Yonas)

Yonas is evidently haunted by the thought that his female relative could "suffer all that there is there" – namely, what he has experienced first–hand plus what it has witnessed women suffered along the route. This account mirrors Yaya's concern for his little brother who may come on the same route.

These stances are irrespective of the agency of refugee women – who like them might see in the journey an opportunity for self–realization and empowerment. At the same time, they indicate a common understanding of the route as an arena for men, not for boys or women. The journey is described as too dangerous for women and children. First of all, due to the extreme conditions of the journey, which are assumed to be too tough – requiring masculine capabilities such as physical strength: 'The woman does not have the strength to face the journey. The journey is too tough', said Rachid. This somehow mirrors the discourse illustrated by Yonas' conversation with the smuggler intermediary, for a male traveller it is more risky to remain in a country like Sudan, with no opportunities for improving his livelihood, than it is to face the traumatic experience of the journey. On the other hand, for women–on–the–move, vulnerability is immediately recognised as the risk of being sexually abused and exploited:

> *It's too hard for the women, because actually the women if you start this journey, you must sell yourself. You must sell yourself. You must have sex with men, different [Inaudible] to get money. Or the person who will pay the transport, that person, you must have sex with that person, that person will tell you, "You will have sex with me, maybe one month or two months. It depends."* (Razak)

> *If you come on this road, even if you don't want to have sex, they [the smugglers] are going to force you.* (Bai)

> *You see our girls, they prostitute everywhere, just because they wanna make it… By the time they encounter rebels, rebels tell them… "this girl"…[they will] sleep with them! If you can't leave me, sleep with them! You see this one, sleep! Another one, sleep!* (David)

David's narrative is particularly interesting as he is travelling with his wife. In his narrative of crossing, protecting his wife is an essential element of his gender performance. David recounted how he managed to 'protect' his wife by making her wear typical Muslim clothing, even though they were Christian, after the advice of his 'gate man'. This represented a great moment of pride for him that somehow reconciles him to his inability to protect his wife from

gang violence in Nigeria. At the same time, this episode is used to distance himself, a righteous and moral man, from the smugglers and armed groups populating the Libyan Saharan region, who are depicted as godless and profoundly immoral.

Some participants would argue that for men–on–the–move the experience of crossing to Libya is much more difficult than for women. Hayat and David, for example, remember how finding a woman who agrees to pass as their wife grants some sort of 'protection' to the man, in particular if the woman presents as a Muslim. For men who travel on their own, such protection – a word used by Hayat – is not accessible and men are immediately relocated within the smuggler masculine discourse. Doudou, for example, explains how smugglers would be insensitive in front of a man dying, while they might help a woman in the same condition.

> *Just like me, when I go [travel] with these women, I don't even know you but when I see you can't make it, I can help you! As a woman! But as a man, when I see you are dying, these people…they can't even think about you, they are thinking of themselves! You will die and nobody will help you…but maybe [if it] is a woman, you can help him [her]!* (Doudou)

Participants' talk about the experience of women–on–the–move helps us understand how man–on–man violence is seen as a necessary component of an idealised trajectory toward manhood; while sexual violence towards women becomes an essential trope to define smugglers' and militia men's immorality, godlessness and cruelty.

The abovementioned collapse of all normative frameworks which participants associated with smuggling practices in the context of desert crossing is therefore expressed through these stories of sexual violence, more than anything else. According to participants, the brutality of smugglers and armed groups' violence is conducive to the suspension of moral and religious principles. Doudou, for example, recounts how smugglers would force 'wives' in front of their husbands. David recalls that 'anything can happen, even your mother!... you'll be seeing your mother raped! you understand'; he recounts how smugglers and criminal group would 'rape' women–on–the–move based on their clothing; those who were jeans and t–shirts would be the prey while those wearing traditional Muslim clothing would be saved. He insisted that members of militia brigades raped these women without using condoms, while wearing a military uniform.

> *I told my wife you see what our girls are passing through? – a girl said– 'I wanna go back!' How come you will go back? How can you go back? It's not done! You can't go back, you have to face! You have to face it! You understand? For what for whatever!* David

In this sense, my data accords with Kabesh's (2013) recognition of loss being at the centre of masculinities. This loss, however, is often projected onto the Other in the making of male subjectivity. When participants describe the journey as too dangerous for women they are admitting something else. Through women's suffering, they are asserting that men are vulnerable too. This suggests the value of recognising the conditions of tellability (Shuman 2006) of vulnerability as part of participants' masculine performance in their refugee story. In this sense, the rite of passage frame might be understood as way to express these neglected experiences of abuse and violence as part of their masculine performance.

Engaging with hegemonic masculinity in the crossing experience

On Bai's way to Libya, in the middle of the Sahara, a pickup truck is running. Bai recounts being pressed by the large number of people who are packed in such a small space. Desperately, he is crying for help for the pain caused by the serious injuries to his leg due to prison abuses in Gambia. Some fellow refugees on the pickup asked for help to the drivers.

> *Bai: 'They [the drivers] said "We don't care. Because here everyone is thinking at his business…how to flee from here…So if he is hurting, he must be silent. Because here we are men"…'*
>
> *Interviewer: 'we are men…'*
>
> *Bai: 'Men! So here there's nothing to say…he [Bai] must be a man…I am hurting, how can I be a man? My knee is hurting…they say 'no! Here there is nothing to say…there isn't…. nobody has a father, nobody has a mother in here, we are just men. So you must be a man, otherwise you have to die in here'.*

This discourse of 'must be a man', co–produced by all actors in the smuggling arena, offers a legitimation of what Ruben Andersson defines as a 'Darwinian selection' (Andersson 2014) of migrants' bodies in the context of illegal migration where the most vulnerable should be left to die. This is confirmed by Ezekiel who argues that 'if you are injured and you cannot continue the journey they [the smugglers] just…shoot you and bury you there…' Here, violence seems to be justified as part of the chaotic lawlessness of the Sahara– and it assumes the role of a test through which participants can prove their

values as men. However, as Connell writes, the distinctions between masculinities do not only occur in the dimension of generalized imagery; it also operates to forge patterns of dominance in specific cultural context (Connell 2002, 90). Smugglers seem to use this discourse to provide legitimation to their predatory rules of the smuggling economy (Triulzi 2012) enforcing onto smuggled people a position of subordination and commodification. As Ebrima recalls, 'That's what they tell you. "You have to be a man". They would beat you, flog you, saying this.'

This account is shared by other participants like Hakeem who affirms that to succeed in the desert crossing, one 'has to be a man, have to be a soldier, a military, a soldier' and he affirms, 'You have to, you have to [act like a military] ... everyone would have to behave like this...because if you are not, you gonna lose [your life]'. When I ask why, he replies: 'because it's like, now, there's no woman, there's nobody. Everyone is thinking of himself, everyone is now selfish ... because [you think] you're going to die ... yes'. The reference to military masculinity makes sense as the archetype of the warrior–soldier – and his qualities such as courage and self–sacrifice (Hedges 2002) – are key signifiers of an ideal masculinity (Godfrey 2009). Soldiers are those who professionally engage in dangerous situations and prove their masculinity (Belkin 2012).

In order to cope with smugglers and armed group violence and arrogance, Issa asserts 'those who are smart…behave well' and that they should not be fearful. When asked what his strategy was, he states 'silence is a weapon'. This is a powerful admission from a masculine perspective. As argued by Kebede et al. (2014), although being silent is an effect of power differentials, enacting silence is an agential process. Facing the riskiness of reacting, he relies on silence as a proxy for self–awareness and self–reliance to protect himself from the danger of crossing. Silence in this sense can be linked to stoicism as a resource to perform masculinity. At the same time, in Issa's words, silence is presented as mechanism of defence, given the reference to being silent as a weapon. It does not infer passivity or submission but capacity for resistance in a very narrow room of manoeuvre and, therefore, it becomes one of the few resources to perform masculinity in the face of smugglers' omnipotent dominance. The reference to a masculine framework governing smuggling practices in the Sahara in this sense should be seen as a result of the collapse of any moral, religious and legal normative framework. It is the law of the strongest that prevails at the interstice of structure (Turner 1969) when all rules are vacated and suspended.

As a consequence of this masculine discourse, the room for solidarity is extremely reduced, and it is often opposed by smugglers. Lyon remembers, for example, how he begged a fellow asylum seeker for a sip of water, receiving a firm 'no':

> *[T]he journey was very tough, so you have to think about yourself. You know if you don't think about yourself, if you don't try to keep your bread on, maybe you gonna be the next one to die…so you don't give even care about the next one, you care about yourself!* (Lyon)

This quote conflicts with military masculinity ideology where solidarity among comrades is essential in establishing honour. Comradeship is not indicated as key aspect of the journey through Libya. Lyon's account introduces the most important aspect of the crossing experience; whether the liminal experience is collective, the performance of masculine agential capacity to endure extreme conditions and achieve survival – in Turner's words the liminal trials (Turner 1969) – is necessarily individual. In Turner's concept of liminality, performance has a key role in the act of transformation/transition associated to rituals (Turner 1980). Turner defines performance not as 'manifestation of form' but as the 'processual sense of "bringing to completion" or "accomplishing"'. (Turner 1979, 82);

The crossing enterprise therefore emerges in a continuum with the phase of separation, described in Chapter 4, as a liminal 'crisis' (Szakolczai 2017, 2009), symbolised by the solitary journey of the traveller. Due to the scarcity of resources such as water and food, and the politics of terror enacted by smugglers, Ezekiel argues that in the desert it is 'all men for themselves' meaning that the struggle for survival is individual. The performative test, in this sense, involves everyone 'fighting for their own life' as argued by Doudou; in the desert, he adds 'you have to be a man! Because of here every man is [for] himself!' This association between being a man and being on your own is indicative of a demarcation that the journey represents for these young boys facing for the first time the condition of being away from the protective wings of their families. Banna, for instance, recalls how during the desert crossing he did not have anyone who 'will support me if I make problem or somebody cause problem to me'. This was a source of anxiety and sorrow for him. Similarly, Lyon asserts:

> *[Y]ou left your country to another country, you don't have a father! You don't have a mother! You don't have a friend! You don't have any siblings! You don't have relations!... Now, you have to learn…even if someone, if someone looks you're your*

trouble, you just have to bear it, because this is not your country. Who's gonna fight for you? There are lot of things you have to learn. (Lyon)

If the gender enterprise is a way to negotiate a transition into manhood, these young men in the Sahara find out that being a man, first of all, means being on your own, being capable of facing dangerous situations with no one taking care of you. What is required by these boys is to rapidly 'man up' if they want to survive. At the same time, the liminality of desert crossing opens up the possibility to reshape hierarchies of masculinities among male travellers; with age and seniority having less significance. Yaya, who is one of the youngest participants, recalls how they would laugh at those 'big men' who were not able to cope with the hardship of the desert crossing:

[A man] was there he so big and tough, and he said he feels hungry, no water, he's crying, while the youngers are keeping quite…big man is crying! So he's so funny for us! (Yaya)

It is maybe for this reason then if Bai never questioned the masculine discourse of the smugglers; being aware that those who failed must be ready to pay the consequences, often with their lives. David, who is not a young boy at the time of crossing and is traveling with his wife, is even more resolute; for him 'there is no brother' in the Sahara; here, 'your brother' might become 'your enemy' in this fight for survival where only the strongest prevails.

[W]hen you are embarking on a journey, that's why I said your brother will be your enemy! When you are embarking on such journey, passing through the desert, there's no brother! (David)

Notwithstanding, people in the Sahara are bonded together by the extreme and hostile conditions of crossing. When the pickup truck stops in the desert and people–on–the–move need to push the car in order for the engine to restart, or when participants attempt to evade militia–run detention centres, their crossing experience is clearly shaped by a sense of 'togetherness'. As a testament of this bond, participants report the practice of taking a mother's telephone number when someone is about to die. Bai who is travelling with an injured knee remembers how fellow travellers helped him during the Sahara ride, forming a human shield around his knee. Yonas recounts being taken under the protection of an older man for the whole crossing experience. That is why migrants' convoys in the Sahara, inmates sharing the same detention centre room in Libya, or boat people in the Mediterranean Sea, are all examples of Turner's communitas, (1969, 128) as a community of

individuals, bonded together through their unmediated, shared liminal experience (Turner 1969). Edith Turner (2012) argues that communitas might develop, often spontaneously, in relation to situations of high stress and even disaster. In this sense, I view the performative enactment of masculinity as framing this dimension of communitas. When dealing with the adversities associated with the desert crossing, individual performance is therefore relationally implicated with one's fellow 'brothers' –a term used by participants to refer to other refugees and migrants on the same convoy.

Having recognised that, when describing the journey as solitary and individual, what I am trying to highlight is while the gendered dimension of crossing is necessarily collective; participants' performance of masculinity requires necessarily an individual negotiation of personal capabilities, resources and values in relation to the dangerousness of the Sahara route. This can be seen by looking at how refugees and asylum seekers discuss their crossing experience in Sicily. According to Hakeem, in Sicilian reception centres they would often use their experience in the Sahara to compare their masculinities in terms of resistance and strength. Hakeem tells how some travellers will even exaggerate these traits in order to present themselves as more manly:

> *[Y]ou are soldier ... you are [more] a man than me! Yeah, of course, you are [more] a man than me, you are a soldier ... [Inaudible] [laugh] Me, I face two days without water ... if someone tells me two weeks ... without water ... how can I believe it?* (Hakeem)

In this sense, comparing their individual experience of crossing through Libya, asylum seeking and refugee men in Sicily negotiate status and respect. This account shows the symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1989) associated with the crossing experience. This seems to create specific hierarchies of masculinity among travellers; not only while in Libya, but most importantly when relocated in the Sicilian asylum system.

In this context, men's vulnerability becomes a contested element in participants' narratives. Previously, I illustrated how such an essentialist and rigid account of gender subjectivities makes the suffering of the Other, intended as the female traveller, one of the possible sites wherein to project and express what happened to them. In the Sahara, the discourse of masculinity operates powerfully in making men's suffering an integral part of the performative enactment associated with the masculine trial; so male vulnerability is forcefully silenced, repressed and policed, as Bai's and Ezekiels's account testifies. The narrative 'before you be a man you must

encounter difficulties!' expressed by David and Lyon in Chapter 4, the opening statement of Dramane, or the reference to the military masculinity ideal mentioned by Hakeem, should be thus read as intersecting frames of the same discourse. However, it would be an error to say that male vulnerability, while policed, is entirely absent.

Participants like Bai acknowledge their fears when confronting the hardship of desert crossing and the wilderness of Sahara. What they suggest, however, is that 'being a man' involves being capable of transcending these fears in face of danger (Whitehead 2005). However, after entering the country via Niger, Hakeem recalls how the possibility of re–entering the Sahara was too scary: 'I was always thinking how to go back, but the Sahara, I was so afraid.' The acknowledgement of being afraid clashes with the masculine ideal of the soldier. In this contradiction, I argue we can uncover the tension between masculine ideal and men's praxis, and the vulnerabilities that this produces for male travellers. After the desert crossing, indeed, Hakeem recalls something has profoundly changed in him. He begins to feel 'disappointment' about his condition as irregular migrant in Libya: 'Why did I come here? Because in Gambia…my life was in danger…now my life is in another danger!' The word 'disappointment' is chosen by Hakeem to express his profound suffering and pain, making the Sahara crossing a turning point[50] in his refugee story.

The passage through Libya and the Mediterranean

As showed in the sections on desert crossing, violence is the key marker of participants' experience as men–on–the–move. I argue that this should be extended to the second phase of their journey where they negotiate passage to Europe. This comprises two phases: traveling through Libya to the northern coastal cities, and a boat trip across the Mediterranean Sea to Italy (Hamood 2006). Much like in the Sahara crossing experience, this stage of the journey entails resorting to smuggling networks to arrive at their intended destinations (Hamood 2006) and confronting the life–threating situations produced by the

[50] As liminal subjects participants describe themselves as navigating dangerous situation. At this point, based on Douglas' work (1966), we should consider how initiates in rites of passages are also perceived as danger for the ordinary world due to their ambiguity, impurity and indefiniteness associated with the act of crossing. Douglas uses this to frame her idea of pollution which justifies logic of confinement for refugee people. On this matter, she argues: 'the polluter becomes a doubly wicked object of reprobation, first because he crossed the line and second because he endangered others' (Douglas 1966, 139 cited in Steppupat 1992).

political fragmentation, administrative chaos and militarisation that characterize post–conflict Libya (FIDH 2012, 30). This means that the liminal experience of crossing is not yet concluded. Participants are therefore required to navigate further difficulties and dangers:

> *[W]hile I was staying in Libya…I cannot count the number of times I escaped death…being killed by gun! I cannot count…knocked by the knife or by gun…* (Ezekiel)

> *[In Libya] you can lose your life…any minute…* (Hakeem)

> *[E]verywhere you are in Libya you are just close to your death!'* (Ezekiel)

> *They kill people every day! Ev–er–y–da–y they kill people…* (Yaya)

> *They don't value life! You walk in Libya they start shooting you like this…shooting you like this!* (David)

The continuum of violence affecting Sub–Saharan African men

It is important to underline how in participants' narratives race is the dominant element that defines their vulnerabilities to violence in Libya. As King puts it, for black people 'there is no freedom' in Libya. Here, we should not forget how Libya has a deep–rooted legacy of racism against Sub–Saharan African (FIDH 2012, 31) based on the assumed superiority of the 'white' Arab world in relation to 'black' Africa (Bensaâd 2007). It is worth noting how smugglers are effectively using the same ancient trans–Saharan slave routes (Triulzi 2012, de Aguilar Hidalgo 2018). This historical legacy was instrumentally fuelled by Gaddafi's regime for his own political agenda; in order to capitalize on the role of Libya as a transit country between Africa and the EU, Gaddafi and his regime rapidly moved from his original pan–African approach –based on solidarity –to an open hostility against Sub–Saharan travellers; often imbued with racist narratives (Bredeloup and Pliez 2011, de Aguilar Hidalgo 2018). However, according to participants, racist violence seems to be pushed to the limits by the chaotic lawlessness of post–Gaddafi Libya associated with the collapse of judicial power and increasing violence among factions. Hakeem recalls how behind the official conflict in fact there are 'villages' and 'families' killing each other for 'land problems'. Guns and militia are everywhere and migrants find themselves in the middle of this fighting:

> *I can't fight…I'm not fighting…but we are seeing everyday guns…boom boom [he*

simulates the sound of a gun shooting]…boom boom… nobody can go out…no one can go out! Everyone was crying…days! Days like that! (Hakeem)

In such context of generalised violence, black male travellers are very vulnerable to exploitation and violence as demonstrated by Galos et al. (2017). Usually employed in construction sites, factories, or farms, participants report working without compensation for their Libyan employers in conditions that resemble a modern form of slavery. Coulibalì recalls how he spent one year and a half working without being paid, with his 'master' –he uses this word – providing only food. Those who dare to ask for payment will often get shot in response. Banna expresses this very well:

You work for them, they pay you. You work for them, they say they will not pay you also. You work full day, they pay you the amount they want to pay you. So it's rough. Libya is rough. (Banna)

Here, Hakeem argues: *'He [the Libyan man] kills you and no one know…no one know! No one…no one's business!'.* When paid, black travellers become the target of criminal gangs. Assaults, robberies and abductions for ransom are also very common (Amnesty 2013, 2015), with people being brought to the Sahara for a day of work and then asked for money in return for their lives.

The same tropes of lawlessness associated with the Sahara crossing are extended to the whole passage through Libya. Here, black travellers are targeted on the streets by youth gangs. This seems valid for both those participants who entered the country before and after the Libyan civil war. Bakary was in Libya before the Gaddafi's fall. He recounts to have witnessed the killing of a fellow Malian traveller by a group of fifteen years old. The Malian man was trying to defend a friend who was being robbed of his phone by this gang. The group of Libyan boys cut the throat of the Malian migrant in front of Bakary with no possibility for him to intervene: 'If you call the police, they will arrest you'. Bakary asserts he has never seen something like this in his entire life and that thinking about that episode makes him 'crying'.

However, according to Konaté, a Malian refugee, who has been in Libya before and after the collapse of Gaddafi's regime, the emergence of armed kids' gangs was exacerbated with the spread of civil war:

When they killed Gaddafi, there's Libyan people like youngsters, thirteen years old, who always look for troubles, when you go to work, you can't put money in your pocket…you go, kids see you, they take your money or they kill you. That is why I

left. (Konaté)

Ezekiel transited within the North African country after the collapse of Gaddafi's regime. The Nigerian participant, who is a Christian man, recounts being attacked by a young Libyan boy for wearing a scapula. The kid slapped him in the face and ripped off his rosary. For Ezekiel, who is an adult, this act of violence was particularly painful because he could not react; the Libyan boy was armed *'so I had to flee…because you cannot fighting, no, no! If you do this you are dead!'*. According to Ezekiel, not only you cannot fight back, '*you don't even speak back! If they are talking [to] you…you just apologize'*. King recounts similar dynamics: *'You will be walking in the streets, you understand, small bambino like 7 years or 10 years will be hold gun and be threatening you'*. The word 'bambino' in Italian means 'child'.

These accounts, much like the violence perpetrated by smugglers in the Sahara, show that violence always inhabits and shapes complex gender and racial hierarchies. For these men, the abuse of power by someone who is not even a 'man' is profoundly troubling. In the gendered enterprise, violence from other men can be rationalized as a consequence of a liminal trial; but when it comes from a boy, or even a 'child', it might mean that all the normative frames and hierarchies – part of the traditional gender discourse – have been erased. Humiliation becomes thus an essential trope for our understanding of refugee liminal masculinities.

King's statement about Libya, as a place where black people have no freedom, should be read in relation to this: anything can be done to black travellers, participants argue, because of their race and gender. For this reason, Libyans are described as all 'racist'. Even Abu, who is maybe the most cautious participant I met, very conscious about what should be said during the interview, does not hesitate in describing Libyans as racist. 'They treat us like animals' he explains. At this stage, much like women's suffering in the Sahara, racist violence becomes a frame to identify and locate their own vulnerability, silenced by the masculine discourse of the illegality industry. In this context, however, the citation of racist violence implicates their gendered identity; black travellers are constantly positioned as inferior in relation to everyone in the crossing arena: smugglers, Libyan men and even children. They are deprived of any power resource, including the possibility of enacting resistance, and experience a condition of helplessness, which is at the base of their dehumanization and exploitation. Their masculinities appear to be therefore shattered of any certainty and signification.

This condition of powerlessness means, once again, that they are not able to live up to the same masculine expectations embodied by their decision to flee. In the previous section, I illustrated how participants are unable to live up to social requirements of breadwinning due to exploitation they face as irregular migrants in Libya. The same could be said about their capacity to protect their loving ones and react to violence perpetrated by other men. David, who is travelling with his wife, recounts how once in Libya they found work in the house of a powerful 'Arab man'. David was taking care of the garden while his wife was helping with cleaning. At one point, the Arab man accused David to have stolen a sum of money and kicked him out of the house. His wife, however, was abducted against her will. Much like the beginning of his story, the Nigerian participant is forcefully separated from his wife. Talking about the journey to Europe, David affirms 'I was with my wife…because marriage! Made us one!'. The unbalance of power between him and the 'Arab man' makes impossible for him to save his wife. David ends up sleeping in 'uncompleted building' in the middle of the desert, hiding from the Arab man because he feared for repercussions. This created a heavy sense of loss and failure in David:

> *'[I]t's like someone left you when your rib is removed from you! You feel it! You understand? It's part of me, you understand?! Because of problems we came…same problems we met….'.* (David)

Facing the same type of experience that originally triggered the flight, David recalls how this affected the way he looked at the possibility of a new life in Italy: *'It's like I'm still not complete! Even if on my arrive here, they give me a job… I won't be happy, you understand?'*

Arbitrary incarceration and inhumane detention conditions

The making of vulnerabilities in Libya would be incomplete without considering participants' positions as illegal migrants. Previously, I illustrated the marginality of their experience of crossing which entails sleeping in uncompleted buildings, squatter settlements, or transit camps. Another important element is their experience of incarceration. Detention of Sub–Saharan travellers is systematic, with militias adopting the same brutal police practice of Gaddafi's era; irregular migrants are intercepted at many checkpoints controlled by militias at the entry to towns and villages (FIDH 2012, 31). Participants' accounts mirror what organizations like Amnesty (2013) and UNSMIL and OHCHR (2018) have denounced throughout the years: highly inadequate detention conditions and inhumane treatment of

inmates. In my interviews, like other reports suggest (de Aguilar Hidalgo 2018), the difference between these detention spaces (whether Libyan prisons, migration–related detention centres, militia holding centres) appears to be blurred, with participants recalling similar experiences of abuse, confinement and violence sanctioned by their condition of illegality (Leghtas 2017).

The imprisonment of migrants and refugees in these detention centres is arbitrary with no access to judicial court or lawyers (UNSMIL and OHCHR 2018). Participants recall being held without due process in very precarious situations. In these overcrowded halls migrants have to sleep all together, with scarce food and beverage, and no access to toilets, medical assistance or fresh air.

> *[If you want] to piss…you have to do it in here… you piss and then your piss goes under, under the people [inmates]…same for shit… we are not allowed to go the toilet* (Bai)

Prison guards are reported to use systematically violence against migrants and refugees, including sexual violence towards female detainees (Gerard and Pickering 2013). The same condition of powerlessness associated with smuggling practices is therefore re–experienced in these detention centres. Prison guards, in this sense, replicate the same brutal dominance of smugglers. That is why, in participants' account, thus, these experiences of incarceration are located along a continuum with patterns of violence associated with the crossing experience within Libya.

In his experience of detention, Bai recounts how prison guards would hit his injured knee when he complained about his condition; then, he was brought 'inside' in a room 'where they hit boy'; here, he was tied up upside and down and underwent a torturing practice. Comparing his experience in detention both in Gambia and Libya, Bai argues that 'Gambia is a bit better…but Libya…me never forget!' Bai, at this stage, starts to realise that the only way to survive is fleeing Libya but is confronted by the impossibility of going back to his homeland. 'If I go there, police will arrest me or my cousin, if he sees me, they are going to kill me!' At this juncture, Bai asserts he is thinking about his family and the reason why he had to leave Gambia.

In detention facilities, the dimension of communitas, as a communion of people facing liminal conditions, is visible. Many participants, like Bai and Yonas, recall how inmates in these detention facilities do not fight; they are on

the contrary bounded by the common goal of escape. Yonas describes this sense of togetherness (Szakolczai 2009) enacted by liminal conditions:

> *Every day…they [prison guards] come at grabbing and hitting us…then when they open the door we are already prepared so…two or three [inmates] die and forty escape [laugh]…understand?'* (Yonas)

Yonas adds that they flee like 'sheeps' or 'horses', who run away in the wild. Prison guards usually fight back with weapons. 'But what's there…you need to face… the only way to get out from there is this…' he argues, because 'there is not a judge who listen to your problem', either you pay a bribe to the prison guards or you take the chance in these attempts. Once outside the prison, you need to keep on running and find a place to hide as prison guards will look for you. Some managed to do this, others are brought back to the cells. Dickinson who is traveling with his wife, much like David, recalls that he had to pay a bribe. Yaya recounts how he was released by a prison guard who after seeing his health condition argued: 'I can't take you to prison again because you are too young and you are so sick…'. The young age of Yaya seemed to have produced some sort of compassion in the prison guard, who decided to let him go.

The boat trip across the Mediterranean Sea

In most participants' stories, the decision to attempt the crossing by the sea is seen as a way to survive this continuum of violence enacted by their position as black men and illegal migrants in Libya. Many participants who might have left for lack of livelihood opportunities found themselves in the same situation as those who have been forcibly displaced from the beginning of their migration experience (Zetter 2018, 34).

At the same time, participants' narratives indicate a degree of agential capacity associated with the project of negotiating the sea–crossing passage. Although some participants assert they were forced against their will to take the boat to Sicily, we know from literature on Mediterranean routes that this act requires negotiations with smugglers over the price of passage and the time of departure and using social connections (Mainwaring 2016, Schapendonk 2018). That is why I interpret the issue of 'being forced' in terms of the restricted room of manoeuvre (Mainwaring 2016) for participants to cope with the continuum of Libyan violence. Rather than a movement from insecurity to safety, the stretching over time and across spaces is experienced as exhausting (Ansems de Vries and Guild 2018). Like Konaté's account

suggests, participants assert that 'taking the sea' is kind of a forced trajectory to save their lives and flee Libya. On this matter, Lyon recalls:

> *All I was just thinking of like: this a war without end. Because all I was seeing is just the water, the river, was not seeing no other place…* (Lyon)

The powerful metaphor of a 'war without end' illustrates how men–on–the–move are required to 'fight' against endless adversities. Much like the Sahara, people travel in overcrowded, poorly equipped vessels, with scarcity of food and water and sometimes very difficult weather conditions. Before embarking on the boat trip to Sicily, they are located in smugglers warehouse where their condition appears to be quite similar to the above–mention detention centres:

> *If you fight…a man will come and shoot all those who fight…they will kill you, yeah! That one is normal! They're all with guns! They come everyday with guns to hit you on the head…this is normal with them…they are very brutal…to me, I think they are heartless…not really because of...they want to…I really want…at times, we need to wonder what these people think about other human beings who are not them…* (Ezekiel)

Compared to the Sahara, however, people arrive there exhausted by the months spent in Libya and possibly with high levels of post–traumatic stress disorder, so that panic and anxiety are common among travellers. Doudou recalls that at this point he was not even afraid of dying at sea; the only think he cared about was to leave Libya and all the suffering he was exposed to there. The vessels, often rubber boats, are usually piloted by fellow migrants/refugees who are trained by traffickers (Altai Consulting 2013) in exchange for a free passage. That is why so many boats get lost in the water of the Strait of Sicily. As argued by Onyeka: *'In desert you walk with your legs. In sea, you know, there is no direction, you just drive. There is no direction'*. Lost in the sea, with no direction, waiting to be rescued, all participants confront – one more time – the fear of death. On the verge of Fortress Europe, the lone traveller embraces his faith: being rescued or dying trying.

The arrival in Europe as a masculine accomplishment

Exposed to a continuum of traumatic experiences, danger and extreme conditions, in participants' narrative the journey through Libya emerges as a threshold, a moment of passage, in their lives as men. The man who surfaces from the Libyan ordeal is profoundly different from the man who left home. In this section, I am interested in exploring the ways participants make meaning of these changes as part of their masculine trajectory. Drawing on

Garfinkel's (1967) understanding of gender as an ongoing performance consolidated in biography and Hammack and Cohler's (2009) work on personal narratives of identity, we are able to conceptualize the journey through Libya as a crucial moment in participants' performance of masculinity.

For some participants like Doudou, crossing the threshold is an unbearable experience, and they even consider death as a possible way to exit this violence continuum: '*You are like, you tell him, let me die once and the suffer is finished!*' Other participants, like Banna, reconnect the journey to their capabilities: 'I feel lonely, I feel crying every time. See, but I manage'. The verb 'manage', much like the verb 'hustle' which he used to explain his reason to flee, infers action and agency. Migrant agency in the act of crossing is presented in participants' accounts as room of manoeuvre within very narrow margins (Mainwaring 2016) and invests their capacity of finding ways to survive (Agier 2016) as a result of their liminality. Here, the vulnerabilities associated with their position as men–on–the–move are indicated as part of the gendered enterprise conducive to a new level of manhood. Therefore, the arrival in Europe is narrated as a journey of achievement not only in terms of safety and the possibility of asylum, but also in terms of masculine competence.

Talking from his new positionality in Sicily, Hakeem sees himself as a refugee man who has dealt with many experiences and survived those; a 'man', finally, who managed to escape from that well.

> *Hakeem: [confused] this thing... encourage [me]... this thing; if I think about the journey think I feel happy.*
>
> *Interviewer: Why?*
>
> *Hakeem: That now, I've crossed ... whereby ... the way that I'm seeing in America, in Europe, in films fighting for themselves, in countries, I do [confused] that is like a gift to me, how escape from that prison, how I make it up, and now I'm in Italy, having a better life in Italy, I'm very ... it's a big success to me ... I didn't think I'll be too proud of it ... because from that place I escaped, the hospital, that place ... it was terrible ... I was sick ... it was terrible ... so I feel very happy if I think about how I do I ever to do it ... how I managed.*

Completing the journey, navigating multiple life–threating situations and risks, was presented as a 'big success' for Hakeem. Through this performance,

which aligns with the narrative genre of coming–of–age, he managed to present some sort of progress across the masculine trajectory of the gendered enterprise, inferring that a successful transition into manhood has been completed despite the pain and suffering of the journey.

For young participants, who for the first time are leaving their homes, the journey is their first experience on their own without the protection of their families. Once arrived in Libya, Banna recalls how he spent his days crying to the point that the other travellers told him 'to keep quiet' because 'you are disturbing us'. Banna, like many others, recalls missing his mother very much. When he eventually got paid, he would spend his money to call his mother. The figure of mothers left behind appears often in participants' narrative as a way to express symbolically the loss and nostalgia for home. Being on his own, in this hostile environment, the mother, a source of care and love, symbolizes what Banna is not anymore: a child. At one point, he argues that he would go back on the desert route to see her again. But this is not possible, as others would explain to him. The work on liminal experiences signifies the impossibility to go back whenever a transition phase has started; failing to complete the performance of the rite does not lead to a reintegration to the previous state, but rather an entrapment in the limbic condition of in–between (Thomassen 2008). I think this view is applicable to participants' narratives of crossing; their condition in between as men–on–the–move in the Sahara marks the only possibility to go onward. The above–mentioned metaphor of the well, advanced by Hakeem, perfectly captures this symbolic reconstruction of Libya in participants' narrative; a black hole from where it is difficult, almost impossible, to get out. Much like in a coming–of age narrative, the young protagonist can only go 'forward', navigating the adversities of his adventure. Therefore, the exposure to difficulties and tests of the journey is narrated as productive of a profound personal transformation.

> *I got more more experienced in this journey…because I see many different, different things…I see many things….different…things…which you know… I never…I never expect…this one…I never think that, you know, a man become like that or these things can be happening…I see it with my eyes…so I have many experience from this journey…a lot of experience in this journey…* (Malick)

> *I have a lot of experience, right now…different from the experience that I have before in my country.* (Lyon)

On the road you see many different things. You see everything. Good and bad people. Everything. (Rachid)

What I do inside journey, many people cannot do that…Because I never see they bring a person and slaughter a person like a goat. I never see it. But I see it in this journey. (Razak)

Razak, for example, cites the unbearable trauma of seeing someone 'slaughtered like a goat' as indicative of a profound change. It appears that the exceptional character of the journey, including the exposure to trauma, is directly linked to the process of engagement with hegemonic masculinity (Howson 2014):

Actually, the journey have changed me. The journey changed my behaviour. This journey changed how I think. The journey changed many things for me. Because first of all, since I was in Gambia, I was a very dangerous boy… Because since I was in Gambia, I think like a small boy, because I'm safe in my home, I'm safe my dad.... But since I start the journey, no mom, no dad, no brother, now you are the adviser of yourself, nobody is to advise you. (Razak)

In Razak's interview, the capacity of enduring difficulties and acquiring patience are presented as distinctive traits of manhood in relation to the turmoil and innocence of boyhood. This is something that other participants like Ezekiel, Lyon and Hakeem share with Razak. Being exposed to stress and life–threating situations is seen as conducive a new level of patience and wisdom. Traits they associated with competent manhood:

While I was in Nigeria for example…I can easily get angry… what I passed through this journey, I tend to think very well like…when you a close to death I think you become more calmer… (Ezekiel)

[N]ow if some of your friends say some bad words to you, you don't get angry easily…because you have seen so a lot of things, more offensive ways than that, so you just look at that as a minor thing…(Lyon)

Recognizing that transition and passage are an occasion for narrative, I see this staging as a narrative strategy to make meaning of the vulnerabilities produced by participants' liminality in Libya. In his book 'Borderlands', Michel Agier citing the work of sociologist Anaik Pain (2009), sees adventure as one of the languages of uncertainty that characterise in–between subjects; adventure narratives are part of 'movement thinking' that helps people

imagine the possibility of moving forward in a hostile context (Agier 2016, 62). Given that the primary aim of narration is to provide a sense of coherence, order and meaning to fragmentary events (Kirmayer 2003), the coming of age narrative seems to offer a clear structure to negotiate what has happened; around this template, participants reconcile profound questions about identity, self and traumatic experiences (Kirmayer 2003). Yonas describes this when narrating how his boat is intercepted at sea by the Italian Coastal Guard:

> *No in that moment, tears came…you made it, because I wasn't thinking that I would have made it…eh…I thanked God…this is the first thing [I did] when I put [my feet] on land, thank God…and then there is that feeling that there is…I was all tears…I can't say to you… how much I experienced, endured, to get here…* (Yonas)

In this context, the coming–of–age narrative genre serves to frame participants' quest for meaning in relation to their experience of trauma, pain and suffering. Similarly, Yonas asserts:

> *[The journey] changed me very much on a personal level…[I] understood I need nobody. I don't have anybody. And I proved to myself that I can do many things. [The journey] made me realize this.* (Yonas)

This process has evidently implications for participants' masculine performance. As illustrated in Dramane's opening discussion, the journey marks a symbolic transition from boyhood to a more mature and competent manhood's position.

At this point, we need to recognise how personal narratives of identity are constructed through the engagement with master narratives and discourse (Hammack and Cohler 2009). Participants' narratives tend not to recount refugee women's agency, using the same tropes as humanitarian discourse to cast them as 'ideal' victims. The same gender essentialist frame is used to strategically demonstrate their own agential capacity and thus contest their victimhood. Hayat, for example, points out how his military expertise was a fundamental resource for his crossing experience. He claims that his journey was carefully planned by him throughout his transit experience. Given the place of military culture in the making of his masculine identity, I see this reference to agency as a way to prove his value as a man despite the circumstances of the flight. The gendered enterprise is characterised thus as a project that requires both effort and mastery, with agency being pushed to the

front of their gender performance.

In the case of David, this is exemplified in a highly dramatized moment (Langellier 2010) when David is on the boat a few minutes before it capsizes. Thinking he is going to die, he makes sense of all that he has been through since he left home:

> *What I said "ah! If I die here"... I said "If I die here, I'm a hero!"... I said "If I die here, I'm a hero! I've tried!"... You understand? [Laugh] That was my thinking! You understand? I said if I die here, I'm hero, because nobody is going to know I die here... you understand? But to me! Wherever I'll be! I am hero because it's not easy to pass through the desert...! If you cannot sustain the desert ... there's no way you sustain the water! But if you can sustain the desert, you sustain the water ... you understand? So I said I'm a hero, because I've heard of Sahara, in the Bible! Cursed land! And I heard of the Mediterranean Sea! And this is where we are! [Inaudible]...I'm hero if I die here!* (David)

The 'before you be a man you must encounter difficulties' narrative finally finds its conclusion on the waves of the Mediterranean Sea: through the journey David sees himself as a hero who managed to survive multiple difficulties and risks. The symbolic necessities located at the beginning of the flight – in relation to his original incapacity to react to violence perpetrated by other men – are somehow met. Streiff–Fénart and Segatti (2012) write that a new figure of the adventurer has been created due to the polarization of the migration process centred on the challenge of border crossing. This has given a dramatic and heroic configuration to mobility (Streiff–Fénart and Segatti 2012, XI). The hero, however, is the epitome of masculine realization in the face of danger so that the challenge of border crossing is primarily reconnected to masculinity. In this context, we can read the episode of boat crossing in the Strait of Sicily as the conclusive stage of the performative trial, signifying the ultimate test for the male traveller.

Common to many cultures and across time (Sullivan and Venter 2005), the hero is the idealised symbol of manhood, characterised by a common core of transcendental courage in the face of danger (Whitehead 2005); the reference to the 'hero' figure seems to correspond to a specific set of narrative strategies.

First of all, we should reflect on how this narrative inhabits a larger discursive frame, emerging as a possible site of contestation. From the work of Johnson (2011) we know that the racialization and feminization of the refugee subject

in dominant humanitarian discourse has coincided with a shift from the heroic, political male individual– the 'Cold war refugee' –to the victimised and voiceless woman from the Global South. Johnson (2011) seems to suggest that heroism was granted to refugee subject until they were white, while the racialization of refugee population led to a dominant frame of victimisation. This, I argue, has great cost for participants, that need to reconcile the masculine expectations/aspirations associated with the gendered enterprise and the refugee tropes of 'genuineness' as part of the same story. The hero's journey narrative can be seen as a way to contest the tropes of victimization and feminisation associated with the 'genuine refugee' narrative in Europe. At the same time, I see David's heroic positioning as some sort of self–exalting strategy (Wetherell and Edley 1999) in relation to his positionality as a result of his entire refugee experience. This means that the hero positioning should be read not only in relation to his asylum seeker condition in Sicily, but also of the whole experience of mobility along the CMR. Through this narrative choice, David's seem to put themselves above all the other men (and women) in the narrative performance (including the audience, and therefore, the researcher).

Another, much younger, participant, Banna, used the same heroic positioning in relation to this phase. While recalling the journey he mentions that one day he will explain to his own kids the difficulties associated with the crossing. To my question 'what would you say to your kids about this?' the young Gambian asylum seeker said, '*Oh, I'm a hero* [laughs]'. For Banna, the performance of heroic masculinity should be read in relation to his view of the journey as a transition into manhood/adulthood. Interestingly, he used the reference to heroic masculinity in relation to his future offspring, clarifying the symbolic capital of the journey experience in his idealised trajectory into manhood. This should be reconnected to the young age of Banna and, most importantly, to its narrative location (Somers 1994, Anthias 2002) as asylum seeking man in Sicily. With few opportunities to conform to hegemonic masculinity, for example, through employment or educational qualification (Whitehead 2005), the refugee journey emerges as key site for the reconstruction of masculine self in Sicily.

In this context, the concept of liminality captures the process of engagement with the masculinity ideal (Howson 2014), which in the case of participants cannot be reduced to merely reclaim patriarchal privilege but seems to serve some more stringent identity purposes. Making meaning of what happened to them – including dealing with highly traumatizing experiences – involves

considering who they are and what they have lost as a result of their journey experience. This might be a very disturbing question for people who have witnessed the horrors of Libya and find themselves in a precarious position in Sicily. The journey of achievement –in its different configurations like hero's journey or coming of age story – emerges therefore as a site where the transformative experience of crossing becomes 'intelligible and capable of assimilation' (Bridges 1980, 117). I see this process strictly connected to the fear of a collapse in self–identity (Whitehead 2005) described in Chapter 4.

At the same time, by defining who we are (making sense of the past), we set the premises for moving forward (Somers 1994). Liminal experiences, in this sense, are meant to be temporary, followed by a phase of re–incorporation in the ordinary world with the new identity. The journey of achievement indicated that the confirmation has occurred, so that the new man coming out from the Sahara is ready to meet the social requirements of manhood – financial independence, marriage, fatherhood. As a narrative strategy, thus, the journey of achievement frame appears to allow men–on–the–move to negotiate dignity (Davis 2003) and status for their new positionality in Sicily, where the reincorporation in society, as 'men', is to be expected. Demonstrating their masculine competence might be seen as a way to renegotiate a new geography of gendered power relation as men in Sicily.

Lastly the hero's journey as a narrative choice should also be analysed in relation to the conversational partnership. Indeed it is very important to acknowledge the power dynamics that narratives inhabit and create (Somers 1994). In my interviews, based on my inexperience, I struggled to negotiate a position from which to negotiate reciprocity. In retrospect, there was a risk that respect and reciprocity might be received as a form of admiration by people who live in the context of high marginalization and even hostility, and did not have many opportunities to interact with Sicilian natives. Proposing myself as someone interested in participants' stories, outside the asylum deliberation process, might reinforce some sort of self–exalting strategy in the performance of masculinity. Another issue is the way I saw my participants, from a perspective of empathy. During the final phase of fieldwork, talking with Evans, I told him 'Every time I hear these stories, you are a true hero, because I would never be able to do this'. Banna and David's interviews were conducted earlier in the interview process, so I see this as an unconscious expression of my analytic process, but still I wonder how this was reflected on the way I approached the interview process and how I looked at the data from my own positionality. More interestingly, as recounted to Whitehead, the hero

myth represents a universal 'standard of masculinity that overarches social divisions between men' to the point that he defines masculinity as heroism (Whitehead 2005, 414). What if the hero positioning was dictated by the social, cultural and racial difference between participants and me? What if, unconsciously, we were both using the myth of the hero as a shared form of communication across social divisions and locations, and most importantly the linguistic barrier? In the case of David, for example, the fact that I was a researcher who was younger and invested with prestige due to my race, class and education, enacted visibly gendered tensions and provided an opportunity for contestation and, even, resistance mostly based on my age. David used a paternalistic approach towards me, from his position of a family man, and eventually educated me on life and gender relations throughout the interview. His heroic positioning might be read in relation to this strategy. With Banna, on the other hand, the dynamic was totally the opposite and the hero positioning should be read as a form of negotiating power in the conversational partnership given my racial and class privilege. Interestingly, Evans to whom I disclosed my impressions, did not reflect these in his personal narrative. He never presented himself as a hero as a result of his story. The theme of the journey of achievement is still present in personal narrative, but not in terms of heroic positioning or other self–exalting strategies. When considering the impact of my positionality on participants' narrative performance, without underestimating the imbalance of power that these interviews inhabit and the fact that the narratives are always dialogically constructed, I argue that the refugee stories, from the narrators' standpoint, have wider purpose than simply responding to the dynamics of the interview situation. Banna's heroic positioning was directed toward his future children, to whom he will explain his story, possibly as part of their masculine socialization. As noted by Eastmond (2007), therefore, asylum narratives should be read in relation to a wider external audience and understood as much more complex texts. In other words, given their experience, I do not think that either Banna or David were 'only' interacting with me when they claimed 'I'm a hero'. This would be the epitome of narcissism from my point of view. However, I argue that my positionality in the interview performance interacted, shaped and most importantly, enabled dialogically participants' storytelling towards that direction.

Conclusions

In the previous chapter, I illustrated how in participants' refugee stories, the CMR route emerges as a landscape for undertaking a quest for masculine

realization and recognition. Following the participants' accounts of crossing through Libya, this segment of the gendered enterprise is characterised as the place to locate the 'threshold' between the old and the new social position. This model, associated with the traditional frame of rite of passage, makes the crossing experience as the social and symbolic location where the initiate is pushed to the limits and needs to prove his value as man; passage, in this sense, involves obstacles, tests and challenges (Janssen 2007) through which masculine competence can be proved. Through this narrative frame we can explore how gendered vulnerabilities are produced and interpreted by men-on-the-move in the phase of crossing through Libya. This is due to the challenges that CMR requires of people–on–the–move when confronting the wilderness of Sahara, the dangerous smuggling practices and the lawlessness of post–Gaddafi Libya.

In light of this, a dominant masculine discourse –exemplified by Bai's account– seems to offer legitimation to this process of engagement with hegemonic masculinity; as argued by smugglers, in participants' accounts, in order to survive the Sahara, one must prove to be a man. This understanding of the Libya crossing, as a 'test' for masculine capacity, allows us to study this experience with the lens of liminality. In such frame, characterised by the typical death and rebirth imagery of rite of passage (Silverman 2004), a boy must prove himself to become a man; while those men who are not capable of enduring the adversities and difficulties of crossing deserve to die. Here, refugee masculinities appears to be located on specific power hierarchies not in relation to smugglers' omnipotent dominance; but also among the same travellers in terms of their 'masculine' capacity of enduring the hardship of the journey.

Vulnerability, however, while policed by masculine discourse is never neglected: it emerged as part of the gendered enterprise, specifically in relation to patterns of violence and abuse associated with smuggling practices, migrant detention centres and the proliferation of armed and criminal group. I see this connotation of vulnerability produced by the intersection of gender, race and the illegality condition. Here, travellers' masculinities are constructed as inferior and travellers are subjected to a continuum of experiences of powerlessness and humiliation. In the Sahara, sexual violence affecting refugee women is used to articulate the brutality and amorality of smugglers and armed groups. In Libya, gang–related violence against Sub–Saharan migrants and the experience of incarceration in migrant detention centres are other sites wherein to locate a contested space for vulnerability as men–on–

the–move. Most importantly, these vulnerabilities are indicated as part of the gendered enterprise conducive to a new level of manhood.

In line with this masculine discourse, surviving the journey through Libya and arriving in Italy is narrated as an accomplishment not only in terms of safety and the possibility of asylum, but also in terms of the participants' masculine competence. Those who survive will come out of this experience irremediably changed. The arrival in Italy is thus presented as a journey of achievement, through which the symbolic necessities located in the beginning of the gendered enterprise are met. For younger participants, in particular, the journey through Libya emerges as coming–of–age story, signifying a transition from youth to adulthood. Participants feel they have demonstrated something to themselves and to their audiences, exalting qualities they ascribe to their masculinity, such as endurance, patience, experience, self–discipline, and self–reliance. These characteristics, symbolised by the reference to the military–heroic–masculinity ideal, allow participants to locate themselves as 'men', not as passive or vulnerable victims, in their asylum narratives.

In this regard, participants' heroic positioning in their refugee narratives be regarded as a strategy to claim masculine status and entitlement. In absence of other opportunities, the monomyth (Campbell 1993) of the masculine hero–soldier might be the only available, yet inadequate, strategy to reconcile profound questions about self, masculine identity, and vulnerability as a result of the journey experience – including the continuous exposure to a range of traumatising and dehumanizing experiences. At the same time, the hero's journey narrative appears extremely connected with participants' new positionality in Sicily, where the reincorporation into society, as 'men', is to be expected. Having demonstrated their masculine values means that participants are able to renegotiate their gendered position as 'men' in Sicily. Here, reincorporation in the ordinary world means being able to fulfil the social requirements of manhood around marriage, work and financial independence.

CHAPTER SIX. Men–Interrupted

It is 3.30 pm in a small village in rural Sicily. Darla has taken me to one of the refugee centres to deliver some Christmas cakes and introduce me to participants. When we arrive at the local centre we find nobody. All the guys that live in this small flat are still at work, except one of them, a young Gambian man, Soufiane, who is on the balcony talking on the phone. A staffer of the organization is also there, engaged in cleaning the floor. The house is not fully refurnished; just a wooden table in the large kitchen with some chairs. At once, I am surrounded by a sense of void and absence. It is like nobody lived there. A few signs of human presence are hard to detect in that emptiness.

Soufiane, who at first was focused on his call, finally greets us. He says he had received bad news from Gambia. Like all the Gambian asylum seekers in Sicily at the time, December 2016, he is following the development of his country's politics. Yahya Jammeh had just lost the elections but still refused to abandon power. Soufiane is worried that a civil war might follow. When Darla asks him what he did today, he answers, 'Nothing'. Soufiane says he wants to go to school but there is no school for adult foreigners in this small village. They would need to be taken to a larger urban centre but at the moment the organization does not provide such a service. Soufiane argues that he is learning Sicilian rather that Italian.

Soufiane is always with a friend who officially does not live there, but whom I always meet whenever I visit the flat. The friend disappears in Sufiane's bedroom as soon as we start talking to him, I feel in the hope of going unnoticed by Darla. I observe that Soufiane and him spend most of the time in that room listening to music and smoking while lying in bed. Darla told me that Soufiane is particularly 'lazy'. The other co–habitants of the facilities are more proactive; they all leave the house at dawn to find job opportunities in the fields surrounding the village, where they provide manpower for the local farmers. The cleaning staffer suggests we go to another flat where he argues we will have a better chance to find some people. The flat is in another part of the village so we take the car to get there.

As soon as we enter the building, less nice than the previous one, we notice that the guys might have recently returned. In the poor entrance hall, a few bicycles lie down next to a dozen of farming boots, dirty with earth. The smell

of earth is intense. Darla and I go upstairs. The flat is clean and empty like the other I visited before. Someone is cooking dinner. The meal is rice with vegetables and fried chicken. One of the inhabitants is in charge of cooking for all. The others are in their rooms, getting ready for the evening. Darla is calling them. I feel deeply embarrassed. What would I think if someone came in my house after a day of hard work to enquire about a research study? But this is not their house, and our presence is proof of that; participants feel they are 'guests' and that is how they have been treated by the populations outside the refugee centre.

A young man from Mali, Touré, joins us in the kitchen and starts talking with me. He is interested in my life in England. He asks 'England? Not France?' I ask if he is interested in moving to France. Touré answers that 'France is not good. England is good, Germany is good, Austria is good'. He is talking about job opportunities. 'What about Italy?' I ask. 'Italy is good but this place is not good!', meaning that in this village where they have been located there is only agricultural work. Working in the fields is harsh and underpaid. Touré asks me if I have ever done it. The answer is no. 'In Germany or England there is not just this type of work' he asserts. The other inhabitants join us in the kitchen; they all are on their smartphones when Darla and I present my project and invite them to ask questions. They briefly discuss this in their native language and finally communicate to me they are not interested in being interviewed. One of them says that he is tired of telling his story. I tried to explain that this could be a way to understand how refugee people live in Sicily but he does not change his mind. The young man adds that everything is fine in here. End of story. After giving them a Pandoro cake, we leave the building and get back to the first flat.

The inhabitants are finally back. The empty house is now full of voices and other noises. Someone is in the kitchen cooking the dinner – like in the other house, it is always one of the guys who is in charge of food preparation for all the residents. Thierry is talking loudly to some friends in his home country via Skype. They laugh and joke. Kams and his roommate are praying in their room. I can hear the Muslim prayer from the behind the door. It is like life flourished in the absence I registered a couple of hours before. In this observational material, we grasp tension the between certainty and uncertainty, past and future, presence and absence, life and waiting that refugee narratives embody.

In the previous chapters, I followed the unfolding of participants' stories from the decision to leave home to their arrival in Sicily; here I illustrated how they position themselves as men, highlighting the complex map of gendered expectations and symbolic necessities associated with their experience of mobility along the CMR. At this point, given the primary aim of narration is to provide a sense of coherence, order and meaning to fragmentary events (Kirmayer 2003), there is a need to connect participants' narratives to their positionality in Sicily, from where they speak and reconstruct their journey stories.

In Chapter 4, I illustrated how the CMR emerges as a meaningful landscape of symbols for men–on–the–move locating an idealised trajectory into manhood. In Chapter 5, I argued that the arrival in Sicily is regarded as rite of passage into manhood. In the narrative frame of the journey of achievement, the traveller engages in an exceptional journey of adventure and transformation, at the end of which, having crossed the threshold between life and death and confronted many tests, he has earned the right to be accepted back into the world as a man (Vogler 1985). I locate the threshold in Libya to signify the ordeal (Vogler 1985) associated with illegal migration in this country.

In line with existing literature on rites of passage that highlights how migration can become an opportunity to signify masculinity (Monsutti 2007, Boehm 2008, Choi 2018), in these narratives of the desert, exposure to risk, dangers and traumatising experiences are contextualised to narrate tales of resistance and endurance rather than victimhood. The arrival in Sicily is similarly anticipated to be an accomplishment where liminality is expected to end; participants feel they have demonstrated something to themselves and to their audiences, exalting qualities they ascribe to their masculinity, such as endurance, courage, self–discipline and self–reliance. These characteristics allow participants to locate themselves as 'men', not as passive or vulnerable victims, in their refugee stories; a new level of manhood as a result of their capacity to survive Libya and reach safely Italian shores. They are therefore ready to be incorporated in the host society as men, fulfilling the social requirements of manhood around marriage, work and financial independence.

Narratives are stories that define who we are in time and place and in relation to others (Fivush 2010). Through narratives we understand and interpret our place in the world; stories thus represent a narrative of location through which we position ourselves in relation to a particular context and therefore audience (Anthias 2002). As storytelling is always a performance (Langellier 2010,

Riessman 2008, Anthias 2002) situated and accomplished dialogically (Langellier and Peterson 2004), the narrative frame of the gendered enterprise must be understood as a way to make meaning of the past but also as a means of articulating participants' placement as refugee and asylum seeking men in Sicily (Anthias 2002, Eastmond 2007). This process involves not only uncovering discourses that are available in the locale, but also navigating complex social positioning and hierarchies associated with their new condition at the intersection of gender, race and migration status. In particular, I argue that presenting the experience of crossing along the CMR as a basis to make claims about their manhood – rather than to present themselves as vulnerable victims – is challenged by the asylum regime and the racialised landscape of Sicily in the context of the 'refugee crisis'. This chapter will therefore engage with these tensions, exploring how masculinity becomes a site of conflict and struggle for refugee and asylum seeking men in Europe.

Entering refugee centres in Sicily

Much like other borderlands such as Greek Islands or Ceuta and Melilla in Spain, Sicily emerges in the current Mediterranean 'refugee crisis' as a transit space, being both the most external frontier of Fortress Europe and the first entry point to the European Union along the CMR. People travelling from Libya are usually rescued by SAR operations in the Straits of Sicily. Yonas is overwhelmed by his feelings of joy, hope and gratitude to God; for a moment, he sees all the things that happened to him as in the past. In this sense, reaching Sicily is presented – as argued in the previous chapter – in the form of an accomplishment at the end of the gendered enterprise. The future can be met and negotiated in this new land, in the case of Yonas, as a free man. However, recounting that moment, the narrator immediately alerts the audience to other concerns that begin as soon as he is categorized as an asylum seeker: then '[suddenly], other concerns begin, later!'.

After spending some time in the first large identification centre, he is allocated to a smaller one. Yonas describes this as an isolated place in the middle of nowhere, surrounded by the farming field. 'Where are they taking me?' he thought while he was on the van to his new 'home'. 'We thought it was like prison…then you get used to it'. Similarly, Kams, who is the only participant who arrived in Italy via plane to Northern Italy, recalls how after being allocated to a temporary centre there, he was transferred to rural Sicily: *'[T]hen I seen [saw] this town is small…where I was somehow…somehow not very very happy…but what comes to my mind is that every mission has an end …so we are here at*

least for a mission that is for paper[international protection status]…when we have paper we can decide wherever we can go'. From Kams' quote, it is clear how the permanence in these spaces is perceived as a suspension of life being associated with the purpose of obtaining documents – a term used by participants in Sicily to refer to any form of legalised status as a result of asylum procedure.

During the refugee determination process, international protection seekers are placed in centres all over the national territory, based on their gender, depending on the availability of places; the decision is not appealable by the applicant (Bove 2017). One day they could be in a small town in Eastern Sicily, and the other they could be transferred to the other side of the island with short notice. Most of my research sites were small towns; only one of them had a population above 36,000 habitants, with the smallest being under 2000 people. Predominantly, their locations were in rural parts of the region, not in coastal areas. So the economy of the local communities was primarily connected to the agricultural sector. The same randomness applies whether they end up in SPRAR structures or temporary structures such as CAS, with the former providing, in theory, a higher standard of the services and protection (Campomori et al. 2016, D'Angelo 2019). The Italian asylum system is particularly complex, characterised by a multi–tier classification of services and centres, with different names, often unclear legal status and different actors involved in the management (D'Angelo 2019, 2217). The centres I accessed were part of second–level reception; in particular, SPRAR receptive structures, based on small local centres providing boarding/lodging services, as well as integration support, legal advice and social assistance services funded by local authorities and managed by local non–governmental organisations and social cooperatives (D'Angelo 2019). Till the recent approval of the decree–law No. 113 of 2018, SPRAR structures hosted both asylum seekers during their asylum application and international protection holders at the beginning of their integration path (Bove 2017). The goal of these centres is therefore providing beneficiaries with a multi–level integration path (Baldoni et al. 2018). Pasquetti (2016) recounts how the SPRAR system was, for over a decade, a limited program catering to only 3000 asylum seekers per year. In 2014, as a result of the surge in sea arrivals, the state decided to expand it to over 20,000 structures in response to the surge of people arriving along the sea routes from Libya (Fargues and Bonfanti 2014, McMahon and Sigona 2018). This, according to Pasquetti (2016), was a way to tackle the corruption and abuse scandal associated with large CARA centres. But the

new configuration of SPRAR receptive structures, and its expansion across the national territory, should also be seen as inhabiting the discourse of the 'refugee crisis' and its logic of emergency. In this context, refugee reception is ascribed to a category of exceptionality, requiring action and resolution by European governments with regards to both security and humanitarian concerns (Castelli Gattinara 2017).

The logic of confinement in refugee spaces is always imagined as a temporary intervention until a permanent solution is found (S. Turner 2016). In the case of asylum seekers in Italy, the solution is usually being recognised under a form of international protection, or entering again the condition of illegality after a negative decision, due to the fact that in Italy deportations are not effective, except for some nationalities. Migrants from countries who have signed a bilateral agreement with Italy – Nigeria, Egypt, and Morocco – can be taken straight to the centres for identification and expulsion (CIE) for repatriation (D'Angelo 2019, 2222). The local centre becomes thus a place of waiting until a final decision is made on participants' applications. D'Angelo defines this as a 'legal and social limbo' (D'Angelo 2019, 2222). Here, participants' lives are marked by a high degree of frustration and anxiety about the future until a permanent solution is reached. This entails navigating the possibility of receiving a negative decision at the end of the refugee determination process; confronting the fear of repatriation or, more likely, becoming an illegal migrant as a result of a negative decision. With particular regards to Sicilian asylum structures, the suspended temporality can last over two years due to length and delays in the Italian asylum procedure. According to the Asylum Information Database (AIDA), citing data from ASGI, the average time of the appeal process for asylum claimants in Italy is 18 months (AIDA 2016).

In this time of waiting and indistinctness, asylum seekers are located in a totalized structure of relations of dependency (Spanakos 1998) by the humanitarian agency, to be reimagined as objects of help (Szczepanikova, 2009), following a logic of care and control (Malkki 1992, 1995). Agier (2011) sees refugee containment spaces as a device of humanitarian government, produced at the interplay of humanitarianism and securitisation. On one side, the logic of containment is justified by humanitarian rationalities to provide assistance and care to vulnerable populations; on the other hand, it creates a space for disciplinary power and control. In Sicilian refugee centres life is highly regulated by the social cooperative in charge of the structure; they

decide what beneficiaries will eat and what kind of activities they will undertake. On this matter, Onyeka, who is now living with his newly established family in a private accommodation, comparing his experience in the reception centre to this new gained independence, argues: ''*So I have a freedom now. You understand? Even though I don't have money, but I have a freedom'*. Onyeka adds, that *'The only person who can control me here is the securities. Police can come here and knock my door, I open. Carabinieri they can knock and will open, they ask me question and go back. Guardia di Finanza can come and knock, I open, they ask me question and go back. Any security officer they can come here'*. He then asserts: '*When you are in camp, most of the people who work there, they take you are a slave'*. The citation of slavery is indicative of the complex power relations that a totalized structure of relations of dependency (Spanakos 1998) enacts within the centre at the intersection of race and gender. On one side, the organization and its staffers, who are usually white men and women, and on the other, the beneficiaries who are usually black and brown men.

In the literature on refugee spaces, Agamben's conceptualization of bare life (Agamben 1998) has been used to describe the state of exception in which refugees are confined (Agamben 2000)[52]. Such suspension created by the sovereign power brings to light the difference between birth and nation, nativity and nationality, symbolizing the separation between bare life (biological life) and citizenship (political life), which is at the heart of the modern nation–state (Agamben 1998, 77). Agamben views camps as 'sites of intensified sovereign power in which the normal legal order is suspended by the sovereign' (Ramadan 2013, 68). The camp becomes an exceptional legal grey zone where refugees are reduced to biological life, while a permanent state of emergency justifies their exclusion from the political life of the *polis* (Miggiano 2009, Ramadan 2013, Diken 2004). Where the citizen has agency, and especially political agency (Nyers 2006), understood as the capacity to act

[52] In the context of the 'refugee crisis', the image of the refugee as bare life is personified by 'those who are fighting for their survival in an abandoned boat in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea or those stranded in the desert' (Miggiano 2009, 13); suspended in a liminal legal space (Dines et al 2015), which provides state authorities 'a moral alibi' for any deaths that occur (Doty 2011), their lives are captured in a tragic state of exception which might have tragic consequences. As a testimony of this, I remember a visit to a Sicilian cemetery where some of the victims of the 3rd of October Lampedusa shipwreck are buried. Compared to the others, migrants' and refugees' graves were not refined, standing without plaster or paint in the graveyard. Only a few graves – an Eritrean woman with her children – had names on them, with the others having just a number for identification purposes. These bodies, like those drowned and never rescued in the Mediterranean Sea, disappeared leaving no trace, in a foreign land.

and the ability to have an impact both upon one's own life and upon the lives of others (Johnson 2011, 1028), the refugee is cast as 'invisible, speechless, and, above all, non–political' (Nyers 2006, 3). I see the 'genuine refugee' discourse as a way to capture the essential tropes of bare life: the ideal refugee subject is depicted as a victim, without a history and incapable of exercising any degree of agency, above all political agency. However, as Simon Turner (2016) points out, the conceptualization of bare life, whether it grasps the politics of humanitarian government, does not capture all the aspects of refugee lives[53]. Although refugees themselves might conceive of this as an exceptional space; the camp is a site where people engage in the creation of 'new identities, communities and political projects' (S. Turner 2016, 148). In this sense, the goal of humanitarian government agencies to create moral apolitical beings is never completely successful, with people resisting it and constructing their own political subjectivities (Turner 2005).

Here, I argue that the dynamics of exclusion and separation, as well as the capacity for resistance by refugees and asylum seekers, should be reconnected to the specificity of the refugee spaces and its mechanisms of power, control and management. Agier (2011), in his inventory of refugee spaces today, distinguishes between different types: self–organised refugee village, holding or sorting centres on the border, spaces of confinement and camps for internally displaced persons. The peculiarity of my research is the rationale of the refugee spaces I accessed which are part of the second level of the Italian reception system. Although they qualify as spaces of confinement, none of them resemble the socio–cultural complexity of camps as cities–to–be (Agier 2011) with shops, offices and streets (Turner 2010). This means that the opportunities for encounters, exchanges and sociality inside the centre space were extremely reduced. Among the research sites I accessed, only one could qualify as a small compound of a few buildings. The other facilities I accessed were mostly flats or single buildings in peripheral areas of the village or town; with the smallest being a flat for two people. The structure had usually a common room with a kitchen, and a few bedrooms to share among two or three beneficiaries. Some reception structures such as one in Town 7, Town 6

[53] Similarly, Dines et al. argues that the concept of bare life, does not capture all the aspects of the migration experience: *'Migrants who succeed in crossing borders, those who riot against detention centres or those who organize themselves to claim labour and citizenship rights break exactly that state of exception configured by the idea of 'bare life'"* (Dines et al 2015, 442).

and one in Town 4 presented inadequate housing conditions. In particular, one large centre in Town 7 was characterised by poor cleaning and lack of basic access to clean water. The organization claimed that this was caused by a strike for the payment delays of the staff's salary. As a consequence, the large reception hall which functioned as the common area was covered in rubbish and permeated by a terrible smell but most of the centres I accessed were much cleaner. However, they were all distant from the image depicted in Italian anti–migration discourse where refugees and asylum seekers are presented as enjoying their time in luxurious facilities and hotels with free wifi and meals. On the 21st of March 2014, Matteo Salvini wrote on his Facebook page that a group of 'clandestini' (irregular migrants) were staying in a hotel with a swimming pool and spa paid by Italian taxpayers (Il Post 2015). Beside the fact that if someone is an asylum seeker he or she is not an irregular migrant, this type of narrative has been proven to be fake news (Il Post 2015, Torrisi 2015.). Overall, the centres I accessed did not have swimming pools or spas. Most participants' social life in the centre was restricted to poorly refurnished common areas, around a wooden table and some chairs. Opportunities for interaction are limited to people who live there. The only people coming from outside are those working for the social cooperatives, but they will leave as soon as they finish their job.

The differences between large camps and small refugee centres was acknowledged by Thierry; the Ivorian man compared his permanence in the first–level reception centre where he was located when he arrived and his permanence in the small flat in Town 4 described at the beginning of the chapter. Thierry recalls how in that centre, he was able to play football every day with both Italian and African people, while in Town 4 he once attempted to join a group of Sicilian boys to play football and was beaten in return. This lack of opportunities for social relations makes Thierry admit that 'this is not life…I am not living'.

The lack of sociality and contractuality of refugees made these spaces resemble Augé's conceptualization of 'non–places'. Augé argues that a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity; on the contrary, 'non–places are abstract and indistinct spaces' (Augé 1995 94). The only problem with Augé's definition is that despite capturing the unmaking of participants' identities (Blue 2015) associated with suspended temporality and exceptionality associated with spaces of transit,; it ignores the relational dimension that these refugee centres shape as sites for food preparation,

praying, and sociality where thus new identities can be constructed and life goes on. At the same time, participants' narratives indicate a shared sense of loss enacted by these spaces. Mortland writes that within the physical boundaries of these facilities 'refugees are not what were, they are not what they will become, and they are not of the surrounding society. They are refugees and that is all: objects either to ignore or pity' (Mortland 1987, 380). This can be seeing by looking at participants' conversation in the centres. Participants recall the main topics concern their expectations for the future, namely what they are going to do as soon as, after being granted a legal status, they will leave the centre.

> *Every day we just talk about documents, you understand?...We talk about future. And want to start good life to make our family proud.* (King)

> *[S]ometimes we talk about the past! What happened in Gambia…the past! …[H]e always talk about documents because it's not having document! He's mad to have document now!…[S]ometimes we talk about our future: when we have a work, what we are going to do, what we are going to do…we talk about it.* (Doudou)

> *Everybody said this is what I want to do ... this is my problem in my country, this ... this ... we also speak about this thing, to know what's best for the future [they talk about future].* (Oumar)

Here, we should ask why participants, who are not detained, remain in these centres despite the feeling of entrapment. As Thierry explains, leaving is almost impossible until their legal status is defined. D'Angelo recounts how many failed asylum seekers try to continue their journey through central and northern Italy and, after that, northern Europe while others end up living on their wits in Sicilian towns or villages in the countryside where they provide cheap workforce for the local agricultural sector (D'Angelo 2019). According to D'Angelo, 'This is a system that produces illegality, a large–scale machinery that, for the most part, channels migrants, hinders them for a while – often quite a long, alienating while – and then releases them in the local territory undocumented' (D'Angelo 2019, 2224).

Those who like Yaya decide or are forced to leave these centres without documents end up in a condition similar to illegal migrants (D'Angelo 2019), sleeping in squats, parks, tent cities or train stations, receiving no support from the state and being very vulnerable to exploitation and invisibility (Miggiano 2009, MSF 2016). Yaya recalls how he slept for some time at

Palermo central train station until he re–entered a new reception centre. Others like Doudou find the support of fellow Africans and end up in private accommodation, often overcrowded with poor living conditions. According to SPRAR (2018), however, finding private accommodation is a complex task; not only due to the volatility of jobs undertaken by refugees and asylum seekers in Italy, but also for the general distrust shown by real estate agencies and property owners towards this group. With very few opportunities, it seems that bureaucratic and socio–economic barriers have replaced prison cells and fences (Zeveleva 2017). This awareness translates into a sense of physical and psychological seclusion, compromising their capability of moving on with their life.

A significant feature of this sense of seclusion is the gendered and racialised dimension of the refugee centre in Sicily. In the second level of the Italian asylum system, refugees and asylum seekers are allocated based on their gender (SPRAR 2018). Except two participants who were located in specific structures with their family, for the rest of them being allocated in a reception facility means entering a community of men.

> *Only men, every day I see my fellow men. You know you just, no woman give passing joy, you understand, if you see a woman, you'd be happy.* (King)

> *[E]ven in this place [the reception centre], sometimes they do complain! "Oh, why there is no girls, here! I think that we should be here with girls!"* (Lyon)

> *We don't have women friends in here. There are not women in here. We talked a lot about women with other guys. We have conversation. At the moment, nobody is dating anyone.* (Ebrima)

> *The only female I know is Claudia [the camp's social worker] who I can meet on the way and say "Ciao"…I don't have any female friends and I don't meet anybody!* (Ezekiel)

The only women that circulate in these centres are those who work for the organization, representing effectively their authority in these microcosms. This impacts power relations inside the camp, making masculinity emerge as a field of conflict and tension between participants and the social cooperative which runs the centre. Another important characteristic is that these communities of men come from different countries and cultures (Agier 2011).

From the point of view of Sicilian natives, the main commonality among camp residents is the prominent factor of race. Being inhabited by men of colour, in some rural town where black communities are scarce in numbers or almost non–existent, the centre appears as a racialised enclave in the middle of a white landscape.

The above–mentioned suspended temporality and temporariness mirrors thus a spatial separation from the host society (S. Turner 2016, 139). Agier (2011) sees camps as sites to locate the undesirable, removing them from the host society. The separation of refugees from the host society is not only physical, but also symbolic and social (Diken 2004). Influenced by Mary Douglas' conceptualization of pollution (Douglas 1966), most of the literature on forced migration has problematized the disquieting spectre of difference posed by refugees in relation to sovereign power (Agamben 2000). Like initiates in rites of passage, the refugee is perceived as a danger due to his or her difference and therefore needs to be secluded from the 'national order of things' (Malkii 1995). More specifically, in the refugee centres I accessed spatial separation and the logic of confinement were organised along racial and gender lines. Often located in the middle of the countryside, or in peripheral areas of the town, the refugee centres I accessed appeared to me as hidden in the urban topography of the town, mostly due to their size. Diken explains this as a contemporary strategy aimed at the dispersal of the asylum seekers in marginal areas. The main purpose of this strategy is to avoid the formation of refugee ghetto in urban centres. However, practice of dispersal often leads to ghetto enclaves in peripheral and isolated locations (Diken 2004, 91). Driving across Sicily, while it would be easy to detect the presence of a large camp mostly associated with hotspot structures or CARA, SPRAR facilities and other second–level centres were very hard to detect with no signs of check–points or gates, no military or police apparatus, typical of refugee spaces of exception (Agier 2011). Usually what indicated that there was a receptive structure in the proximity, was the presence of small groups of African men walking or cycling on the side of the road.

I experienced this when I accessed the first centre; I had to use my car, but even that was complicated so I needed to ask someone to drive me there in advance so I could learn its location for the day after. The second facility was even more alienating: literally in the middle of nowhere, on a hill surrounded by farming fields, with no possibility of transportation except a minibus supplied by the same centre. In participants' accounts, this created a sense of

entrapment to the point that Yonas's first thought when he saw his new 'home' was that this looked like prison. At this point, challenging Agamben's view of the camp as a separate entity from the city, research has extensively illustrated how social life in refugee spaces should be understood in relationship between outside and inside of the refugee camp (Sigona 2015, Agier 2011,Casati 2018) and how refugee spaces of exception often become a site for social–political engagement (Sigona 2015, Turner 2010). Given the symbolic position of the camp in local communities, the dimension of seclusion and exception should be understood in a complex relation between outside and inside. Diken and Laustsen argue that camps are not 'just a matter of walls and fences but also of doors and windows' (Diken and Laustsen 2005, 192). In the case of centres I accessed, there were not fences but only doors. But the peripheral location of these facilities subjects participants to a great deal of isolation. Most of my participants had to cycle – sometimes for 50 minutes – to reach the farms where they worked. With no public transport, bikes appear as the only resource to fight this feeling of seclusion associated with life in the centre.

The institutionalization of liminality

Recounting his days in the centre, Yonas recalls spending his time watching television:

> *My day passed like this; morning I have breakfast and then I put myself in front of the television until lunch, then lunch I eat and again I go in front of the television until night. That's enough. This is how my day passes by because there is nothing else.* (Yonas)

From this account we grasp how the suspended temporality translates into a state of inactivity, boredom and apathy. Contrary to the rich sociality associated with large camps (Turner 2010, Agier 2011, Sigona 2015), everyday experience inside Sicilian refugee centres was marked by few possibilities of social interaction. In the small centre of Town 4 that I described above, participants' social life was mostly associated with encounters with fellow SPRAR residents and staffers in the house common areas. This enforced close proximity to fellow refugee and asylum seeking men was perceived by some participants, like Coulibalì or Hakeem, as a source of further frustration; while for others, like Oumar, it constituted an important source of sociality, care and interaction. Ousmane adds that they treated him like a 'son'. Overall, I noticed that participants attempted to carve out a space for social encounters mainly through social media that participants used to keep in touch with their family and friends in Africa, but also to exchange information about the future directions of their journey. This underlines the importance of Wi–Fi, that in anti–migrant discourse is presented as a privilege (Il Post 2015). During my time spent in Town 4 I noticed how Thierry was constantly with his phone in his hands. On this matter, I wrote in my field notes:

*He wakes up at 6 in the morning, goes to work, comes back at 4, he doesn't go out, he doesn't have a hobby, he lives suspended in a non–places. Together with his African friends, there is not social life for them in ***** (Town 4) outside the black community. The WiFi reminds him that there is a life, still, somewhere in the world, that deserves to be lived.*

SPRAR reception centres, like the one where Thierry was located, are imagined as devices for favouring beneficiaries' paths to integration and activity (Baldoni et al. 2018); therefore, at least theoretically, in SPRAR centres, beneficiaries should be actively involved in the management of the reception project (SPRAR 2018); they should attend education, vocational trainings, internships and specific employment bursaries financed by local authorities ('borse lavoro') (Bove 2017). However, as Campomori et al. argues

there is a problem of implementation of the SPRAR holistic model of reception across different contexts. In her evaluation, she highlights this issue, comparing a centre in Northern Italy and one in Sicily. Here, problems of implementation intersect bureaucratic and administrative inefficiencies of different bodies (Campomori et al. 2016). This, in addition to the length of the refugee determination process, is seen as compromising the integration path of asylum seekers and impacting on their psychological wellbeing (Camporoni et al. 2016).

Based on my data, I registered a different implementation of these integration initiatives across the research sites. For example, in Towns n° 2 and n° 3 the partnership with the local authorities seemed to work well, with beneficiaries being actively involved in cooking and cleaning services; in others, like Town n° 7, less so. Moreover, opportunities like 'borsa lavoro' highly depend on the partnership between the organization and the municipality in charge of the reception centres: in Towns 4 and 5, this appeared to work, while in Towns 6 and 7 there was no trace of it. In this respect, Bove (2018) argues that while the law makes a generic reference to the right to access employment without indicating any limitations, in practice asylum seekers face difficulties in obtaining a residence permit, which allows them to work. This is due to the delay in the registration of their asylum claims, on the basis of which the permit of stay will be consequently issued (Bove 2018, 91). As a result, most participants were left outside these programmes and had to find jobs in the illegal market, mostly in the farming sector.

Being one of most deprived regions in the EU, with very high socio–economic inequalities and a stagnant labour market – for both natives and migrants – refugees find in Sicily an unexpected version of Europe, very distant from what they idealized in their home countries. This means that they need to navigate a dire socio–economic landscape where the job opportunities are limited and located in a highly racialised landscape. Those in larger urban centres, like Yonas, Moussa or Bakary, can rely on a more diversified range of job opportunities including the hospitality and service sector. Those in rural areas outside large urban centres, like in Town 4, migrants and refugees ultimately provide cheap and easily exploitable work for the agricultural sector (Corrado et al. 2018). Kams recounts*: '[H]ere if you want to get money…especially if you don't have paper, you know…simplest or the most appropriate way to get money is to go to campagna [farming] like… you go and caught the peperoni [peppers], or… zucchina [courgette]*'.

According to D'Angelo (2019), Sicily's agricultural sector is now able to survive only thanks to the large number of migrants employed in exploitative, largely illegal conditions. In an article for The Guardian, Lorenzo Tondo (2018a) writes that 'migrant labour is a booming business in Sicily, not only for farmers but also for the contractors who recruit men and women to work illegally in the fields'. That is because, in Southern Italy, agriculture is characterised historically by an intense use of casual and seasonal labour, which increases the risk of exploitation and the condition of precariousness for migrants and refugee workers (Corrado et al. 2018):

> *[Y]ou may have it today…tomorrow you may not have…after tomorrow you may have work… normally we go out…on the streets sometime …so normally when the 'capo' [boss] need two or three people…they contact us…and then you know, tomorrow I need at least you know two people, can you join me? You go and join with them and work…so if there is none…then you know…you do relax…there is none.* (Kams)

Kams describes how African men in Sicilian villages need to negotiate jobs on a daily basis, using intermediaries, which procure cheap workforce for local farmers. During the fieldwork, I was informed of African men regrouping in some areas of the village, usually a square, where farmers and their intermediaries would go to choose and pick up them for a day of work. This means that for those, like Sufiane in the opening sketch, who did not secure a job for the day in the illegal market, they are swallowed back inside:

> *[W]e take the bike to get into town (Town n° 7) to look for a job…then if you don't find it…you stay like this…watching tv…there is nobody to…to walk around, to talk…what [can] we do?* (Dramane)

> *Me, I just stay in the house, and eat food and sleep…wake up and eat and sleep… and I saw somebody who offered me to work, a little work, [why] I should reject it? So it was very bad for us!... After we are in the house…get bored! Sleep! [Inaudible] we watch TV!* (Ezekiel)

> *We have so much problem, this place, so. One problem, pocket money. Everything is problem here. I'm sitting here for a good two years now. No documents, nothing, nothing. Just eat, sleep, go around. It's no good.* (Jeremiah)

From these accounts, I argue that patterns of inactivity should be seen as constructed at the intersection between refugee policies and the wider Sicilian

socio–economic landscape. In my observations, when not working some participants surface from their rooms, nervously circulating around the common areas of the centre with their phones, in the attempt to find something to do. At this point, Yonas asserts:

> *I don't want to stay there [the refugee centre] 24 hours doing nothing! And for four years it is not easy! Not a year I could bear this! For me it was like prison! Prison without doing anything! Also prison is better! They do activities, they make you study! They do so many things! But there it's a wasted life…thank god I didn't die [along the journey] so I [risked to] lose my life to get here doing what? To do what? Studying? To find the future? To find freedom?* (Yonas)

Now that he lives in private accommodation, Yonas defines his experience in the refugee centre as 'life wasted' indicating how from his perspective the new condition of liminality, institutionalised and sanctioned by asylum practices, jeopardised the idealised trajectory toward manhood, as a proxy for adulthood, embodied by the flight. For Yonas, who fled Eritrea to become a man fulfilling his aspirations and projects around study and work, such inactivity is incompatible with his own aspirations, hardly negotiated throughout the materiality of the journey. In this context, the permanence in liminal conditions represents a traumatic suspension of the active masculinity project (Connell 2005), which was embodied in, and performed through, the gendered enterprise framework in participants' asylum narratives.

Liminality becomes a permanent condition when any of Van Gennep's phases (separation, transition, and incorporation) 'becomes frozen, as if a film stopped at a particular frame' (Szakolczai 2000, 220 cited in Thomassen 2009). According to Thomassen, incorporation 'is a critical passage', without it 'liminality is pure danger', meaning that 'the social drama has no foregone conclusion' (Thomassen 2009, 22) and the ambiguity associated with in–between phases is not resolved. For this reason, for Szakolczai (2017), living under conditions of permanent liminality results in a sense of entrapment.

I observed this in what I define as the most difficult moment of my entire fieldwork, when Yaya, after recounting his story, suddenly broke into tears in front of me. Explaining why he was crying, he told me that after all he had been through his situation 'hasn't got better'. At the moment of the interview, he was still waiting for paperwork associated with his asylum claim, living in another refugee centre, with no possibility to find a job or enrol in formal

education. He thus found himself in the same situation he was when he left Gambia and as a man–on–the–move in Libya.

> *[S]ince in Gambia I never go to school; here, also here, I never go to school; that's a big problem for me… When I think education is important because when I see people are speaking a language, are reading, understand things…while I'm sitting nothing, I'm not doing nothing, only sleep …I'm just… fed up… with that.* (Yaya)

Yaya traces a linear continuity between his life in Gambia (as a kid) and his life in Sicily (as an international protection holder) in relation to his access to education, signifying how the quest for personal realization cannot yet be met in Europe despite his location in a SPRAR centre that should aim at providing training and education for their beneficiaries.

Given the temporal dimension of my analysis following the unfolding of participants' experience of mobility, I argue that their liminality in Sicilian refugee centres should be understood in a continuum with their previous experiences along the CMR and not as an isolated event associated with Sicily. For men–on–the–move like Hakeem who had to spend several months reaching Sicily, liminality becomes thus a protracted condition of existence (Agier 2016). At this point, transit spaces in Libya are associated in participants' narrative with their agential capacity to move onward with their journey as men–on–the–move. What appears to be different in participants' account is that liminality in Sicily is sanctioned by the disciplinary power of the asylum regime, which abruptly interrupts their migration trajectory before they reach an idealised, final destination.

If we look at the journey along the CMR we can see how mobility is always interlaced with moments of stasis and waiting. Interviewing participants in Sicily, it is obvious that this relationship is reconfigured in terms of their present experience in asylum reception centres. Here, I argue that compared to other transit spaces along the CMR, this sense of obstructed mobility and spatial friction is aggravated by the widespread control enacted by the social cooperative on the lives of beneficiaries. In this sense, the liminality of participants' conditions is not symbolically depicted as part of the journey – a test – but as a stumbling block.

Emasculation associated with asylum conditions

From the previous chapters, we notice that the theme of work, as a proxy for acquiring financial independence, is a key social requirement of competent

masculinity interacting with truncated patterns of mobility and migration experience. By looking at participants' accounts, we grasp how despite the arrival in Sicily being presented as an achievement, participants' concerns are the same as originally located at the beginning of the flight; mainly around the emblem or motif of work as a resource to construct competent masculinity. Razak summarizes this tension when he asserts: 'man can't work without any work'. However, these tensions are immediately reconnected to their new positionality in the asylum regime:

> *Actually, if a man is not working, he is useless. You can't do nothing for yourself.* (Razak)

Issa shares the same opinion, describing how in Sicily he spends his time doing nothing in his room; he asserts 'Yes, I am a man! A man who can't do anything! A man who doesn't work can't do anything!' David argues that 'the most important thing is working! As a family man! I have to work so that I can take care of my family!' Dramane points out: '[My] main concern is work… just work! Without it I cannot do anything!' At this points we should go back to the opening vignette of Razak, where he argues that Libya, despite the violence and existential threats, is better than Sicily for a male traveller as there he can find job opportunities.

In all these accounts, inactivity associated with the work condition in Sicily is seen as profoundly affecting their own senses of self as men. This feeds into the emasculation process associated with asylum centres. As Tommy asserts: '*We are men, not women. We've become [like women]... [men] used to fight for future because we know because you gon get married tomorrow you gon to have kids tomorrow [Inaudible] You understand? You've got to give your child a good life. Not the kind of life I'm living now….'*. Previously, the Nigerian participant had explained:*'[b]ecause this issue of documents meaning we just like living like human who don't got, who don't got future. You know what I'm saying?'*.

Here, being confined in a state of inactivity directly questions the idealised trajectory toward manhood associated with the refugee experience. As Banna argues:

> *My main concern now is to find work, to have work. If I have work, I have my place to rent or somewhere else to stay. Maybe if I have good opportunity, I find a wife. Because time is going, I'm getting every day older.* (Banna)

In Banna's quote the relationship between negotiating a trajectory into manhood and time is directly cited. The young Gambian left home to negotiate a path to manhood. After months spent as a man–on–the–move, he finds himself impaired by this new condition as asylum seeker. In the meanwhile he is getting older, without achieving what was imagined at the beginning of the journey. Whether liminality in Libya was presented as conducive to competent masculinity; this does not apply for their experience in Sicily, where the effects of prolonged liminality seem to be intolerable for their masculinity. In these quotes we grasp how the protracted confinement in the liminal condition conflicts with the frame of the journey of achievement associated with the journey narrative. In Sicily, masculine expectations and entitlements cannot be met yet.

In line with previous research on refugee masculinities (Jaji 2009, Turner 2010, Rowe 2001, Lukunka 2012), the result of inactivity is being dependent on humanitarian assistance and financial support from the organization which runs the reception centre. With farming jobs being dependent on the seasonality of their labour demands, participants face extensive periods where they are unemployed; therefore they rely on SPRAR pocket money, which usually varies between from €1.50 to €3 per day (Campomori et al. 2016) and most participants complain it is often delayed.

This is indicated as having profound ramifications on their ability to conform to cultural definitions of competent manhood (Jaji 2009):

> *I have two kids, you understand?! So I have to take care of my family! Not always "please…", calling… "please…bring this for me!". I hate to beg in my life!... For example, my wife needs…I don't have to say "bring this" I have to provide! That's is my responsibility! You understand? (*David)

Moussa recalls how the amount of money he received while being in the reception system was approximately 70 euros per month; this would be not enough for someone who has or aims to establish a family. Like Kams, Moussa needs to send money to his wife in Mali, and he has to maintain himself in Sicily. Two euros and 50 cents per day are evidently not capable to sustain these needs. Similarly, Kams, who is married and still within the refugee centre at the time of the interview, when talking about the possibility of reuniting with his wife and children asserts: '*If things go well and I have a job, my intention is if I have documents and I have a good job…probably!.. you know when you have paper you're independent…that means that your life will be…you will be living on your own…you understand*?'

In light of this, it is important to note how patterns of emasculation illustrated above are also related to this new configuration of gender and racial hierarchies in Sicily. Hakeem recalls how the flight deprived him of his bright future as the first male son of the family, the one who was going to be in charge of the family business after his father's death.

> *Interviewer: Do you miss your country sometimes?*
>
> *Hakeem: Not sometimes, that's always!*
>
> *Interviewer: Always...*
>
> *Hakeem: I have to be at home! Because I have things to control!*
>
> *Interviewer: What kind of things?*
>
> *Hakeem: I have things to work there! I have to do my life! People, I have people to work for me! Not people I work for, people, people pay me!*

In this extract, Hakeem expresses his frustration over the asylum seeking condition. Now, he finds himself working, often being exploited, for other (white) men in Sicily while in his farm he would have 'people working for him.' Liminality as a mechanism of power enacted by the asylum regime haunts participants, not only in relation to 'what could have been and perhaps should have been' (Kabesh 2013, 151), but most importantly with regards to their future. When he says 'I have things to control!' Hakeem is precisely reclaiming his masculine status, lost as a result of the flight; but he is also contesting the emasculating aspect of the refugee system, where asylum seekers experience a lack of control over their lives. The nostalgia for his home is immediately reconnected to his masculinity. At home, Hakeem felt in control and with a purpose due to his position as the firstborn male son in the family. In Sicily, he faces severe marginalisation.

Bai advances a similar argument when asserts that as a result of the journey, he is now a 'big man' like his father; so if he were now in Gambia he would be expected to take a wife. However, Bai argues due to his condition as asylum seeker, the possibility of getting married is unimaginable for him:

> *But in this moment I cannot get married…because here in Italy you cannot get married…without money…without home! For this reason I can't!* (Bai)

Ezekiel advances as similar reasoning, stressing however the impact of the institutionalization on liminality on his capability of establish a family as it should be expected from a man in his thirties:

> *[B]ecause I'm getting old…you know ordinary…if I was in Nigeria by now, I think I also have three kids…yeah… [Inaudible] married….but my staying here [the reception centre], my [lack of] documents are drawing me back, because that is the first thing I want to do…'* (Ezekiel)

The stance 'I'm getting old' indicates how culturally desired trajectory toward reaching manhood (Vlase 2018) is also implicated with biological time and what he perceived as a 'natural progression' toward a new stage of his life. In this regard, the lack of 'documents' jeopardises the timing of this life course's major transition. This appears to have significant consequences for Ezekiel who feels emasculated as a result of this failed transition into manhood. According to him, a man of his age should already have three children.

Previous literature has explored the emasculating and infantilising effects of asylum policies on male beneficiaries; the work of Simon Turner, for example, shows how the relationship of dependency created by refugee aid emasculated young men in the Lukole camp, being deprived of their role as breadwinner and provider (Turner 2010). Similar findings arise from other studies (Griffiths 2015, Jaji 2009, Lukunka 2012). Turner (1999, 2010) defines these men as liminal experts and focuses on the way they might renegotiate new status in the life of the camp. Much of the literature on refugee masculinities (Jaji 2009) has replicated these findings, without outlining the different configurations of liminality in relation to camp structures, mobility patterns and migration trajectories. They tend thus to take emasculation for granted, almost like it was a universal experience associated with humanitarian governance. At this point, less interest has been given to how emasculation is produced by the situated nature of power relations and the exercise of power in refugee spaces (Sigona 2015).

In this context, I insist on the specific configuration of gender and race relations that the centre inhabits. One day I was informed that a big argument happened in Town 6, as Jeremiah was found having a female guest in his room. This is not allowed by the centre policies. The way the staffer handled this, however, was perceived by Jeremiah as inappropriate: *'I'm a man though. So they don't have to treat me like bambino*'. Jeremiah refers to the organization in charge treating him like a 'child'. A couple of weeks before, he recounts how

the same incident happened with a male friend visiting. Jeremiah insists that this guest was someone who had a job, meaning that he was not trying to squat in the structure so that there was no point in 'harassing' him to leave. Talking about the staffers, he says, *'I don't feel anything, because this is not my house. If I'm at my own house, nobody can tell me what to do, what not to do…. I don't feel like angry with them, but I just let them to know that what they did is not right'*. In Jeremiah's quote, the lack of control over his life perfectly captures the tension between the disciplinary power of humanitarian governance (Turner 2010) and participants' masculinities. In line with previous literature (Griffiths 2015), participants are contesting the effects of asylum practices on their senses of self as men; these practices deprive them of any capacity to take decisions over their lives, and thus of political agency. In this sense, masculinity, from participants' point of view, becomes a site where contesting the embodiment of bare life.

As registered in my observations and as disclosed to me by the female staffers I spoke with, some beneficiaries have difficulties in having women assuming power positions. In one occasion, in Town 6, I observed an argument between the female social worker in charge of the reception structure and one of the centre's guests. Although the object of the discussion was again about delays in pocket money, the gendered dimension of the conflict was visible with the male asylum seeker refusing to be subjected to the social worker's direction. In that occasion, I was informed that in that centre, participants would prefer to interact with the white male staffers – whom they feel are more sympathetic and understanding. I felt like male staffers would have more opportunity to use 'masculine' codes to socialize with beneficiaries – while female staffers were often perceived as an external body, representing for this reason the disciplinary power of the organization. That is why I want to go back to the first day of fieldwork, where I suddenly found myself in this courtyard of a reception centre in the middle of the Sicilian countryside.

There, a group of African asylum seekers was playing table football with some Sicilians who worked in the facility. I was observing them when I realised that there were not women around me. The group of men was happily playing, using the kind of lexicon that men are socialized to learn when playing sport. I observed that in that occasion, race was not an issue and the two groups of men found a common language in that homosociality. There, I was the outsider. I have never learned that masculine code, and my only attempt to play football with other boys when I was a little kid did not end very well. That is why all–male environments such as team sports have always terrified

me for a great portion of my life. At one point, one African boy nicely asked me to join them. I was petrified. I am terrible at playing table football. However, I knew that for the purpose of this study, given the gender dimension of the reception centres, I had to throw myself in this unknown, alien territory, in which I have never felt totally comfortable. In Italian culture this is traditionally a much masculinised sport and it represents one of the most important arenas for boys' socialization into heteronormativity and hegemonic masculinity. In that moment, however, I realised that in order for me to be perceived as an insider in the centre I had to join the group of men in that activity. From this account, we grasp how despite the emasculating practices of the asylum system, in this all–male environment, masculinity becomes a key organizing principle of social life and interaction among SPRAR beneficiaries and with the social cooperative in charge. In this sense, the centre emerges as masculinised space despite, and maybe in reaction to, the emasculating effects of refugee policies.

Another day, in Town 7, I observed Dramane enacting a form of peaceful protest for the delays of the pocket money transfers. According to social workers and other professionals involved in the centre, delays in payment[54] are associated with the multilevel bureaucratic bodies involved in SPRAR: the central office in Rome, the municipalities and the organization/social cooperative in charge of the local project. Facing yet another delay, the young Gambian said he would refuse to sign the attendance register. At that point, the two female social workers tried to make him reflect, arguing that with no proof of attendance he could lose his place in the structure. Dramane said firmly to the two social workers that 'he is a man', meaning that he is capable of taking decisions on his own life. 'They can't kick me out if they don't give me the money they owe me' he says. His masculinity becomes a site of contestation against the organization, which the two social workers represent in this moment. The statement 'I'm a man' should not be read merely in relation to the social workers being women but on the contrary, in relation to the infantilising practices of the asylum system. 'Being a man' means not being a child, and therefore, being capable of exercising political agency. Similar to what happened to Jeremiah, Dramane's masculinity becomes a site to resist the institutionalization of liminality, understood in terms of emasculation by participants.

[54] It should be noted that in many towns I visited, members of the staff also were waiting for their salaries to be paid.

Here, it is important to note how gender relations as a site of power had different configurations, not only in terms of conflict. In the separated space of the camp, where Sicilian women assume authority, for some participants, especially those who arrived as unaccompanied minors, these women are described as new 'mothers'. Ebrima would refer to the psychologist of the local centre where he was located as his 'new' mum. Ousmane recalled a similar experience. Oumar recalled, 'Those who work there (reception centre for unaccompanied minors) always take care of us because we are children!' implying that this does not happen anymore in the centre for adult claimants where I met him.

Being a 'refugee' man in the local communities

In the previous section, I illustrated how emasculation is the product of refugee policies, which can infantilize beneficiaries (Griffiths 2015), including when only partially implemented. I indicated how local centres interact with the social landscape of the town/village where they are located. On this matter, Pasquetti writes: 'When asylum seekers arrive on the Sicilian shores they do not just arrive in Europe; they arrive in a marginalized periphery with its own history of dispossession and emigration and its own present condition of socioeconomic crisis' (2016, 9). This shapes specific processes of marginalization (Pasquetti 2016), which I see as a product of the socio–economic and ethno–racial landscape inhabited by the refugee centre in the local community.

Casati's (2018) ethnography of one SPRAR centre in a Sicilian village, very similar to those I accessed, acknowledges how what happens inside should be read in relation to the outside. In my observational material, I see refugee reception structures as highly racialised sites in relation to the white native community. This shapes complex relationships between people in the centre and the Sicilian native population. Participants like Bai recount how he does not like to go out in the nearest town, arguing that he feels 'ashamed'. This mirrors what Yonas told me about black people feeling not comfortable in transiting in those places as they feel they are being judged. Based on my personal experience as a Sicilian migrant who moved to London, a multicultural city, and is back in his homeland with a renewed gaze for racial relations, it is hard to not to notice a sharp separation between the white and the black communities which affect also larger towns; not only in terms of residential patterns, but most importantly in socialization spaces. Black and white people rarely use the same bar, café, recreational space. I felt the same

when I invited some participants for a coffee in a bar or when I walked down the main street of the town with one my African students. I just notice that these inter–racial interactions were gaining attention.

This spatial separation between black and white communities was even more marked in rural villages where the majority of black people reside inside the centre, making it an enclave of blackness in relation to the 'white' outside. In the local native communities, blackness and refugeeness emerge as if they were synonyms. Here, it worth noting how this othering strategy operated by Sicilian people in the locale was completely irrespective of the rich diversity of nationalities and ethnic groups located in the centres; not only between Africans and people from the Middle East, but also among people from the same region, such as West Africa. These differences were mostly visible when refugee and asylum seeking men had to prepare dinner all together. I engaged in numerous conversations whereby West African cuisine was argued to be the best and how participants disliked the way of 'cooking' of a particular neighbouring country. These cultural nuances went unnoticed by the white 'outside'. As soon as a black man was detected walking outside the asylum receptive structures, he would be immediately identified as one of the 'boys' from the centre with few possibilities for further nuances. In my conversations with Sicilians, the derogatory term of 'extracomunitario', meaning illegal alien[55], will be often used to describe their social location in relation the local community. Furthermore, the fact that these centres are often populated predominantly, if not only, by male beneficiaries crystallises a specific set of gendered and racialised notions so that the male black body is immediately regarded with suspicion.

From my observations, I, like Casati (2018), found that the Sicilians, both inside and outside the centre, would make constant assessments of the 'deservingness' of men from the camp, regardless of their legal status. These hierarchies of deservingness produced outside the centre are imported inside by staff (Casati 2018). Reflecting on my interactions with social workers in the centre, I noticed how participants' deservingness would be determined based on their capacity to elicit compassion and sympathy. Usually, this was associated with participants' age and politeness toward the staff. For example, young participants like Oumar would be described by Darla as 'very sweet'

[55] In Italian, the word 'extracomunitario' means 'non–European'; but it usually used in popular vocabulary as a proxy for 'illegal alien'. However, people in refugee centres are not illegal alien; so the word should be intended as a racist slur.

and 'good' while others would be described as 'troublemakers' or 'ungrateful'. I think this partly replicates, at the micro level, the shift in emphasis from rights to practices of humanitarianism in regulating the asylum system (Ticktin 2006). With humanitarianism as the driving logic (Ticktin 2006), the character of the 'genuine refugee' is conceptualized in the eyes of the Western public as the epitome of what Malkki calls 'pure victims' (Malkki 1996). Refugees are therefore configured as objects of charity and compassion rather than of law and rights (Ticktin 2006, 40). Their 'deservingness' is therefore based on 'racialized and gendered ideas of who is a worthy subject of compassion' (Ticktin 2016, 265). In this sense, humanitarian efforts go hand in hand with the logic of securitization (Holzberg et al. 2018), shaping hierarchies of deservingness in which adult men like David or Kams are necessarily at the bottom. In her study on Syrian refugees in Egypt, Suerbaum (2018b) shows that refugee people are very aware of this stigmatising repertoire of meanings associated with European asylum categories and practices, and they cope strategically with the ramifications that these have on their masculinity. She argues that refugee men continuously distance themselves from what they consider a less valuable and respectable masculinity, personified by the ideal refugee (Suerbaum 2018b). I agree with Suerbaum's conclusions, but in Sicily I observed that refugee men do this not only in relation to the 'genuine refugee', but also to racial and cultural hierarchies activated by the 'refugee crisis'[56] discourse in the locale .

This counter–image of the 'bogus asylum seeker' narrative would convey an inventory of racialised, sexualised and gendered narratives (Scheibelhofer 2017) affecting men in the centres in their everyday encounters with the local communities. My research took place in the midst of this discourse of emergency, so that racial relations in the field were also impacted and

[56] Here, I am not suggesting that racialising narratives are produced 'only' by the 'refugee crisis' discourse. Drawing on Angier's (2016) views on the social character of the border, it is therefore necessary to illustrate the fundamental relation of alterity through which Sicilian identity has historically formed in relation to the southern bank of the Mediterranean. In Sicilian folklore, for example, dark people of Islamic faith arriving from the sea, commonly identified in the Sicilian language as 'Turks', have been cast as the racialised, cultural Other – symbolised by the image of 'dangerous invader', probably Ottoman corsairs situated in Algiers, who depredated and raided villages on the coast for centuries. More recently, several authors have illustrated the racialization of migration in Italian public discourse (Angel-Ajani 2002, Curcio and Mellino 2010, Triandafyllidou 1999). What I am trying to say here is that the discourse of the 'refugee crisis' reshaped and inhabited this repertoire of cultural narratives, meanings and symbols associated with the Sicilian liminal position between Europe and Africa.

informed by the new language of the 'crisis'. This problematized the role of Italy – and in particular, Sicily – becoming the 'refugee camp' of Europe. In this context, Italy was constantly represented in the news as being left alone by the EU and its member states to deal with massive refugee flows from Libya.

Tropes of a dangerous and archaic sexuality (Scheibelhofer 2017), laziness, cunning and criminality would be used to cast refugee and asylum seeking men as a burden and a threat for local communities. On one hand, the concentration of foreign men in one place was seen as a risk for women in the host community; on the other, the absence of women among refugee people created a culture of disbelief with regards to the 'genuineness' of their refugeeness. Strickland (2016) in his piece 'Why is the world afraid of young refugee men?', illustrates how being a young man of military age and in good health is often presented by far right politicians as being incompatible with the need for humanitarian protection and is used in the rhetoric of invasion. The 23rd of May 2016, a few months before I entered the field, the very popular Italian politician Matteo Salvini declared in a famous political evening show, 'In my house, the door is open for women and children who flee war' (Huffington Post 2019), implying that the same door should be shut for asylum seeking men, even when fleeing armed conflict. During my fieldwork, I was often confronted by Sicilian people who would ask why we should provide for young men who are able to work. Here, the rhetorical question 'where are the women?' would be used to cast a shadow of mistrust and suspicion on men's claim of asylum.

Casati (2018) suggests that political and economic contexts inform how host populations frame notions of deservingness. In a region with one of the highest unemployment rates in Europe and profound socio–economic inequalities, the stereotype of the lazy asylum seeker who abuses the asylum system, receiving aid while locals are not supported by the welfare state, appears to be particularly powerful. These stances, usually starting with 'I'm not racist but...' highly problematize social policies tipped unfairly in favour of asylum seeking and refugee populations. This was something that I observed in one conversation with a psychologist at the centre, who noticed how a relative of hers who lost his job did not receive any type of state support while these young men were receiving money and housing 'for free'. Likewise, Pasquetti's (2016) study of migrants in impoverished Sicilian towns, similarly found native populations not only problematize neglected support for Sicilian citizens compared to refugee populations, but they also ignore the

contributions that these newly established centres provide to the local economy of these communities. I saw this with my eyes; in rural Sicily where youth unemployment is particularly high, young educated people like Ada and Darla would find job opportunities in the asylum system that were not available before the 'refugee crisis'. However, this is rarely acknowledged and the migration complex is often presented as a dirty business for social cooperatives (Pasquetti 2016). According to Castelli Gattinara (2017), this should be seen as a result of the government choice to outsource refugee reception to charities, private companies and social cooperatives. On one hand, this choice led to the rise of numerous scandals regarding refugee aid organizations associated with corruption, inefficiencies and criminal activities. On the other hand, right–wing groups used these scandals to depict refugee reception system, emerged as result of the discourse of the 'crisis', as a highly lucrative business, the so–called 'business of hospitality' (Castelli Gattinara 2017).

On my way to the airplane that would take me back to London, I remember being in a van when a group of asylum seekers passed by while they were jogging near a field; the driver asserted 'I'd like to make them run!'. 'Run' in Sicilian dialect means 'get busy' or 'go to work', implying that these young and healthy men were enjoying outdoor activities instead of being at work. This chimes with the Sicilian gender order which is very much based on the traditional male breadwinner model, so that a man who is not working and claims social benefits is considered to be unworthy or useless. This narrative is purely fictional as most of my participants indeed did work, often being exploited at the hands of Sicilian men; but it is still a very powerful narrative.

Like Casati (2018), I noticed that anti–refugee stances often interrogated the Sicilian migratory past, especially in rural Sicily where every family has at least one relative who has migrated[57]. These Sicilian migrants are idealised as hard

[57] Following Curcio and Mellino (2010), we should mention the subaltern place of Southern Italy compared to the richer North; for many years, Sicilians were at the end of racialization processes and racist violence (Webb 2002) when they migrated to Northern Italy, or abroad. These racial stereotypes marked Sicilian male migrants as untrustworthy, dangerous, uncivilised, and with a natural propensity towards crime (Webb 2002); this eventually translated into the 'mafioso' figure that has defined for decades the image of Sicilian masculinity worldwide. When migrating to the wealthier urban centres of Northern Italy, Sicilian migrants found a similarly hostile environment (Russo Bullaro 2010), this time within their own country. This past is rarely acknowledged in current debates about migration, but Casati (2018) argues it is significant in shaping relations between the native population and refugee subjects in the centre.

workers who never received any help when they migrated to the US or in Germany while young African refugees are in the centre 'doing nothing' and 'getting money from the state', as one psychologist in a centre told me. Interestingly, the same tropes of inactivity which in participants' narratives emerge as a source of great discontent, were reshaped by Sicilians to cast men in the centres as 'bogus'. These politics of gender and race come again to redefine 'refugeeness' as a category almost impossible for participants to take up, not only at the level of the asylum determination process, but also in their everyday experience and micro–level interactions with Sicilian natives.

Such everyday interactions outside the centre were noted by participants. Issa told me how he how he does not like to go out with his flatmates: 'If I go out alone…I don't make troubles'. 'Making troubles' means reacting to provocations. According to Issa, black people in his small town are often targeted by Sicilian men who direct toward them racist slurs and insults Issa, from Senegal noted that many of his fellow refugee friends would react aggressively and this is seen as negative from his standpoint. On the contrary, Issa asserts 'you can insult me I don't tell you anything!'. This too contributes to a sense of competent manhood. Such discourse is indicative of the place of refugee masculinity in the local community as a signifier of otherness and the continuous necessity for participants to cope with the effect of this racialization[58]

According to Yonas, '*If they [Sicilians] see you are a migrant, they see you as someone who steal, and do so many bad things'*. Participants described episodes of racism and micro–aggression when they entered the white space of the local communities. Some, like Thierry, recount even being victims of racist attacks. Living in one of these rural towns, Thierry observed that this is 'the most racist place' he has ever been, even compared to Libya. He would recount how a group of Sicilian boys refused to let him play football with them because 'he is without document'. The same men physically assaulted him and his friend, and the young Ivorian man complained that the police did nothing about it. 'They hate the blacks', Thierry asserts. Notwithstanding, in larger towns, like the one he lived before being transferred to Town 4 – where

[58] Following Curcio and Mellino, I use the term 'racialization' 'to describe in an effective way the economic and cultural processes of essentialization, discrimination, inferiorization and segregation, that is of symbolic and material violence, to which certain groups in the Italian and European social space are nowadays submitted' (Curcio and Mellino 2010).

communities of people of colour are more conspicuous in numbers – according to him, the situation seems better. For Thierry this small village is not Europe, such that every time he goes to a nearby urban centre he says, 'I'm going to Europe'. This is a recurring theme, as mentioned in the opening vignette, among participants living in small villages. Ousmane would recall how he would take the bus to Palermo in order to go and meet African people and buy African food, which was not available in his village. Being granted 'documents' enables movement to a larger urban centre where not only are there more job opportunities but also more possibilities for socialization with fellow Africans.

This racialization is gendered, according to participants. Talking about his experience in the village, Ezekiel, for example, is particularly shocked by how young white women in his village would change their path as soon as they met him on the street:

> *I was working some days ago and it was very narrow road, I saw this girl maybe she should be like eighteen or twenty…so there was no way for she for her to go that way around, she turned back immediately! I wait to the next corner, I went through and I turned back so she came out…before she started walking.* (Ezekiel)

He insists that this happens 'just with women! Just with women! Specially with the younger ones!'. The spectre of dangerous black masculinity casts the black man as a violent, sexualised risk for white women. Thierry recounts a similar experience with Sicilian young women. Evans recalls how he does not have any female friends in his village. He narrates how he tried to befriend them on Facebook; however, 'if you send them message, they don't respond'. Evans thinks that 'it makes me feel because I'm black, that's why' specifying however that this is 'not a problem for me'. Negotiating basic gender relations in the white spaces outside the reception centre is challenging.

Jannehboy and Malick recall negative experiences with the families of their Sicilian girlfriends. The two young Gambian men recall how they had to break up with them because the girls' parents did not support the relationship. In both accounts, the primary issue is their faith in conjunction with their race. As Jannehboy says, 'I think what they see on TV about black people affecting society….they see terrorists and they think all Muslims are terrorist'. Malick argues that he is 'very very very' angry with these fundamentalist terrorists as 'what almighty Allah…he never say somebody to kill somebody'.

At this point, Ebrima asserts: *'How can you find a girlfriend if you don't meet any girls?'*. The gender segregation of the reception centre and the racialised landscape of the local communities affects the possibility to negotiate basic gender relations. For this reason, with few opportunities for romantic encounters with Sicilian women, participants complained about the lack of opportunities to meet African women due to their location in rural Sicily. Some like Razak and Thierry rely heavily on online and cyber–based relations, mainly via smartphone. I see this as both a coping strategy in relation to, and a consequence of, participants' social liminality. Razak recounts how to cope with this condition, which to him results in some sort of 'unnatural' sexual abstinence, relying on sexting and cam sex with African girls. Thierry states he had three different online relationships. In both cases, the two participants recount how they had a rich social and romantic life before the flight so that social media and cyber–based relationships become somehow a surrogate of their previous social life.

In particular, Thierry proudly showed me some of his Facebook pictures as proof of this 'previous' life; I felt like he was interested in showing to me that his life has not always been like this. Those pictures told a story that I struggled to reconcile with what I observed. Thierry was wearing fashionable clothing, attending parties and enjoying the Ivorian nightlife with his friend. The young Ivorian man showed me also pictures of young women with whom he was chatting and exchanging pictures: 'It's the women who followed me', Thierry would tell me while laughing. Thinking about his online relations, I wrote in my field notes, '*living in this suspension which is the refugee determination process, his masculinity is conveyed, through chat/pics/likes on Facebook to not be annulled*'. I suggest substituting the verb 'eradicate' instead of 'annul' to highlight the artificial effect of social isolation, which I see as one of the prominent features of refugee policies.

This is revelatory of the cost that being stuck in liminality entails form their point of view: it means being confined in a position of otherness, with so few resources to resist and react; so that the physical confinement into reception structures mirrors the social isolation in relation to the host community. Participants are thus caught in the middle between the 'genuine refugee' (reduction to bare life) and 'bogus asylum seekers' (Othering strategies) in their everyday experience. This might lead to frustration, anger or resignation. Malik had seen Europe as an idealised space of opportunities, but this had not been his experience since arriving in Sicily.

In this regard, I want to connect the issue of gender relations to the idealised trajectory toward manhood, which is embodied by the gendered enterprise. Heterosexual marriage is described as the climax of competent manhood, signifying the ultimate transition into maturity and adulthood. King notes that in order for him to get married he needs first to get 'documents'. These would help him find a legal job, thus fulfilling his duties toward his future wife. This is something common I registered in participants' narratives, however, the Nigerian participant advances an important differentiation between black and white women; he asserts that in order to marry a white woman, it is important that she understand his struggles as a black man in Sicily; primarily related being subject to racist structures. King is particularly clear in saying that a black woman would 'understand me because we are black', while a white woman will not be able to do this, comparing King's efforts and struggles to the privilege of her native community:

> *[Y]ou tell whites 'Oh I don't have money', they will say like 'we have money', you understand? It's no good.* (King)

This underlines the challenge for participants who are situated within a mutually constitutive landscape as men of colour within refugee centres. Exception and objectification and a lack of settled legal status have profound implications. Being granted 'documents', for participants, does not mean becoming immune to racism, or what Pasquetti (2016) calls the chains of marginality associated with the Sicilian socio–economic landscape, but it does represent recovering some degree of political agency, eventually enabling capacities of resistance and opposition, escaping from the nature of power relations enacted by the asylum system. The gender hierarchies produced by the asylum regime inevitably intersect and interact with racist structures outside the centre; in other words, in this thesis I argue that not only the feminisation and victimisation of the 'genuine refugee' makes the male refugee largely invisible (Quist 2016), but that it enacts specific othering strategies that put this group of men in a very precarious position with regards to the racialised landscape of Sicily. As Hooper argues, emasculation as masculinist strategy operates in two directions: on one side, it downgrades female activities, while on the other, it shapes and maintains hierarchies of masculinities (Hooper 2001, 71). This makes the experience of emasculation associated with life in the centre as the site where the threshold between bare and political life is consumed and embodied by men–on–the–move. Emasculation therefore more than anything indicates the reconfiguration of power relations in the field, with refugee men being placed at the bottom of

every social hierarchy – in relation to Sicilian men and women due to their race, but also to refugee women due to their gender.

Negotiating an exit from liminal conditions

In most of the literature on refugee masculinities, the experience of marginalization and emasculation associated with the refugee experience is rarely explored in relation to the unified gendered narratives emerging from men's life histories[59]; meaning that gender analysis fails to capture the role of changes and discontinuities, not only across multiple places and temporalities, but also as part of a lifelong project (Garfinkel 1967, Connell 1995, Brickwell 2003). The result is that processes of emasculation are sometimes taken for granted or circumscribed to a specific stage of migration, without documenting how different patterns of mobility and different policies have in making gendered subjects (Gass 2014). This approach rarely captures the transformational aspect of migration with regards to their identities and the fact the emasculation is a continuous experience across different migration stages for men along the CMR. Such awareness clarifies the dimension of liminality associated with refugee centres in Sicily and, most importantly, participants' claim of reincorporation in the society as men.

By looking at participants' narratives of asylum, we notice how men in the centres find themselves stripped of any certainty about their present and future, suspended in a condition of being in–between (Turner 1969). That is why, for most participants, exiting the asylum system is seen as a prerequisite for their reincorporation into society as 'men'; recovering the idealised route to manhood originally embodied by flight. The path of reincorporation is therefore organized in sequential order: being granted a legal status means exiting the refugee centre and being able to find a legal job. This would allow participants to fulfil masculine duties around breadwinning and independence that are conducive to marriage, universally understood as the apex of competent manhood:

> *When you are in camp, you don't think about woman…No, they don't think about woman, because you think about where to start life….Like document, when you don't have a document, many people, they spend two years without Italian, you understand? So you are thinking about other things. You are thinking about woman?...You forget woman. You don't remember woman… You understand? So they don't think about woman. I can joke that [Inaudible] because when I was in*

[59] The work of Simon Turner (2010) represents one of the few exception

their shoes, I don't [didn't] think about woman…I think [thought] about my document, I think about when I get my document, what am I going to do. You understand? Being in Europe now, what am I going to achieve?' (Onyeka)

When you have it, you can have anything. Work, money, women. Women come later, first documents. (Rachid)

For participants such as David and Hayat who are already married, financial independence is seen as a precondition for establishing an independent household outside the asylum system.

As to the relationship between aspiration and praxis in the process of engagement with the masculine ideal, it is important to illustrate how participants constantly break that state of exception that surrounds them. During my fieldwork, for example, I did not observe any significant collective protest in the centres to which I was granted access; although I was informed that in some of them, these had happened in the past, mostly related to the issue of pocket money. The only examples I witnessed, like the episodes with Dramane and Jeremiah, were individual, often confrontational clashes, between the beneficiary and the staff of the reception facility. And in that occasion, participants' masculinity signified a space for contestation of the refugee centre's mechanism of care and control. However, I view these micro–level acts of protest as particularly interesting given the social landscape of rural Sicily; here, migrant or refugee advocacy groups are almost non–existent and opportunities for political or social engagement in places of worship (for Muslim participants), political parties or community association, are relatively sparse. In other parts of Sicily, where large cities like Palermo or Catania have significant African communities, refugees and asylum seekers might have more opportunities for socialization and political activism. In the small rural villages, for many participants social life is restricted between the centre and the farming fields.

In his study on refugee encampment in Tanzania, Turner (2010) explains well how the camp becomes a site where men, as liminal experts, try to resist the effects of emasculation by strategically taking advantage of the hidden and informal economy of the camp or community involvement. In the local refugee centres I accessed, this landscape of opportunities was extremely reduced. None of them had the complex organization of refugee camps with shops, offices and streets (Turner 2010). In the Sicilian refugee centres, such opportunities for encounters, exchanges and re–workings of identity (Agier

2002, 322) were mostly to be looked for outside the centre. This does not mean that participants would not engage in attempts to reclaim masculinity. I noticed three main strategies to reclaim masculinity: working for the humanitarian apparatus associated with the 'refugee crisis', finding and permanent, farming jobs in the locale, and becoming a responsible father. Before engaging with these different themes, it is worth noting that not all participants employ these strategies in their narratives. Some, like Lyon or Yaya, were still struggling with their positionality in Sicily, suffering the effects of disenfranchisement, apathy and meaninglessness associated with their liminal conditions. Last time I saw Lyon, he was entering a betting shop, which to me represented the epitome of refugee liminality. In places like this, refugee and asylum seeking men would go to watch football and bet the few euros earned in the field in an attempt to try their fortune. These spaces looked like an extension of the centre, with the same patterns of waiting, passivity and suspended temporality, while being separated from the ordinary sociality of the local community across the lines of race and gender. At the same time, we should not understand the institutionalised liminality of the reception centre as a totalising experience; all participants, even those who were still struggling to find a way to cope with their positionality in Sicily, exited the liminal condition of the centre at least for a couple of hours, whenever they went working in the farm or attended school (when provided). Oumar joined a local football club and found a group of Sicilian peers, with whom he socialized and went out on a Saturday afternoon. Razak recorded a song with the help of local musical producer. Ousmane took the bus to a large town in order to buy some African food, and he met his partner there. These are all micro–level acts of disruption of liminal conditions. In Town 1, for example, I saw the faith–based NGO providing an Italian course, which became a space where refugee liminality could be eventually challenged by providing cultural resources and opportunities for social encounters.

During my classes, I saw the effects of this when one of my students was studying for the language proficiency test required by the immigration permits procedure. Unfortunately, the access to these courses to people in the camp was limited. The NGO made the difficult decision to restrict these only to refugees, asylum seekers and migrants outside the centres in order to avoid the possibility that the organization running the SPRAR facilities would use this as an excuse to not provide access to formal education for those residing in SPRAR centres. The rule was implemented not so strictly – I met one participant there, who was residing in a centre – but it still had repercussions

for the people who were able to attend the classes[60]. Similarly, the youth group was a space for interaction and sociality; although I was the only Sicilian member, people from other ethnic communities attended the groups (mostly, European and South American). The talented community organizer of the youth group set activities that reduced the isolation of participants' lives in the centre and provided opportunities for socialization, such as parties, theatrical performances or trips to a local art house. As recognised by the community organizers, these efforts were limited by the scarce participation of the Sicilian population, but I see them as fundamental.

Therefore this section examining how participants attempt to negotiate an exit from this cycle of indefiniteness and exceptionality associated with their asylum condition does not aim to provide a comprehensive analysis of these strategies and efforts. Rather, my aim is to connect these efforts to construction of a unified gendered narrative of the self (Toerien and Durrheim 2001). Here, masculinity emerges as a situated and strategic project always interrelated with the necessity of seeking ways to negotiate the future and thus it is primarily associated with participants' agential capacity. Similar to the journey of achievement narrative, here it should be acknowledged that one of the main existential functions of storytelling is to provide a sense of agency, especially in disempowering circumstances (Jackson 2013). The issue here, however, is how this is done contingently through storytelling. In the cases of participants, masculinity seems to offer a structure to negotiate agency across public and private domains (Jackson 2013) and hence provides an opportunity for contesting asylum practices and rationalities.

Finding job opportunities in the Sicilian socio–economic landscape

In the socio–economic landscape of Sicily, refugee and asylum seeking men are confined to low pay work, mostly in the farming fields or in the hospitality sectors. This is a common pattern across participants despite their level of education; Kam or Ezekiel, who have university degrees, do the same farming jobs as participants with a primary education like Banna. In this context, similar to what Turner (2010) found in his research on Burundian refugees, the only alternative seemed to be to find a job in the refugee regime, which

[60] I see this choice of the NGO as particularly interesting; in the past, the community organizer told me how people would be sent in large groups by the SPRAR organization. The NGO did not want to be complicit with the implementation gap affecting the second–level reception system. SPRAR beneficiaries are entitled to formal education and training, while this course was aimed merely at providing language resources to people who cannot attend formal schools.

after the beginning of the ' refugee crisis' undertook a significant expansion in Sicily (D'Angelo 2019). Many participants like Adam or Bai started working for the refugee centres to which they were allocated. Others like Jannehboy, Hakeem, Yonas or Rachid worked as interpreters or cultural mediators for the asylum system in Sicily. As Jannehboy recalls, in order to do this type of job you need to speak English well and possibly attend a course. These types of occupation, away from farming fields or illegal markets, were seen as providing prestige and status for men in the centre. In the centres where the SPRAR holistic approach seems to work better, like Town 3 where I met Jannehboy, I registered better possibilities to negotiate this type of occupation by enrolling in the specific training required. For others, access to jobs in the humanitarian sector is more complex and requires exiting the refugee centre.

The story of Yonas exemplifies this. The young Eritrean man recalls how his first job while in his centre was working in the kitchen of a local café. The job was illegal and poorly paid for the time commitment required. Yonas described well the sense of exploitation and abuse by his employer, who would often use racist slurs against him. However, Yonas argues that he would tolerate anything because:

> *I was determined not to stay 24 hours sitting and doing nothing ... and then I needed [the money] ... for the money I saved, I was also sure if I go out [the centre] I can rent [a house] ... plus that job helped me ... to meet so many other people outside [the centre], in the morning ... because at eleven in the morning I work at the counter ... I'm making cappuccino. (Yonas)*

Despite the exploitative condition of the job, working in the café was clearly a way to move on with his life, coming out of the liminal situation of the refugee centre, marked by apathy, poverty and social isolation. Yonas was able to send money back to his mother, and eventually apply for a familial reunification. At one point, when exiting the refugee centre, he went for a year in Germany to study. There he realised how things could be different for refugee people like him. 'There I opened my eyes…for four years I always worked illegally [in Sicily]' while in Germany, refugees can access plenty of legal job opportunities. Unfortunately, due to asylum laws, he found out he could not study in Germany so he went back to his mother in Sicily. At this point, becoming an interpreter in the asylum regime provided him with the economic resources to take care of his family – his mother in Sicily and his relatives in Eritrea:

> *[B]ecause after all I've been through, now I'm also responsible for the family, because I'm the only one they see [sending money]!... I care about sending money [in Eritrea] from my salary, I send them one hundred, two hundred euros… so every time they have a problem they call me.* (Yonas)

Remittances have a symbolic power in the context of transnational families. By sending money to his family, the migrant asserts himself as a honourable and respected man in his sending community (Sinatti 2014, 221). Remittances thus serve to answer the gender expectations located in the migration experience, providing approbation and respect. This better paid job allowed Yonas to fulfil these duties. At the same time, he argues that he does not want to do it for the rest of his life. One day he would like to become a lawyer; for now he is studying to become a social worker, which would help him in his job with refugee organizations.

Yonas is not presenting himself as an accomplished man as a result of his job. He is still in the process of meeting the aspiration located at the beginning of the gendered enterprise; in particular, in relation to education and establishing his own family. As a result, the road to manhood, imagined at the beginning of the life history, as linear trajectory, is still incomplete and unresolved. However, this job appears as a step forward in his masculine trajectory; particularly in relation to the marginal position associated with life in the centre:

> *I have to resist ... give me some time [for] to let me finish what I'm studying ... and then everything will change for the better!* (Yonas)

For those who are not able to find a job as interpreter, working in the fields is one of the few opportunities to become economically independent. Farming jobs are universally described by participants as sometimes difficult to find depending on the time of the year and if the opportunity arises these are typically described as tough roles. In Hakeem's story finding job opportunities, even when demand for seasonal agriculture labour is scarce, offers resistance to the apathy and inactivity associated with his asylum condition. Hakeem, like David and Issa, is focused on showing his proactivity despite the dire socio–economic landscape of rural Sicily. He recounts how occasionally he would go around the small village with a piece of paper where there would be written 'I'm looking for a job':

> *I have to have patience to work for people…I have to have patience to work 'campagna' [farming].* (Hakeem)

The patience required to work for other people is similar to enduring the difficulties of the journey in Libya. Again this masculine capacity of resistance is seen as a symbolic necessity of manhood; by doing this, one day, Hakeem will be able to go back to his country, reclaiming his father's land and finally having people who work for him. In waiting for this event, he has yet to endure further humiliation and difficulties associated with working in the fields.

By showing endurance and proactivity in finding job opportunities available in the local, participants are able to recover a space for performing masculine competence:

> *I have to work forever, so we don't have to sit down, I know what happened [to my family] ... so I have to go to work to look for money ... to help the family ... because I'm a man! I don't have to stay here that I'm fine, I find I eat, I dress [well] ... everything is fine ... but I know my family sometimes they struggle, so I have to help them ... if I don't have it [if I don't do it] who does it?* (Dramane)

The pressure to provide financial support concerns Dramane. David is able to maintain a positive sense of masculine self by drawing on two discourses: one emphasising the distance between him and those asylum seekers who are 'opportunist' and solely relying only on social benefits; and the other signifying his role as a family man compared with young single men in the asylum regime. In order to show this differentiation, he prides himself on being known in the little community of the Sicilian village where he lives as an industrious man, always looking for jobs to fulfil his primary responsibility of taking care of his family; but also always ready to help the local community where he lives. I witnessed this with my own eyes when I went to meet him. Someone from the local municipality told me how well integrated was David in the social life of the village, with everyone using him as handyman. In David's words: '*[I]t's a small community…that's why if you want to integrate….properly…you have to show your best!'*. Showing your best means: *'[w]hen the man is fully responsible! You understand? What makes a man fully responsible? You cannot be at home being sleeping! Then your wife brings food to you and you say you are responsible! A responsible man should go outside and work!* (David)

From David's account, we grasp how competent masculinity becomes a way to demonstrate 'deservingness' outside the centre. This can be understood as

a gendered process enacted through patriarchies – David's culture and the new gender order in Sicily. By showing his proactivity, maturity and willingness to take any kind of job opportunities for the welfare of his family, David is negotiating a process of alignment to hegemonic masculinity (Howson 2014) both in relation to his culture of origin in Nigeria and the host population in Sicily. He is thus able to demonstrate his entitlement to asylum protection without falling into the feminised image of the 'genuine refugee'. At the same time, by showing his helpfulness for the community and his focus on masculine duties, David is able to contest the racialised tropes of the 'bogus asylum seeker', somehow reassuring the local community about his character and intentions. In the case of asylum seeking and refugee men, gender performance is strictly tied to the necessity of negotiating refugee credibility and deservingness; this must take into account the imbalance of power which characterised their position in the host society and in the institutional domain of the refugee regime.

Similarly to David, Hayat argues that he has never relied on the help of anyone –especially humanitarian assistance; he recounts how once in Sicily he did not use the support of a relative who lived there nor did he ask for help from local charities such as Caritas. In his life history, the performance of masculine competence is characterised by independence, his ability to rely only on his capabilities, even if this means doing many low paid jobs at once; although he considered these humiliating due to his work experience and educational background. Hayat's decision to leave the reception centre was a way to move forward on his masculine trajectory. This was essential for the perspective of reuniting with his wife. Talking about her, Hayat recalls how in Ethiopia she had a well–paid, high–skilled job in a firm while now she has to work as a member of the cleaning staff for a Sicilian family who often exploit her. Hayat clearly states that she 'left everything to live with me'. That is why Hayat feels guilty, to the point he claims 'she has to suffer no more'; meaning that in the future he would not allow his wife to take other 'humiliating' and exploitative cleaning jobs, even if this means two jobs for him while she remains at home.

Establishing a family in Sicily as the climax of the gendered enterprise

At one point, reflecting on the changes after the flight, Hayat asserts: *'[Before] I thought [only] about my country…and my country means my people! I had this idea inside of me…before! Now is [still] there? I don't know! Now there is [only] my son'.* I read this extract as a way to compare the changes associated with his masculine identity; in Ethiopia, this was primarily framed in relation to his military career

as service to his country, while in Sicily Hayat argues his main focus has shifted to his son. This involves a renegotiation of masculine status across different domains: from public to private, from his military career to his role as a father. In his interview, Hayat sees fatherhood as proof that life goes on, despite the downturn in mobility associated with the flight. A similar narrative can be seen in Onyeka' words about his daughter: *'I mean, she's everything I have…Everything. She puts smile on my face. When I see her, maybe I think I have a future'*. Onyeka's sense of self–worth is deeply connected to his role of father and family man. It is not a surprise that he insisted that we did our interview in his house, like he wanted to show me that somehow he had exited the indefiniteness and precariousness of refugee liminality in the centre.

Here, I am not saying that both Onyeka and Hayat's lives in Sicily were suddenly without problems: they were still confronting profound systems of ethno–racial inequalities. But in that small and cosy house of Onyeka, life was not suspended and reincorporation in the social world was somehow achieved. The Nigerian participant was now working and studying Italian; on Sunday morning, he and his family would go to the Catholic Church and meet other families from the local Nigerian community. Talking about the future, Onyeka says his goal now is to 'have my own empire'. This means enrolling back in school, getting a certificate and finally establishing his construction company: 'So there is [are] many things I can do. I make good money, proper business for my wife, my daughter, have a good life'. Like Moussa, Hayat and David, Onyeka argues that his first duty now is to improve the life of his child, who needs to be better off compared to her parents. For this reason, he wants his daughter to get further in education including a PhD.

Based on these accounts, I see establishing their own family outside the centre, becoming a father and a husband, means they have resisted and overcome bare life, finally reincorporated in the social world 'as men'. In this sense, the gender expectations associated with the flight have been (at least partially) accomplished – not only at the individual level but also with regards to their family left behind. It is not a surprise that participants like Moussa and Bakary, who are both Malian, as soon as they came out of refugee centre, were asked by their families to come back in their communities and take a wife. In particular, Bakary recalls how he went back to attend his mother's funeral in Mali and his brother almost forced him to take a wife. His industriousness outside the asylum system was seemingly insufficient to confirm his transition into manhood which still needed to be sanctioned by marriage. Once back to Italy, living on his own in a private accommodation,

however, he separated from the wife. At this point, his narrative becomes particularly interesting because he is maybe the only participant who detail a rich and nuanced romantic life in Italy. He is thus the only one among the married participants who detached from the traditional masculine script of the 'family' man. I think this difference reflects not only participants' cultural or religious background, but also their social life produced in Sicily at intersection between race, class, and migration status. Once out of the asylum system, Bakary started working in the hospitality sector; this provided him with social capital and resources that those illegally working in the fields do not have.

Contrary to Bakary, once out of the refugee centre, Moussa made the conscious decision to fly back to Mali to find a wife; according to him, the precise reason was he could not find an Italian wife here. The selection of the wife was left to his mother and sister; he approved his future wife after seeing a picture and went to Mali for the wedding. When I asked why he wanted to get married, Moussa answered laughing: 'because me man!' Recognising the cultural relevance of marriage in the making of competent manhood, I also argue that this statement can be reinterpreted as a micro–level act of resistance. My view is motivated due to the fact that such claim is imbricated with discourses of power embedded in their social positionality as refugee and asylum seeking men in Sicily. Like Dramane, Issa and Jeremiah before, reclaiming his manhood, Moussa asserts his entitlement to political life despite and beyond the reduction to bare life associated with the asylum condition. This invests them with the capacity to exercise 'political agency', which Hakli and Kallio describe as 'the subject's action when in a state of becoming prompted by future–oriented demands and contingencies of social life, and characterized by the exigencies of changing situations with considerable uncertainty and ambiguity.' (Hakli and Kallio 2018, 69). In other words, with few opportunities available in terms of social mobility, performing competent masculinity becomes an essential site to lay claim over their future, beyond and despite the refugee experience. Being stuck in liminal conditions involves a significant burden for participants in terms of humiliation, frustration and anxiety; not only does it jeopardize the whole sense of the gendered enterprise, invalidating all the efforts they have put in to reach Italy; but it means being suspended in a position of profound social isolation and vulnerability, from where it is hard to even imagine a future. Suspended in limbo, confined to the 'inside' of the centre, while being subject to racist structures, participants cannot perform competent manhood and yet, 'being

man' is everything they can aspire to be to reclaim agency to move on from this liminality.

Thus, masculinity, as illustrated in the opening vignette of this thesis, is constructed as a site wherein to recover agency and subjectivity. Through these micro–politics of identity, to be linked always in relation to participants' social location in Sicily and the power relations embedded in their subject position, the male traveller is able to answer the original quest for masculine realization embodied by the gendered enterprise; illustrating to their families that they are now mature men as a result of their journey. At the same time, by showing their masculine competence as family men, men–on–the–move are able to negotiate a position of deservingness in the eyes of the Sicilian community, contesting the feminised notions of the 'genuine refugee' without falling into the discourse of the 'bogus asylum seeker'. The gendered enterprise, while never entirely accomplished and always fragmented, can be understood as a way to respond to these multiple necessities and vulnerabilities produced by, and producing, their experience of mobility along the CMR. Through this narrative, participants are able to strategically negotiate their place in the world across transnational arenas.

Conclusions

Throughout this thesis, I illustrated how for men–on–the–move the journey to Sicily along the CMR is associated with a protracted condition of liminality which participants see as a test for their masculine identity. Liminality, as a concept to study socio–cultural transitions between states, involves always a phase of incorporation in which the neophyte is reintegrated into the society with a new status; without it 'liminality is pure danger', meaning that 'the social drama has no foregone conclusion' (Thomassen 2009, 22). This model is extendible to the refugee experience as a gendered enterprise: whether participants' arrival in Italy is perceived as an accomplishment for their masculine trajectory, an incorporation in the host society as 'men' is to be expected. This means that, once in Sicily, participants expect to fulfil the gendered expectations and aspirations associated with the migration experience, particularly financial independence and marriage. However, as soon as they are relocated within the Italian asylum system structures, participants find themselves embroiled in a protracted liminal status, produced by asylum policies, and aggravated by the significant implementation gap of these in Sicily. This can be seen as the 'institutionalization of liminality' (Turner 1969, 107) to highlight the role of the disciplinary power of the asylum regime, resulting in the suspension of the masculine trajectory associated with the refugee experience.

This suspension is traumatic and painful because it involves an embodiment of what Agamben calls 'bare life', meaning the reduction to biological life, in opposition to the political life of citizens. This process is experienced in terms of emasculation by participants and it is connected to three main tropes associated with the governance of reception centres: inability to work, reliance on humanitarian aids and lack of control of their own life.

Due to the specificity of the refugee centres I accessed, which were small facilities immersed in the urban topography of the Sicilian villages, the liminality of refugee lives in the centre should be seen as intersecting the socio–economic and racialised landscape of the local communities. As a result of the 'refugee crisis' discourse, refugee centres emerge as enclaves of black masculinities. For this reason, men in the centre would constantly navigate the repertoire of racialised narratives associated with the 'bogus asylum seeker' discourse in their everyday experience outside the centre. The liminality of the centre intersecting these processes of racialization and othering result in a sense of profound social isolation which jeopardise the aspiration of masculine incorporation into the host society. In this regard, gender relations

constitute a good example for exploring this gendered claim of incorporation: being allocated in all–male reception centres, with few opportunities to meet women outside the centre, due to racist structures, men in the centre see marriage as impossible for them. For this reason, to recover the idealised trajectory into manhood, participants elucidate a precise sequential order: here, being granted legal status is seen as the precondition for obtaining a legal job and being financially independent. At the end of this path, establishing their family outside the centre is characterised as the climax of competent masculinity, symbolising that the transition to a new level of manhood, as a result of the journey, has been achieved.

This idealised trajectory reveals the tension between the masculine ideal and men's practice which is constitutive of the frame of the gender enterprise. In their narrative, participants would constantly engage in attempts to reclaim masculinity, despite and as a result of their liminal situation. Here I noticed three main strategies – working for the humanitarian apparatus associated with the 'refugee crisis', finding and enduring farming jobs in the locale, and becoming a responsible father – as a way to contest the effects of bare life and prove that life goes on beyond the asylum experience. In particular, establishing a family outside the centre and becoming a father is seen as one of the few available opportunities to negotiate an exit from liminal conditions, while recovering a contested space for self–worth. That is why the statement 'I'm a man' should be viewed as an act of resistance, aimed at reclaiming a political subjectivity in relation to multiple audiences – including the researcher and the self. Suspended in the limbo of the centre, while being subject to racist structures, participants cannot perform competent manhood and yet, 'being man' is everything they can aspire to be to reclaim agency over their lives. At the same time, the fulfilment of moral obligations associated with traditional masculinity is interestingly used to negotiate notions of 'deservingness' in Sicily, distancing participants from the spectre of dangerous foreign masculinity. Through this frame – shared and understood by the white population in Sicily – participants are able to negotiate a position which is not associable with the 'bogus asylum seeker' while still not resulting in the feminised 'genuine refugee' men.

Conclusions

The thesis began by presenting masculinity as a site of struggle for men arriving in Europe along the Mediterranean routes. This 'struggle' inhabits many arenas: the transnational familial context, the materiality of the journey, the European asylum regime and the racialised landscape of Sicily. In the context of the 'refugee crisis', however, refugee and asylum seeking men emerge primarily as a burden for European societies. Their lives are simplified in terms of the 'risks' they posit to the receiving countries while their voices are frequently distorted. A focus on the significance and meaning of their lived experiences aimed at, on the contrary, uncovering the complexity of participants' everyday lives (Datta et al. 2009).

Based on this premise, we argued for the necessity to incorporate a gender perspective in the study of men's refugee experience along the CMR. By focusing on these men as gendered subjects, we are able to grasp the complexity of their lives and the challenges they face throughout their journey. Influenced by feminist and gender research on refugee women, I used gender as analytical level in which uncovering the vulnerabilities produced by processes of mobility and relocation across different migration stages. The selected interview method oriented toward life history tradition, elicited participants' personal narratives in order to explore the journey along the CMR as a unified trajectory in which locating gender performance. By doing this, we are able to identify changes and continuities in the making of participants' experiences as men-on-the-move. Following individual trajectory embedded in the situated circumstances of the journey, we grasped how vulnerabilities are contextually produced by individual position in the wider socio-cultural landscape of the journey and in relation to multiple arenas. Here, refugee vulnerability emerged as gendered, meaning that is associated with the changing patterns of gender relations enacted in a specific context (Clark 2007).

Overall, this thesis provides three main contributions to the scholarship of masculinity and migration: first of all, it integrates a gendered analysis to the whole experience of mobility along the CMR and not just a segment of the migration trajectory; secondly, it is one of the first attempt to extend an analysis of men's gendered vulnerabilities in the context of CMR; thirdly, it explores the role of masculinity in the current European 'refugee crisis' by illuminating the gendered lives of asylum seeking and refugee men in reception centres in Sicily.

The 'gendered enterprise' as a unified narrative of gendered mobility

Engendering a masculine perspective in the study of migration movements across the CMR to the EU, this thesis has shown how men-on-the-move act as gendered actors in the context of their mobility, from the moment they decide to leave their homes to their relocation in Sicily. What this thesis adds is a dynamical understanding of these gendered processes as enmeshed with a unified narrative construction of gendered selves. The refugee experience emerges thus as a major event in participants' gendered lives at the intersection with age, nationality, race and class; entailing a quest for masculine realization despite, and as a result of, the circumstances that triggered migration paths. By doing this, we can document the process of allignment to hegemonic masculinity in relation to different migration phases, uncovering the ramifications that this has in influencing men's mobilities and trajectories. Contrary to what argued by Connell (2005), I view such engagement as a process, rather than a moment.

By following participants' accounts, the journey is contextualised as part of this narrative engagement (Hammack 2011) with masculinity. This process is connected to specific life stages and position in the family. For young participants, the flight is described as one of the few available opportunities for transitioning into manhood, as proxy for social adulthood. For those who are already married the journey represents a challenging and arduous arena to reclaim masculine status lost as a result of being exiled. In any case, due to its historical, political and socio-economic dimension, the CMR emerges as an arena when men might negotiate key resources to perform competent masculinity, mostly associated with work and breadwinning.

For this reason, I viewed participants' refugee experience as a gendered enterprise, a complex project that aims at fulfilling social and cultural requirements associated with masculinity. This requires engaging symbolic tropes of masculinity -such as mastery, courage, physical and moral strength, independence, and financial provision - throughout the flight. The choice of focusing on a diverse sample in terms of nationalities and ethnicities across Sub-Saharan Africa impacts necessarily the depth in which we can locate the symbolic necessities of manhood. Focusing on a single ethnic group would have allowed more in-depth exploration of the cultural specification of the gendered enterprise. There is no doubt that by focusing on cross-cultural common denominators, we lose sight of the significance of ritual necessity associated with transitions into manhood.

By focusing on the commonalities among participants, meaning their shared experience as refugee and asylum seeking men in Italy, however, we are able to grasp the significance of the migration experience in their gendered lives as a moment of profound transformation and change in their life as men.

Liminality as a sociological concept is helpful to capture the processes of social change and identity transition and it has been frequently applied to refugee conditions, mainly in the context of camps (Stepuppat 1992, Turner 1999, Maalki 1995). Originally the concept aimed to grasp the condition in between states, associated with rites of passage, where the neophyte is neither here or there, being suspended out of the ordinary day-to-day cultural and social states and processes (Turner 1969). The Sahara crossing can thus be described as the place where liminality is embodied due to the difficulties of the journey. The crossing experience represents a liminal trial where the initiate can perform his fitness for masculine approbation and entitlement (Silverman 2004). Following Howson (2014), this thesis contributes to theoretical debate on masculinity arguing that the process of alignment to hegemonic masculinity can be understood as liminal experience situated in men's biography. In particular, when men are required to confront radical changes and difficulties.

In Libya, thus, masculinity becomes a site of resistance against the continuum of violence they are exposed to by their condition as irregular migrants. In Italy, it becomes a way to contest both racializing and feminising notions associated with refugee discourse and practices; here participants manage to present themselves as masculine agents rather than passive victims, while still claiming they are worthy of seeking international protection. These claims are expressed in relation to both the host communities in Sicily and their families left behind in their sending countries across transnational sites.

Exposed to trauma, danger and extreme conditions, in participants' narratives the journey emerges as a transformative experience, a turning point, in their lives as men. The ontological change associated with the liminal experience is somehow concluded when they finally reach Sicilian shores via boat. A new man emerges from the ordeal of crossing; some participants describe this using the narrative genre of the journey of achievement, which much like a coming-of-age story or a hero's tale, signifies the symbolic accomplishment of masculine identity through the transformative journey. This narrative performance might be read in relation to multiple elements, including the intersubjective construction of meaning between the researcher and the

interviewee. Most importantly, I argue that this selected genre dramatizes a claim for masculine reincorporation into the ordinary social world of life in Sicily.

In this sense, we can grasp a pattern of continuity (Herz 2018) in the dominant cultural discourse on masculinity cited by participants' in their gender performance. This stability should not be understood merely as reflecting participants' cultural histories, but it also interrogates participants' personal experience and their location in Sicily. With few opportunities for social interaction with Sicilian population, or social mobility, the perspective of new gender performance disengaged by traditional masculine discourse seems particularly difficult to achieve. I argue that this is caused by the lack of cultural and social resources associated with their positionality in refugee centres. The claim for masculine reincorporation should therefore be understood as a way to reclaim masculine status, the only status they can cling to given their social location. This highlights the necessity for further research focusing on how this affects patterns of gender inequality in the family. This is an aspect which is not explored by this thesis, due to the great prevalence of young single men in the sample and the fact that majority of participants lived in all-male refugee centres. At the same time, I read this masculine claim as a strategy to contrast othering strategies activated by their racialised position in Sicily and the emasculation processes associated with the Italian asylum regime.

In this context, the liminal situation of men-on-the-move should be understood along a continuum across the whole mobility experience. However, what participants' narratives seem to suggest is that while in Libya that liminal situation signified being on the move and negotiating passage to Italy, in Sicily it represented an abrupt suspension of their mobility associated with their location in Sicilian refugee centres. Agamben's (1998) concept of bare life was used to illustrate how the institutionalization of refugee liminality is sanctioned by specific power relations in the centre: between staff and participants across the gender and racial lines, denoting a line of demarcation between the political life of the 'citizen' and the bare life of the 'refugee'.

Being confined in this condition of marginality and exception, participants connect emasculation to the deprivation of political agency, intended as the capacity to take decisions over their future. Without a clear and defined status ('documents') this basic symbolic necessity of manhood cannot be met and fulfilled. This has extreme consequences for their sense of self. Their

masculine trajectory is suspended, and the quest for realization is interrupted. At the same time, masculinity becomes a key site of conflict and struggle with the institutional landscape of the refugee centre. Additionally, this study offers an opportunity to locate emasculation of refugee lives in relation to their whole refugee experience, by illustrating how this is not just produced by their interaction with humanitarian enterprise and refugee policies, but also by the whole experience of the flight. Emasculation is indeed produced by the liminal condition embodied by men-on-the-move, although, as argued above, it has different meanings associated with different migration phases.

With regards to asylum experience in Sicily, I noticed three main micro-level attempts to carve out space for themselves as men (Turner 2010): working for the humanitarian apparatus associated with the 'refugee crisis', finding and enduring farming jobs in the locale, and becoming a responsible father. I see these strategies as a way to contest the effects of emasculation and prove the life goes on beyond the asylum experience. With few other options due to the ethno-racial inequalities in Sicily, family life is indicated as a central arena to lay claim to a future and thus recover a neglected space for political agency and subjectivity. Establishing their own family outside the centre, becoming a father and a husband, might be see as ways to overcome the condition of exception associated with bare life within the refugee regime. These findings necessarily require further reflections on the effects that this process of resistance has on the women who are in a relationship with these men in Sicily. Following the masculine trajectories of the men-on-the-move, this thesis provides a partial account of gender relations in the context of the CMR. Further research is necessary to study the effects of these gendered processes activated by the flight have on women and children that live with these men.

By showing their masculine competence as family men, some participants are also able to find a space of manoeuvre in relation to the racial and cultural hierarchies activated by the 'refugee crisis', negotiating a position of deservingness in the eyes of the Sicilian community. Here, much like the hero's narrative in Chapter 5, performing a traditional frame of masculinity, associated with the figure of the hard-working family man, becomes a way to negotiate a common cultural script across patriarchies; namely, participants' culture of origin and the Sicilian gender order. Ultimately, this strategy allows them to not be associated with the feminised notions of the 'genuine refugee', incompatible with the quest of the gender enterprise. At the same time, participants manage to distance themselves from the discourse of the 'bogus

asylum seeker' and its othering effects. A moral version of masculinity is thus performed so that participants can present themselves as competent and respectable men both in Sicily and in their sending communities. Through these micro-politics of resistance, to be linked always in relation to participants' social location in Sicily, the traveller is able to answer to the original quest for masculine realization embodied by the gendered enterprise. The journey into manhood, while never entirely completed, is somehow presented as moving forward.

At this stage, we should consider how the life history method enacts specific modes of storytelling; given the primary aim of narration is to provide a sense of coherence, order and meaning to fragmentary events (Kirmayer 2003), the gendered enterprise frame is necessarily produced by the selected method of interview. We must also recognise how the trans-cultural dimension of the research complicates the possibility of narration associated with the life history method. Most of the time, both participants and I would not use our native language and this necessarily impacted on communication, especially in the case of the life history method, which requires a constant narrative flow. There is a possibility that these cultural differences might have enacted some narratives' configurations around universal tropes of manhood, such as the citation of the hero-soldier figure. The selection of a performative approach, interrogating not only the textual dimension, but also the dialogical nature of narration as a co-production of meanings aims to uncover these politics of meaning (Hammack 2011). Narratives are, indeed, stories that define who we are in time and place and in relation to others (Fivush 2010). In this sense, reflexivity is necessarily a fundamental tool for data analysis and interpretation. The findings presented in this thesis should be read in relation to the fact of my being a Sicilian researcher interviewing African refugees and asylum seekers in Sicily. Despite my attempts to establish a conversational partnership with participants, my positionality should be taken into account when considering the power struggles associated with participants' narrative performance.

The contribution of a gender perspective to the understanding of men's vulnerabilities along the CMR

This study integrates mainstream research on mobility across the Mediterranean routes to Europe which has primarily used gender as a category applicable only to female migrants and refugees. Extending a masculine perspective to young adult men, I challenge this assumption and provide further contextual understanding of the role of gender in the

production of vulnerabilities along these routes. Here, men's vulnerability is produced by contingent and situated patterns of gender relations and, therefore, normative discourse of what it means to be a man in a specific context.

Focusing on the causes that prompted participants to flee, masculinity emerges as a key level of analysis for understanding the gender-specific vulnerabilities that prompted participants' reasons to take the CMR. Here, I argue that, interacting with different migration drivers, gender frames a specific range of possibilities, expectations and aspirations for men-on-the-move; participants argue that these are different from those of refugee women, as a result of the gendered structural characteristics of their sending communities and their position in their families. In this context, engendering participants' reasons to flee can help understand patterns of mixed-migration, predominant across the CMR, with violence and persecution intersecting structural economic patterns with men being expected to provide or contribute to the economic life of the family household. Among the largest sub-groups I noticed interesting common patterns: problems with land property in Gambia and a state of generalised violence, most notably gang violence, in Nigeria. On the relation between masculinity and these structural factors that are prompting so many young men to flee in terms of gendered vulnerabilities, however, we need further quantitative evidence to inform policy responses and corroborate qualitative findings. Future quantitative research could usefully incorporate gender into the study of migration determinants in the context of the CMR.

Overall, as argued in Chapter 4, whether fleeing for political persecution, family violence, human rights abuse or economic factors, gender expectations produced and producing the flight are always interrelated to the economic asymmetries between participants' Sub-Saharan Africa and the idealised space of Europe. This clarifies how gendered vulnerabilities prompting men to leave their homes invest the divide between normative ideal and real life, what they are 'expected' to do and what they can realistically achieve in their local communities. Both the decision to leave and the frame of the gendered enterprise inhabit inexorably this divide.

On the other hand, extending feminist theorization on the relationship between refugee labelling and gendered vulnerabilities that prompted women to flee, I illustrated how men too flee from gendered violence targeting them in both private and public realms (Oswin 2001). In this sense, this thesis

contributes to the limited literature that aims at studying masculinity as a category of vulnerability in relation to forced migration, humanitarian crisis, and post-conflict settings (Løvgren 2015, 18). The exposure to (masculine) violence informing their decision to flee should not be understood as single moment. Gendered vulnerabilities produced by, and producing, the refugee experience, in this sense, should be located on a continuum across different migration stages.

In Chapter 5, violence marks their experience of crossing through Libya. Here, we have demonstrated that refugee and asylum seeking men coming to Europe witness and experience violence too, in particular with regards to the Libyan crossing and smuggling industry. By doing this we grasp not only a wider contextual understanding of smuggling practices and networks, but also the key role of gender in shaping patterns of violence associated with irregular migration in the Mediterranean region. These findings also have relevance for women and children transiting along the CMR.

With regards to the smuggling industry, participants described a masculine discourse associated with the illegality industry (Anderrson 2014) regulating the interaction between participants and smugglers. Violence and dehumanization are justified as part of the suspension of social structures associated with liminal situations. And they understood by participants as sites where they must prove their value as men. The Sahara crossing is thus described as a 'journey for men'. Enduring such difficulties and engaging with risk is presented as proof of masculinity, while those who do not sustain the extreme conditions of the journey, by showing vulnerabilities, are located at the bottom of the gendered hierarchies of the illegality industry (Anderrson 2014). The reference to a dominant masculine discourse, in participants' accounts, seems to confer on smugglers a power of life and death over the travellers. In such context, men's own experience of abuse and violence is neglected while gender-based violence towards refugee and asylum seeking women arises as one of the few opportunities for men-on-the-move to bear witness against the traumatising practices of the smuggling industry. This aspect has two sides: on one hand, men on the move face challenges to their sense of masculine identity when they witness gendered abuse and violence against women without the possibility to intervene; on the other, gendered victimhood of female refugee emerges as one of the possible discursive fields where to express their own vulnerability, at the intersection of multiple masculine discourses (including participants' own culture) which equate victimization with women and children.

Once in Libya, participants are cast as illegal migrants and find themselves in the middle of generalised violence related to the proliferation of weapons, intra-clan fights and the collapse of the Libyan judicial system; in search of job opportunities and sanctuary, they move north, often facing arrest or being subjected to violence and abuse by criminal groups, militias and civilians. Participants also traced a direct line between the proliferation of violence and their blackness. Because of their race and illegality condition, black travellers are constantly positioned as inferior in relation to everyone in the crossing arena: smugglers, Libyan men and even youth gangs. This has serious ramifications for their masculine identity due to their required passivity in the face of provocation.

As Chapter 6 shows, gendered vulnerabilities are associated with participants' location in the Sicilian asylum regime. This is expressed by participants' narratives when they present the legitimizing steps to renegotiate manhood in a clear sequential order: the first thing to obtain is 'documents' (namely, a legal status), which will allow you to surface from the condition of protracted liminality by accessing a (legal) job and private accommodation. These are conducive to the possibility of establishing your own family outside the refugee regime, with marriage being described as the climax of competent manhood. Such trajectory into manhood is also presented as a ideal path to negotiate an exit from liminal condition clarifying how gendered vulnerabilities inhabit the divide between hegemonic masculinity (Connell 2005) and what men can actually achieve in their lives.

As refugee and asylum seeking subjects, participants are located within refugee reception structures until a final decision is taken on their asylum claim. Such a period of incertitude, seclusion and exclusion means that the liminal experience is not concluded. Men in the refugee centres are not often able to completely fulfil masculine expectations around work, independence and authority, and therefore are subjected to a frustrating experience of emasculation associated with their permanence in small refugee centres.

In light of this, this thesis contributes to the literature on masculinity and the refugee regime, by extending significant contributions on the role of the humanitarian government from large camps in the Global South (Turner 2010, Jaji 2009, Lukunka 2012) to small reception centres in Europe. On the other hand, the study provides an original contribution by integrating a gender perspective to the limited literature on refugee centres in Sicily (Pasquetti 2016, Casati 2018).

In this context, this study allows a reflection on how different mechanisms of power inside refugee structure shape processes of emasculation and infantilization in relation to the ethno-racial landscape outside the centres. I connect these to the specificity of refugee centres I access, as small reception structures in the middle of Sicilian landscape, where the logic of containment of refugee lives is operationalized through the separation of refugee men from refugee women. This logic symbolically mirrors the confinement of these men in relation to Sicilian women outside the centre.

Due to these characteristics, I argue that these centres emerge as masculinised ad racialised spaces. They, thus, can be understood as enclaves of othered masculinities in relation to white Sicilian landscape. For this reason, the repertoire of narratives activated by the 'refugee crisis' discourse are immediately inscribed to the men in the centres, affecting their day–to–day interactions and possibilities of socialization with the native communities. In light of this, emasculation is problematized as a reconfiguration of power relations both inside and outside the refugee centre. This results in the inescapable placement of refugee and asylum seeking men at the bottom of any gender hierarchy in Sicily -in relation to white women and men, but also refugee women.

Differently from literature in large camps, where emasculation is associated with the promotion of gender equality among refugee population by aid organization (Turner 2010, Lukunka 2012, Carlson 2005); in my study emasculation appears to be more connected to systems of surveillance and disciplinary power activated by refugee discourse in Sicily. Being emasculated by refugee policies and practices inside the refugee centre, the black refugee man is less of a threat for white population. Located at the margin of Sicilian society, however, his position of Otherness exposes him to potential violence and injustice. In this context, this research contributes to the critical scholarship which aims at extending an intersectional understanding of refugee masculinities (Christensen and Jensen 2014). By focusing on the gendered lives of men in the reception centre, we are able to contextualise the multiple systems of inequalities (Crenshaw 1991) or interlocking structures of oppression (Collins 2000) enacted by their position as black refugee and asylum seeking men in Europe.

On the gendered and racialised politics associated with the European 'refugee crisis'

On the gendered and racialised politics associated with the discourse of 'crisis', the stories presented in this thesis capture the difference between how we talk about asylum seeking and refugee men, and how they talk about themselves. Although this thesis is not concerned with the politics of labelling (Zetter 2007), we have vastly explored the gendered simplification that these enact and what are the consequences of these for men-on-the-move.

This invests how we deal with gendered vulnerabilities in the context of refugee flows along the Mediterranean routes (Kofman 2019). In many parts of the world, violence targeting men traverses the traditional divide between public and private domains associated with the 1951 Refugee Convention and this is often neglected by asylum commissions. On the contrary, integrating a masculine perspective in the analysis of participants' decisions to leave their home, the gender dimension of interpersonal and structural violence-associated with gang-related violence, extended family and clan-based conflicts, intergenerational tensions over land property, generalized violence associated with a malfunctioning state, extreme poverty and criminal activities -becomes clear. In this context, masculinity emerges as a central frame for understanding men's experience of victimization. Without these considerations, the emergence of the CMR as one of the major migration arenas in the world cannot be understood, nor can its gendered patterns and structures.

These narratives also offer an opportunity to deconstruct more broadly the politics of refugee storytelling (Hammack and Cohler 2011, Hammack 2011, Jackson 2013). On one side gender and cultural norms may play an important role in influencing the content of refugee stories; specific experiences of violence and abuse, including sexual violence and torture, might be difficult to reconcile with masculine expectations, ideals and codes so that male asylum seekers and refugees might decide to omit them from their oral accounts. On the other hand, gender essentialist notions of vulnerability promoted by both humanitarian and securitarian discourse might produce a culture of disbelief, impacting the asylum application for those applicants who do not or cannot tap into the 'genuine refugee' narrative.

In particular, I am concerned with the effects of refugee labelling associated with the discourse of the 'crisis' on men's capacity to 'demonstrate' their credibility as refugee claimants. Similar to what happened to women seeking

asylum being forced to present themselves as idealized 'victims' of archaic cultures (Freedman 2012), men too have to conform with these racialised tropes of 'deservingness' (Mavelli 2017). Feminised notions of passivity and helplessness associated with the 'genuine refugee' narrative can be unbearable for self-identity. This is not only due to the cultural tropes associated with feminization in traditional gender discourse, but also due to the effects of emasculation processes on racial hierarchies in Sicily. Across the sample, therefore, I noticed micro-level attempts of resistance, with participants laying claim to masculinity within their refugee stories.

Through these efforts, participants were able to distance themselves from narratives of passivity and feminization, while strategically not being embroiled in the spectre of 'bogus asylum seekers'. However, given asylum hearings demand the applicant's ability to interpellate refugeeness as 'a recognizable identity' (Luker 2015, 92), it is worth asking how these performances would be perceived in the context of the refugee determination process. What happens to asylum seeking men who contest/resist the 'genuine refugee' narrative in the context of asylum hearings? Do they have less opportunity to be granted asylum? Further research must investigate the role of masculinity discourse in asylum deliberation and its political implications on people's claims. In this context, it is essential to interview commissioners and asylum officials, exploring how gender essentialism affects their decision-making and deliberation process.

Incorporating a gender-sensitive approach in asylum policies toward men

Uncovering the gender-specific vulnerabilities of male refugees and asylum seekers, this thesis has illustrated the necessity of incorporating a gender-sensitive approach in refugee reception and integration models for all beneficiaries, not only women. Ricardo and Barker (2005) and Correia and Bannon (2006) provide specific recommendations on how this should be done and what the benefits are for the whole society, including women. By including explicit discussion of manhood/masculinities and male socialization, men can become agents of social change towards a more equitable and just society for all. Here, I agree with Olivius (2016) who argues that such efforts should discard predominant assumptions about refugee masculinities as backward and reject hierarchical narrative of cultural evolution. This is particularly important in the Italian asylum system, which organise its receptive structures along the lines of gender but refuse to acknowledge the implication of this choice. In Chapter 6, I illustrated the key role of masculinity and race in shaping power dynamic inside the centre. Based on my

experience, these are totally ignored by the social cooperatives in charge of the receptive structure or the staffers. Their approach to men appears to be characterised by gender-neutral lenses while the issue of race is merely acknowledged in terms of promotion of cultural diversity. This study provides insights that might help practitioners and refugee aid organizations to rethink their micro-level approaches toward male refugees and asylum seekers.

At the meso-level, this requires the Italian asylum system to take into account men's gender-vulnerabilities. Caterina Bove of the Association for Legal Studies on Immigration writes that asylum procedure in Italy identifies specific groups as vulnerable (e.g. minors, unaccompanied minors, pregnant women, victims of trafficking, disabled people); and take into accounts their special needs in reception services (Bove 2018, 51). In this sense, SPRAR (2018) has a differentiated approach between vulnerable and ordinary beneficiaries. Some participants who have transited from community house for unaccompanied minors to adult centres acknowledge the difference in terms of the quality of service provided (access to psychological support, education and social activities). Given the highly traumatising experience of crossing through Libya and the Mediterranean, however, we should ask how does the vulnerability screening work in practice[62] when people arrive in Sicily? And how does the Italian asylum system deal with the vulnerabilities of those who do not fall into these categories of 'vulnerables'?

With regards to men's vulnerabilities, asylum policies and practices that infantilise and emasculate asylum claimants are perceived by participants as invalidating social requirements associated with manhood, thus jeopardising the masculine quest for realization associated with their journey. This might have serious consequences for their mental health (including risk of re-traumatization), wellbeing and integration into the host society. As Ricardo and Barker (2005) note, the absence of other means of achieving socially recognised manhood can lead young marginalised men towards criminal activities or toxic behaviours. Instead of activating alarm or general paranoia, policy-makers should realise that initiatives to tackle social exclusion, racism and socio-economic marginalization of this high-risk groups are much needed in Sicily. These must be enabling and active-oriented, with refugees and asylum seekers as agents of their own destiny, rather than objects of pity.

[62] Bove (2018) describes how there is not a legally defined procedure for the identification of vulnerable persons in Italy.

Reconfiguring asylum assistance toward models that enhance durable solutions, economic integration and personal responsibility - for all refugee subjects - might be an important corrective in that direction. Reducing the incertitude associated with the asylum applicant condition is a priority for participants' gendered life, as this highly compromises their capacity to make autonomous decisions about their life and future.

Despite SPRAR centres being commonly identified as better solutions compared to other types of reception structure (D'Angelo 2019), this thesis has shown that there are still significant gaps in the implementation of SPRAR holistic model in Sicily. Failures of implementation in SPRAR programmes produce significant gendered vulnerabilities for refugee and asylum seeking men in Italy. In this sense, guaranteeing effective and continuous access to education and training opportunities and evaluating the implementation of SPRAR policies with gendered-sensitive criteria in the locale is of primary importance. The new Italian government, disappointingly, appears to be going in the opposite direction. The recent changes in legislation that abolished humanitarian protection status will affect primarily male asylum seekers. Among SPRAR beneficiaries, indeed, this was the most common protection status for male beneficiaries, while women register a higher percentage of refugee status recognition (SPRAR 2018). Although humanitarian protection being a weaker form of protection, it still represented an opportunity for legalise their situation in Italy. This added to the exclusion of asylum seekers from SPRAR system[63] will force the majority of male asylum claimants into large, often dysfunctional (D'Angelo 2019), first reception centres. I read this new government policy as way to use the institutionalization of social liminality as an enforced strategy of surveillance and containment of othered masculinities. In doing this, not only do we reproduce significant violations of basic human rights, which are protected by Italian constitution, but we also feed the chains of marginality (Pasquetti 2016), exploitation and social conflict in our peripheries.

Overall, policy-makers and practitioners are responsible for taking refugee policies out of what I define as a collective denial on the relationship between

[63] With the aim of preventing asylum seekers from accessing second-level reception in the former SPRAR, system, now renamed SIPROIMI, decree–law No. 13 of 2017 reformed asylum seekers' reception approach, drastically separating them from international protection holders. With the new legislation asylum seekers can be only accommodated in first reception centres and in CAS (Bove 2019, 14)

refugeeness and gender, making visible what it is instrumentally overlooked. As argued throughout the thesis, the point is not merely saying that men are vulnerable too, nor that they are more disadvantaged compared to women; but rather, it is rethinking how gender essentialism compromises the model of refugee reception and integration, creating new relations of subordination, violence and inequality between the citizen and the refugee.

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APPENDIX 1 Information Sheet and Consent Form (English Version)

Information sheet for research participants

What is the aim of the research? This research is conducted by Marco Palillo, PhD Candidate from the Department of Social Policy at London School of Economics and Political Science. The project is part of his doctoral research funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). The aim is to explore the stories of young refugees arrived in Sicily. In particular, how the refugee experience has changed their lives as men, fathers, husbands etc. The study is based on interviews with questions developed around a few topics such as family, work, and friends.

Who can take part in the research? Male Refugees/Asylum seekers; residing in Sicily. The participation is absolutely voluntary. Before you decide whether or not to take part it is important to read carefully this information sheet for research participants. If you decide to take part you will be asked to sign the consent form below. You can stop participating at any time without penalty.

What will I have to do? You will be invited to take part in a face-to-face interview. You will be asked a series of questions about your background, journey to the Sicily, and your life here. You can decide to stop the interview at any time, without providing any reason for it. You can decide to not answer any questions being asked you do not wish to.

Will my answers to any of the questions be available to anyone aside from the researcher? No. Everything you say during the interview is confidential. The information you provide will be anonymised. A fake name will be used instead of your real name.

What are the possible benefits of taking part? There will be no direct benefit to yourself. Due to the current refugee crisis we hear so much about refugees and so little from their own perspective. By participating in this interview you will be providing information that should be useful to advance knowledge about the refugee experience

What will happen to the information you collect during the interview? The interview will be recorded using a voice recorder if you are happy for this to happen. This is simply to make sure that we record the information you give us accurately. Then we will produce a full written record of what is said. The voice recording will be put onto a password-protected computer, protected by encryption and destroyed after transcription is completed. You will not be named or identified in any reports that are written about this research.

Will my participation in the research affect my asylum claim or the services I receive? No. Your participation in the discussion is in no way linked to any services or advice you may receive from the government or from any other group, organisation or institution. There will be no negative or positive effects on any services you may receive. Your participation will also have no effect on your asylum claim or your status in Italy, nor on any services you may receive from the government

What will happen to the result of the research study? The results of the study will be written up and published in a PhD Thesis, journal articles, reports or books. The findings will be also presented at various conferences.

Contact for Further Information. You can contact me at m.palillo@lse.ac.uk. My phone number will be provided on request. If you are unhappy about the way the research is conducted you can contact the LSE Research Governance Manager at research.ethics@lse.ac.uk.. You do not need to provide your name or contact details but if you do it will enable us to stay in touch with you and provide you with a copy of the findings of the research.

CONSENT FORM

If you agree to be interviewed, please complete two copies of the Consent Form below. Return one to the Interviewer and keep the other along with the research information sheet for your own records.

Participant Declaration	Please tick
I have had a chance to ask any questions I wanted to, and all such questions or inquiries have been answered to my satisfaction	YES □ NO□
I give my consent to participate in this study	YES □ NO□
I agree for my interview to be recorded, transcribed verbatim, and stored on a password-protected computer	YES □ NO□
I give permission to include my responses without my name being attributed to them in your research findings, which will be shared and published	YES □ NO□

Participant's Signature **Date**

…….

Interviewer's declaration

I declare that I have explained to the participant the aims and objectives of this study. I have received the participant's consent to participate according to the components agreed.

Signature **Date**

APPENDIX 2 Information Sheet and Consent Form (Italian Version)

Opuscolo informativo per i partecipanti

Qual è lo scopo della ricerca? Lo studio è condotto da Marco Palillo, dottorando del Dipartimento di Social Policy alla London School of Economics e Political Science (LSE). Il progetto è parte della sua ricerca di dottorato finanziata dall'Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). Lo scopo è conoscere le storie di giovani rifugiati che arrivano in Sicilia. In particolare, siamo interessati a capire come l'esperienza migratoria ha cambiato le loro vite come uomini, padri, mariti etc. Lo studio si basa su singole interviste con domande attorno ad alcuni temi: famiglia, lavoro, relazioni sociali e affettive.

Chi partecipa alla ricerca? Giovani rifugiati/richiedenti di protezione internazionale residenti in Sicilia. La partecipazione è assolutamente volontaria. Prima di decidere se partecipare o meno è importante che tu legga questo opuscolo informativo. Se acconsentirai a partecipare ti sarà chiesto di firmare il modulo di consenso informato qui sotto. Puoi decidere di interrompere la tua partecipazione in qualsiasi momento senza alcuna penalità.

Cosa devo fare? Sarai invitato a partecipare ad un intervista faccia-a-faccia con un ricercatore. Ti saranno rivolte alcune domande sul tuo passato, il tuo viaggio verso la Sicilia e la tua vita qui. Puoi fermare l'intervista quando desideri senza fornire alcuna spiegazione. Puoi decidere di non rispondere a qualsiasi domanda se non ti senti a tuo agio.

Le mie risposte saranno disponibili a qualcuno al di fuori del ricercatore? No. Tutto ciò che dirai rimarrà confidenziale. Le informazioni prima di essere usate verranno anonimizzate. Un nome inventato sarà usato al posto del tuo.

Quali sono i benefici del prendere parte alla ricerca? Non ci saranno diretti benefici per te. A causa dell'attuale crisi umanitaria, si parla molto di rifugiati ma sono poche le occasione per sentire direttamente la loro voce. Partecipando a questa ricerca potrai fornire informazioni che saranno utili per avanzare la conoscenza sulle esperienze dei rifugiati.

Cosa accadrà alle informazione raccolte durante l'intervista? Se sarai d'accordo, l'intervista verrà registrata con un dispositivo elettronico. Questo semplicemente per permetterci di prendere nota di tutte le informazioni che ci darai. Dopo di ciò produrremo una versione scritta dell'intervista. Le registrazioni saranno archiviate all'interno di un computer protetto da password, protette da criptaggio (encryption) e distrutte dopo che la trascrizione sarà completata. Tu non sarai nominato col tuo vero nome o reso identificabile in nessun testo che sarà prodotto da questa ricerca.

La mia partecipazione ha qualche effetto sul mio status, richiesta di asilo o servizio che ricevo? No. La tua partecipazione non è in nessun modo legata ai servizi che ricevi da parte del governo o di altri gruppi, organizzazioni o istituzione. Inoltre non avrà alcun effetto sulla tua richiesta d'asilo o sul tuo status legale in Italia.

Cosa accadrà con i risultati del ricerca? I risultati della mia ricerca verranno pubblicati nella mia tesi di dottorato e in articoli, libri o report. I risultati saranno presentati anche a varie conferenze.

Contatti per ulteriori informazioni. Puoi contattarmi alla mail m.palillo@lse.ac.uk. Il mio numero di cellulare sarà fornito su richiesta. Se non sei felice di come questa ricerca è stata condotta puoi contattare il Research Governance Manager della LSE (research.ethics@lse.ac.uk). Non sei obbligato a fornire il tuo nome o i tuoi contatti ma se lo farai ci darai la possibilità di rimanere in contatto e di fornirti una copia della ricerca.

Modulo di consenso informato. Se dai il tuo consenso per essere intervistato, per favore completa due copie del Modulo di consenso informato. Una copia sarà conservata da Marco Palillo, mentre l'altra ti sarà data insieme al materiale informativo.

Modulo di consenso informato

Dichiarazione del partecipante	Per favore, contrassegna una delle due opzioni
Ho avuto modo di porre domande all'intervistatore e tutte le domande hanno avuto risposte soddisfacenti	SI □ NO□
Sulla base delle informazioni che mi sono state fornite, acconsento a partecipare a questa ricerca	SI □ NO□

Acconsento al fatto che la mia intervista sia registrata, trascritta e archiviata in un computer protetto da password	Si ☐ NO☐
Acconsento che le mie risposte vengano incluse, senza essere attribuite al mio nome, nei risultati della presente ricerca. Tali risultati verranno condivisi e pubblicati.	SI ☐ NO☐

Firma del Partecipante (DATA)

……

Dichiarazione dell'intervistatore

Io sottoscritto Marco Palillo dichiaro di aver spiegato chiaramente gli obiettivi e lo scopo di questa ricerca e di aver ricevuto dal partecipante il consenso a partecipare a questo studio secondo i punti stabiliti sopra.

Firma (DATA)

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