

Resourceful Cities

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Out-of-cell time.

The humiliation of identity in Italian detention camps for immigrants.

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Abstract

Law number 40/1998 institutes Italian immigration detention centers for people waiting to be expelled. Nowadays, immigrants can pass up to eighteen months into the camps, having no permission to move away, with the police monitoring every movement they make. Despite these evidences, those people are officially called “guests”, and according to law they are not “imprisoned”, but “kept”.

What are the consequences of these contradictions on human beings? What about their identity burdened by this ambivalent status?

The life stories collected in Turin’s center give us back the immigrant’s point of view. People describe themselves as caged animals, emphasizing the process of dehumanization they are subjected to.

It is significant to notice how this process is close to the one described by Hannah Arendt in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, referring to Nazi camps. We certainly don’t talk about extermination, but about oppression of identity and deprivation of human rights.

The immigrant is easily sacrificed in the name of security. Immigration camps link a personal condition to a blame and this blame to a punishment. In the eternal *metus hostilis* logic, the contemporary enemy is the immigrant. He is punished notwithstanding his behavior: his crime is immanent in his very existence.

1. CIE: Italian camps for the identification and the expulsion of immigrants

The centers for temporary detention and support (CPTA) were established in Italy in 1998 with the law on immigration, n. 40, better known as “Turco-Napolitano”. In the same year the first centers were set up in Agrigento, Caltanissetta, Lamezia Terme, San Foca di Melendugno (Lecce), Trapani and Roma. In 2002, the detention camps were reconfirmed and strengthened as a tool to tackle illegal immigration by law n. 189, the “Bossi-Fini”, which doubled the maximum detention time, bringing the total to sixty days: the thirty days of extension were used if the procedure for the determination of identity was considered by the court to present serious difficulties (Various Authors, 2004: 21-37).

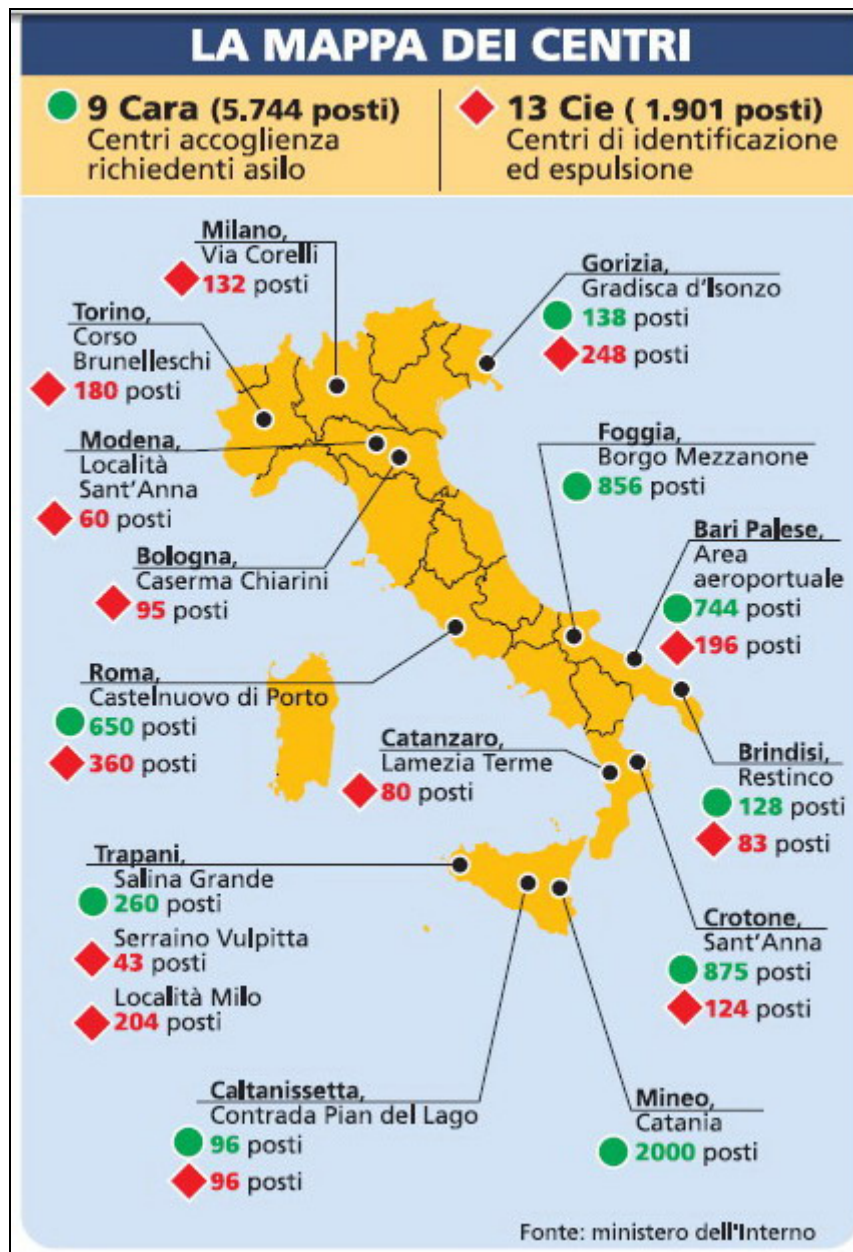
By Decree-Law n. 92 of 23 May 2008 "Urgent measures for public safety," (better known as “Pacchetto Sicurezza”, “Security Package”) then converted into law n. 125/2008, the immigration detention centers were renamed "Centers for Identification and Expulsion"(henceforth CIE). As part of this Law, the Government introduced a measure aimed at criminalizing unauthorized presence in the country and the status of “illegal migrant” was added to the list of aggravating circumstances (Art. 1(f)) of the Italian penal code (Global Detention Project, 2012).

The Decree-Law n. 89 of 23 June 2011, converted into Law n. 129/2011, extended the maximum period of stay for foreigners in these camps by 180 days (provided by Law n. 94/2009) to 18 months in total. This Law amended the Consolidated Immigration Act, which transposed the EU Return Directive.

The purpose of the centers is to temporarily hold immigrants without a valid residence permit, waiting to implement the deportation order issued in charge of them. The expulsion, in fact, cannot be immediate if investigations on the identity of the foreigner and the validity of his documents are necessary, if he should be given help or if the means for transportation is not available.

The following map shows the placement of CIE in 2012¹. From North to South we find 13 detention centers (CIE) plus 9 centers for asylum seekers (CARA).

¹ <http://www1.interno.gov.it/mininterno/export/sites/default/it/temi/immigrazione/sottotema006.html> (accessed 5 May 2013)



According to law, foreigners who remain in the detention center are "guests" or "kept" not "prisoners". These institutions are in fact unrelated to the State prison system: they are not prisons. The detention in a CIE, however, is undoubtedly a measure that deprives the individual of personal freedom, as "guests" cannot get away from the "housing".

Here it is a crystalline first contradiction: what are the fields fenced and guarded day and night, from which people cannot get out, if not prison? With law n. 94 of 15th July 2009, art.10bis, entering and remaining on the Italian territory without valid documents became a crime, to be precise it became a contravention, punishable by the payment of a sum of from 5 to 10 thousand euro and the consequent expulsion from the territory of

the State. Until that date, people detained in CIE weren't considered responsible of any crime at all, but of an administrative offence, as it could be a traffic fine.

Law governing immigration in Italy has been declared unconstitutional in some of its points². Nevertheless article 13 of the Italian Constitution guarantees inviolability of personal freedom and gives the courts the burden of deciding on the detention of citizens, CIE have been used as places of detention of persons who had not committed crimes and the authority in charge with the validation and the extension hearings is the Justice of the Peace. These are evidences that the right of non-citizens runs on a parallel track with respect to that of citizens. As the lawyer, member of ASGI³, which I interviewed, said: "They have made an exception to the rule creating a parallel right that is entitled to the foreigners."

This "special right" (Jakobs, 2003) does not affect a stigmatized individual behavior, but an existential condition that concerns a category of people, or rather "non-persons" (Dal Lago, 1999), the migrants. They are punished as objective enemies and as such can be harbingers of a potential crime that justifies a preventive intervention against them. The stranger, to the extent that he is associated with the dimension of displacement, is easily replaceable by the society in which he is inserted. Surprisingly it is the status of the migrant's superfluity that reveals his utility: he overfills the "scum of the earth" scapegoats and sacrificial lambs from which to draw for any eventuality (Arendt, 2004: 372-419).

In this context, the detention camp is none other than a contemporary and italianized "form field", which responds to the "phenomenology of excess" inherent in migration (Rahola, 2007: 11-27). Migrants, in fact, belong to the group of "displaced persons" (Arendt, 2004: 388) and as such they transcend the idea of the nation-state and all political category that anchors the individual to a single place. They live in a state of perpetual non-membership. The administrative detention centers in general, and CIE in particular, block this flow, bordering humanity excess, staring at one place its strangeness.

² Italian Constitutional court's sentences n. 222/2004, 223/2004, 78/ 2005, 466/2005.

³ Association for legal studies on immigration.

2. From the inside

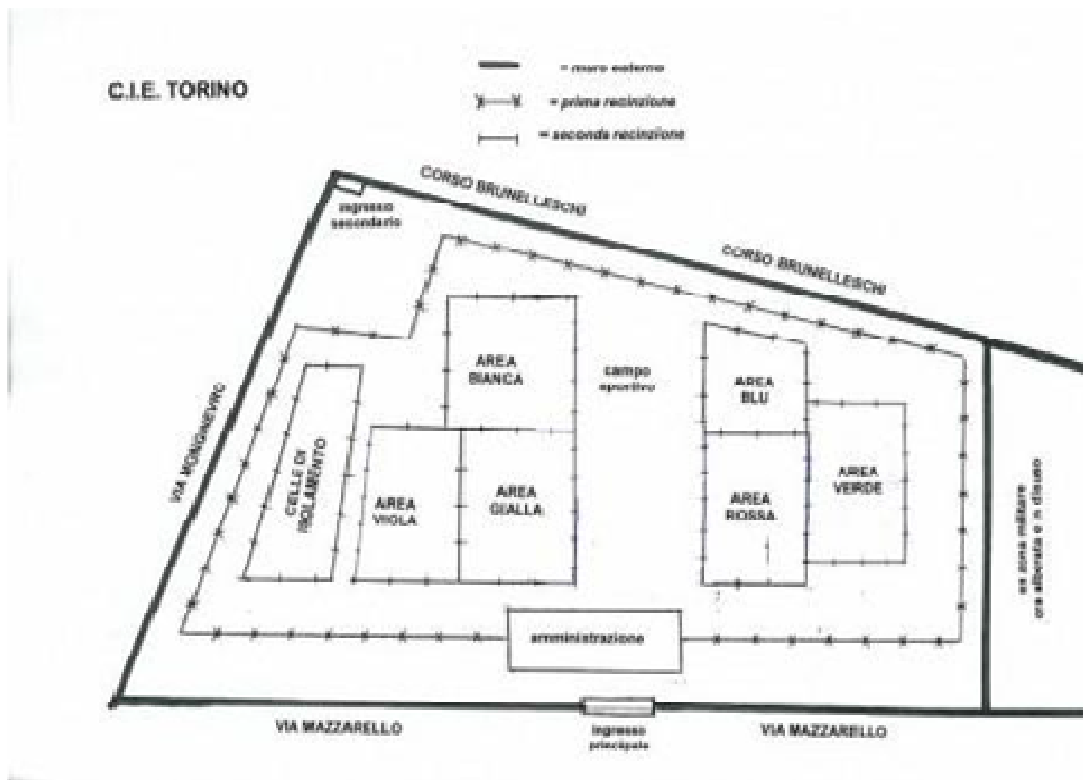
In order to bring the analysis to a more practical level, I am now referring to a specific CIE, to Corso Brunelleschi in Turin, which I visited in October 2007⁴. Opened in 1999, in a residential area on the outskirts of the city, this center had a peculiarity that set it apart from others on the national territory: it was entirely structured in container houses. These trailers were exactly those emergency housing units used to host the displaced as a result of natural disasters, dimensions 12 x 3 x 2.5 meters. They were surrounded by tall metal fences around four meters, which went on over horizontally to a length that I could estimate of about one meter. The sectors so defined were three, two for men and one for women, plus a separate container called "ospedaletto", which was meant to accommodate those people affected by infectious diseases.

The trailers that were not surrounded by the fences were the infirmary, the one designed for the talks with the lawyers and those ones used by the Red Cross, the managing authority. The only masonry building was the headquarters of the Immigration Police. The whole area was monitored through a system of cameras, with the exception of the interior of the container. As I was told by a policeman who served in the Centre, during the night, the field was brightly lit by several reflectors, for security reasons.

Starting from May 2008, a masonry structure is in operation to replace the container houses. At the moment it counts 180 beds and 6 or seven "guests" per cell. I couldn't get any precise information about the size of each cell. Detainees are allowed to play football on the open-air yard inside their area. There is an infirmary where a medical staff of 3 doctors, 2 nurses and 3 psychologists works (Iyengar et al, 2012). The following map, from Indymedia⁵, gives us the idea of how the renovated camp looks like:

⁴ I entered twice Brunelleschi CIE, thanks to the authorization of the authorities in charge, which accepted my request for scientific research reasons. During my visits I could freely interview some of the detainees. Later I had the opportunity to go deeper in the survey by interviewing some former "guests", who are now living in Turin as illegal immigrants. Furthermore, the report has been enriched by the evidences of some key informants and workers of the sector.

⁵ <http://piemonte.indymedia.org/article/12780>



The following passage, extract from an interview with a social worker of the Prefecture, provides more details on the new buildings, highlighting the difference with the old structure:

Each module has a dormitory and a dining hall with canopy. Canteen, common room, then there is a plasma television [...] the dormitory with six single beds, no more bunk beds, sink, shower and toilet and a sink to wash the hands, things that weren't there before and some cubes, I mean lockers to put your personal belongings and then the canteen with tables, TV, and a telephone booth [...] We have three areas like this, two for men and one for women, because women are usually fewer than males.

During the visit to the immigration detention center, I had the opportunity to interview some of the detainees. I will report below some excerpts from their testimonies and from those of ex-detained met in Turin, where they live today as irregular immigrants.

The main purpose of my research was to infer images from the stories, in order to reconstruct the idea of the institution "CIE" from the very point of view of the detainees. The representation of the object that they have rendered, based on their experience of it, has "conventionalized" it and provided it with a precise form. And it is by communicating to me the nature of this form that they have tried to explain "what CIE stands for" (Moscovici, 2005). Many definitions of the physical location of the camp have spontaneously emerged from the talks. The attempts of the speakers to connect the experience of CIE to my supposed cognitive frames reflected the need to bring out their own self. Sociologically speaking, the concept of "self" is ineluctably social, therefore it requires the use of a shared language (Baert, 2002).

The most common term used by respondents is "prison", together with the variants "cell", "jail" and "gaol" and the more specific "Guantanamo" or "Alcatraz". It is present in statements such as:

This is a prison, what's the difference? You eat whatever you're given, you wear what they give you, come on! It 'just a prison: there is no freedom, nothing! I visited a prison when I was in Nigeria, in my country, as a journalist, I visited one. There are some services that must be in a prison where there are young men, there must be some equipment [...] These things are not covered here (Thierry, Nigerian, one week in the CIE).

We are here in Guantanamo, there is nothing at all! (Afid, Moroccan, 5 days in the CIE)

These people are committing mistakes. So many mistakes! They bring the innocent in this prison, this is a mistake! (Amorige, Nigerian, 6 days in the CIE).

However there are also less negative images:

Bad place, but I tell you that here there is everything and we can do everything. This is not prison. I have to be fair this is not prison, because we have our kitchen (Olga, Ukrainian, 41 days in the CIE).

The comparison between the CIE and the prison expands in statements such as "It's worse than ..." or "It's better than ...". It is interesting to notice that the people who

believe that the camp of Turin is preferable to prison have never been imprisoned, while those who have experienced both, say the lesser of the two evils is the second one:

It is not a jail, it should be a bit better than jail, I hope not to see the jail, I have not seen it yet! However CIE should be better from what I've heard, however there is an area where you can walk all day, there is a shower, even if this water is not good, then food and drinks would be like in jail (Sofiane, Moroccan , in the CIE in May and June 2006).

But anyway Welcome Center better than jail, but not well (Rashid, in the CIE in December and January 2006-2007).

Worse! At least the jail ... you cook by yourself! If you want to eat pasta, eat pasta. Here nothing, you eat what they want you to eat! No food, no stove, nothing (Brahim, in prison for drug dealing and in the CIE in February 2007).

The prison there are many people who prefer to go to jail and not go to the CIE, because at least the prison they give you everything clean, like clothes, where you sleep, bed sheets, bed, also you go out three times ... no, twice a day [...] if you want to study you can make the request and you're sent to school there, play football in a large stadium, it is not like this that play into that gate. And they bring people from outside, teams from outside, if you want to play football and then ... you can work, just that they see what you do and they send you to work, though always in there: chef or hairdresser, any work you do, make your request and they send you there. [...] In the Center you don't work, nothing ... They do not treat you well (Hamid, three months in prison for drug dealing and in the CIE in January and February 2007).

The other recurring descriptive word is "zoo", which is similar to the expression "cage for..."⁶ used by almost all of the detainees and ex-detained respondents. The description of the now former sectors of Turin's CIE, given just above, should clarify the reason why they use these terms: the metal trailers were surrounded, four by four, by high

⁶ The word "gate", used by many of the interviewed detainees, is here substituted by the term "cage", which is etymologically more correct. I think that people I spoke with, used the term "gate" because it was the most used by the staff: "I open the gate!", "Come closer to the gate!", "Beyond the gate".

fences and all the areas so enclosed were separated from the outside by a high wall topped by barbed wire.

And inside you have these two large-square-type chicken coops because there are [...] not the bars [...] but a fence, that kind of chicken coop, a wire mesh, with the mesh also above, to prevent people from jumping over (policeman on duty at the detention center between 2003 and 2004).

You do not have the freedom, to me there is racism, they mock people, people are closed there like animals and they go here, go there, they turn, they look at us, how we are, how we behave...it is ugly ... , it's ugly, it's a thing that is bad, very bad (Sofiane).

We can say that staying here is like being in a zoo (Sami, an Algerian, into the CIE for 45 days).

Once you're inside, you're like a lion in his cage, walking from North to South and this makes you feel... (Thierry).

The psychology inside is not good, since you are such a thing as a dog inside a gate (Abdel, Morocco, 36 days in the CIE in 2006).

No one uses the word "lager", no one uses the word "gulag". Yet it has been told, and it has been written that these places are "lager" and "gulag". I am referring to slogans shouted during the numerous anti-globalization demonstrations for the closure of the centers, to the title chosen by Marco Rovelli for his book-report: *Lager Italiani* (2006), or to the words spoken in 2006, on the occasion of the visit to the detention center of Gradisca d'Isonzo by the then secretary of the party *Rifondazione Comunista*, Fausto Bertinotti: "If you mean the Nazi concept, then I feel it's a stretch, but if the term is used on the basis of common terminology, or to indicate places where there is no guarantee of rights then it is correct to speak of lager" (Ceci, 2006).

In order to compare the two institutions, I refer to the analysis of Guzzetti (2007: 39-50), which uses as discerning criterion the purpose of the three forms of field. The Nazi internment camps were pursuing the dehumanization of prisoners, exploiting their work, they had institutionalized a regime of terror and were pointing to the final extermination.

According to Guzzetti, in the Soviet gulag extermination was not included as an objective, although the other three points were. With regard to the administrative detention centers, we absolutely can't speak of extermination, nor generalize on terror regime; forced labor is unquestionably ruled out, while the dehumanization process is undeniably present.

The physical elimination of the migrants is not at all a goal pursued by CIE. It is perplexing that we should clarify such a thing, and yet we have to, since the word "lager" immediately refers to the extermination. Indeed, what surprises the most is that one could use a word of this magnitude without anyone feeling compelled to be scandalized or give explanations. Even just as a "provocation" or "warning" (Cartosio, 2002), this term refers to the material extermination.

Yet talking about physical elimination of the migrant with reference to the CIE, it is not totally incorrect. Once set aside the brutality of extermination, we can introduce the softer and more fitting one of the cancellation of the body of the migrant. The main objective of these institutions seems to be the elimination through the removal. To achieve this goal, the law uses the forced accompaniment at the border, so that the immigrant is eliminated from the country. However, the cancellation of people begins well before their expulsion: with the entrance in the camps.

The CIE, by its very nature, is a secret place, not visible, where almost no one can enter and unknown to the majority of people. In the moment you enter it, you disappear for the rest of society. The duality between the reality of the inside and the outside has a strong impact especially in Turin, where the detention center is placed in a residential area, with high buildings all around, the children lining the wall with barbed wire to go to school, bars with outdoor dining in front of the wall.

This is the beginning of the process of dehumanization, that is implemented with the emptying of the time. In CIE you can't work, you do absolutely nothing:

I did walk a lot in the center, I went all around the center, I walked every day, I saw the girls resting on the other side... and more...I watched television, talked to people, nothing. Nothing. Nothing. Anyone who wants can play football, there was the ball. Nothing. We talked on the phone with family, friends (Sofiane).

They give you something to eat ...you eat, you wait. Nobody here is serving a sentence: everybody is waiting for his time to go. You eat, sleep, till your day (Afid).

Time is a long wait. You count the days: one, two, three, the hardest and then fifty-two, fifty-three, fifty-four, the longest. And in that time you play football, you call, you wait, you smoke, you eat, you wait, you sleep, you talk, you wait.

Hannah Arendt (2004: 608-609) spoke of "economic uselessness of horrors", referring to the Nazi and Soviet concentration camps. Even the immigration detention centers are economically worthless, not to say they are harmful, as it has been pointed out by many studies on the costs that the state must incur to maintain them (Artoni, 2006; Naletto, 2010). And the detainees, from the moment they join this category of immigrants, also become unnecessary, indeed superfluous from any point of view, except by the instrumental political one.

3. Killing the personality

Let's go deeper analyzing the process of dehumanization that is a key point to understand what CIE are. I'm going to follow step by step the analysis that Hannah Arendt (2004: 535-629) makes of the personality's destruction of people interned in Nazi concentration camps.

The killing of the legal personality of the detainees or internees passes through the destruction of their civil rights. For people illegally present on the territory a parallel right is about to be defined (Caputo, 2007): it puts them on a level below than citizens. Thereby, the word "rights" within the CIE is not used in relation to personal freedoms mentioned in the Italian Constitution, but for accessibility to material goods, such as cigarettes, the phone card and the mobile phone:

In every area there is still a public phone booth. They can call, they may even use their own cell phone. Ten cigarettes per day are distributed (Social Worker of the Prefecture).

I quote Federica Sossi (2002: 122), in particular the report of the visit to Turin's CIE:

"...all the good things they are entitled to, and the list is long, the supervisor is keen to let us know it, smoking right, they are entitled to ten cigarettes per day, distributed free of charge, so much that his office seems to be a tobacco shop, he says, a phone card every ten days, the sachets of Nescafe"

It begins like this: you come in and you are given the list of your rights and some new clothes, they make you take a shower and a medical examination. As stated in the Communication to the Stranger, they have many rights: thirteen and the ones to cigarettes and Nescafe are not even mentioned. Duties, however, are only seven, shame the first is not to move away from the center, that is, to temporarily give up their freedom!

Hannah Arendt writes that criminals are the aristocracy of the camps: "They know at least the reason why they are in a concentration camp and then have preserved a remnant of their legal status" (2004: 614).

Into immigration detention centers, who recognizes himself guilty for having committed a crime feels relief, justifies somehow his permanence and preserves a part of his legal personality.

I quote the words of a detainee that refers to a fellow inmate who was stopped while cleaning windows at a traffic light:

Here it is something absurd, for no reason, no offense. At least I made my mistake, I pay for my mistake. Dealing. He nothing! No offense. Window cleaner. Life is hard! He works for a living, he must eat (Brahim).

Another category of people locked up in the camps was the one of innocents: "People who had not done anything that, in their consciousness or in their persecutors' one, had a rational connection with their arrest" (Arendt, 2004: 615)

We cannot even say about the "mass of Jews" (Arendt, 2004: 615) imprisoned in Nazi concentration camps that there wasn't a connection with their arrest. The prison was not, however, in relation to their behavior, as to their existence.

For illegal immigrants it is the same thing. We call them "illegal" and from that point on they are guilty. Not so much for what they did, but for what they are. On the other hand, if their guilt was to reside without valid papers on the territory of the State, it would not be "boats of illegal immigrants" those in the offing in Italian Mediterranean Sea, or in international waters: these people have not arrived yet and are not irregular, because, as far as we know, they might have valid documents.

Nazi concentration camps killed the moral personality of the inmates by preventing them from martyrdom, by depriving of sense their opposition and even their death, by

forcing some of them to cooperate to extermination (Arendt, 2004: 620). Let's put aside the killings, which as we have said, are beyond the reality in question. Let's consider, instead, the revolt.

There have been episodes of revolt in all Italian centers: cases of self-harm, vandalism, strikes, mass escapes, suicides. These demonstrations of dissent are not nipped in the bud, as it was in the Nazi camps. In CIE there may be rebellions, you can "*make some mess*", "*there's a fine mess almost every day*" (Hamid).

We took the tubes of the bed, maybe... one plays football there and another breaks down the tubes, and so the greatest thing, the maximum that we did, that there was a sleepless night here in Turin, I don't know what occasion, there was an Egyptian brother who couldn't take anymore, as well, and then he had the strength. There was the car of the police in this corner, he rose above the car of the police, he had risen above, but they stopped and beat him, they brought him in front of us, then here... I tell you, a revolution, really. I remember that ... voices, tubes, everything was broken, everything was broken, stones, everything was broken (Sofiane).

Because he said, I'm a minor, I cannot stay here. He screwed up, he broke the television, screaming, things like these and finally they sent him out (Abdel).

The only aspect of detention that can be attributed to the killing of moral personality of individuals is the paucity of information that comes out of camps. That is to say, compared to the frequency with which vandalism acts occur, the information accessible to the public are very few.

As an example: Federica Sossi, author of *Autobiografie negate* (2002: 122-123), entered the immigration detention center of Turin in September 2001. She says that the procedure for her entry has been slowed down by the chaos caused by the riots of some detainees. She writes about her telephone conversation with the supervisor:

"...I had to take into account that there had been riots, I wanted to, but I knew nothing, there was no news in the newspapers that I heard of, I say, thank goodness! he says, why fortunately? Because we don't want to incite revolt more and more".

It looks like it is not possible to prevent people to rebel, but a nonsense of their expressions of discomfort can be made by hushing them up.

I have found, however, a spirit of solidarity, at least apparent, among the detainees. In the Nazi concentration camps this feeling was nipped in the bud (Arendt, 2004: 616) and it is a limited phenomenon even among interned people in psychiatric hospitals (Goffman, 2003).

In the center, everyone not only told me his story, but they all agreed on which were the people who had suffered the worst injustice. The group let these individuals speak, such as Mustafa, who "*has no one in Morocco*," or told their story, if they were not among my direct interlocutors, as for the guy who "*was just a window cleaner*", for another too young to be there, or for a Moroccan who perhaps suffered from mental disorders and a Nigerian man who would have to leave his pregnant wife and young children in Turin at the time of the expulsion. In the words of the detainees:

This one fifteen! A little minor boy (Afid).

He should be in youth center, not here! (Brahim).

That Arab is not well, I think he has mental problems. This place is not for people like him. He should be in a hospital, where a psychiatrist can take care of him (Thierry).

You see that man sitting over there on the other side? [...] His wife is five months and three weeks pregnant. She has two children, one of three years, the other one year. All three were out here yesterday, from six in the morning, at noon. They wept because they wanted to bring their dad at home (Amorige).

The distinction among individuals was abolished in Nazi concentration camps. The individual identity was completely erased. This procedure started from the entry ritual, which involved the expropriation of the private goods in possession at the time, the shaving, the attribution of a standard uniform, a number and a distinctive sign to each one. The process was completed by the subhuman conditions of everyday life: the overcrowded shacks, the humiliation resulting from not having spaces in the background etc.(Arendt, 2004: 621).

The incoming "guest" of the CIE is informed of the conditions of his detention, he delivers value goods that are stored in special safes, takes a shower, wears clothes that have been supplied and declares his present and past state of health in a compulsory medical examination. After that he is assigned to an area, to a bed and there he spends his days waiting.

The individual can keep his clothes and his cell phone, unless it is equipped with a camera, in this case, as I was told by two respondents, he must destroy the lens. He can also receive personal items from the outside (which of course will be selected), when there is a relative or friend who can make the delivery.

At present, purchases of goods can be made inside the Brunelleschi CIE. A cooperative enters the center twice or three times a week, with a list of goods people can buy, by using the voucher they are given. They have at their disposal 20/21 € per week (Iyengar et al, 2012).

In 2007, otherwise, if you had money, you could buy some things to eat, but not anything. For example, tomatoes were forbidden. As the Colonel of the Red Cross, supervisor of the center, told me, if everyone would order a kilo of tomatoes, those who go on grocery shopping would be overloaded!

Nevertheless, at the time of my visit it had been granted to the girls from the East to buy the tomatoes, as it is evidenced by their words:

These tomatoes, if I eat many tomatoes, everyone eats tomatoes and Red Cross for example says that you can't, you can't buy vegetables. You can buy for example cola, cigarettes, this. And tomatoes you can't. Let's talk to Colonel, he's really very good person, because he does everything you need (Olga).

Here is a point to be emphasized: the demand for "favors" which can go far to the petition and their granting by the staff. Talking of "favors", to tell the truth, is reducing: it may fit in the specific case where the staff agrees to buy a "forbidden" good, but not when the requests concern the medicines, clothes to replace the outworn ones or talks with family .

Yet I have heard the cries of the detainees who were trying to grab the attention of staff and the demands repeated *ad nauseum*, to get those few things they are entitled to. Hamid said that after having begged the Red Cross to recharge the battery of his cell phone, he decided to rebel and set fire to his trailer:

I called them for my phone, I left it to them to recharge the battery and I have not found the charger that charges and I want to call my parents and then I'm calling, no one answers me. So no one wants to answer ... and I took the lighter.

I personally heard the "please" and "thank you" shouted through the bars, again and again, like a leitmotif in the background. And the answers, when there were some, sounded like "later", "wait!", "what do you want again?", "Keep calm, we have stuff to do".

People are not completely denuded of their property and they have the ability to make purchases, which means choosing what to eat. It is true that many detainees have no money and that many do not even have relatives who can bring them any object, but they could maintain their identity for what concerns the right to own property and to decide what to eat.

What happens, however, to the identity, if you have to lower yourself to the petition, even in order to simply take advantage of your rights? An humiliated identity remains and it is in these conditions that the revolt often fires up.

The inmates into Nazi camps were divided into categories, they were assigned a distinctive marking in order to prevent a spirit of solidarity to arise among them (Arendt, 2004: 616). Some categories could be identified in CIE, too: first of all, we can distinguish, using the terms of Arendt, between "criminals" and "innocent", contextualizing between those who have committed a crime (coming from prison, then) and who have not. Instead no distinctions, of any kind apart from the sexual, are made. This involves the forced coexistence among people very different from each other, for nationality, knowledge of the Italian language, mother tongue, age, origin, previous experience:

It's just that they've sent someone, someone comes along, there is always change. Sometimes it was chock-full, sometimes normal, then someone came and suddenly went away, you know, those who have some reason strong strong strong, some strong story, I can't even remember all the ones I've met there. Sometimes the center is full, sometimes is empty (Sofiane).

The episodes of racism among detainees in this context are frequent and there are reported cases of violence, as well⁷. The promiscuity of interpersonal relationships that the individual is forced to entertain inside CIE, combined with spatial constraints to which he must adapt, greatly affect the possibility of maintenance and expression of his identity.

Another aspect not to be underestimated is the reduction of the personal names of individuals to common names of person (often referred to nationality) or to an indiscriminately attributed handful of names. Within the camp of Turin, I heard “guests” being called by the staff with names that were not theirs or epithets referring to their physical appearance or their origin. And I have found their discomfort to the fact of not having a name. They explained that the Red Cross often confuses the therapies and the shopping delivery. In the following statement, Mustafa, a thirty-six years old Moroccan man, refers precisely to these repeated mistakes: "*He can't even write! Damn! I come from the third world, I studied three languages, absurd!* "

It is comprehensible that people can be confused, since their high number in a short period of time, but which is the effect of a similar on the individual?

The fact that detainees spontaneously match the detention center with a zoo and their condition to some animal's ones, such as dogs, lions and monkeys, is an effect of the oppression of identity I have described. I do not have my name or my own space anymore, I have to beg for my requests to be granted, I am cramped for room in a cage with dozens of other people, *ergo* I am no longer a person but a dog, a lion, a monkey.

4. CIE as total institutions

Goffman (2003: 29) defines total institutions such as:

“places of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life”.

If we want to apply this definition to CIE, we should correct it in the passage that refers to the work: this certainly is a place of residence, but not a place of work. While the

⁷ Evidences of some episodes of sexual assaults, brawls and abuses are reported by many sources. Among the most important ones, I mention the documentary of Mencherini S. (2003).

duration of internment, that now can last up to 18 months, can easily be considered "an appreciable period of time."

With regard to the characteristics of total institutions set out by Goffman (2003: 34), the theory sticks to the reality of camps. Starting from their structural characteristics, which underline the separation from the outside world, "behind closed doors, high walls, barbed wire".

In CIE there is a staff that is socially integrated with the outside world and whose work has essentially to do with the people. The inmates are "object and product" (Goffman, 2003: 102) of this work that does not pursue, however, the goal of their rehabilitation, as it is in a psychiatric hospital. The detention center may in fact be traced back to the third type of total institutions, those that "are organized to protect the community against perceived intentional dangers" (Goffman, 2003: 34).

The Goffman's concept of "civil death" can be efficaciously used to describe the condition of the "guests" of the camps. It is similar to the killing of the legal personality which we have analyzed above, using the tools of Hannah Arendt (2004: 471-534). In this regard, Goffman tells us of a loss of roles, which can last even outside the institution. According to what was observed among former detainees, I cannot say that the same thing happens to CIE and this is due to the comparatively short period of time people spend inside them.

As a matter of fact, the data collected during my field research highlight that the average period of detention was 13 days between 1999 and 2007, while the maximum time provided by law was 30 days from 1998 to 2001 and 60 days from 2001 to 2009. During 2011, the average period of detention in Turin's CIE was 35 days, while the maximum provided by law was (and still is) 540 days. Turin's Prefettura, moreover, states that in the same year nobody was detained more than 280 days (Iyengar et al, 2012). The following table recapitulates the acquainted data:

Year	April- Dece mber 1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Average time of detention, in days	14	18	21,8	5	8,7
Maximum time by law, in days	30	30	30	60	60
Year	2004	2005	2006	Janua ry- Septe mber 2007	2011
Average time of detention, in days	10,7	10,9	14,9	17,6	35
Maximum time by law, in days	60	60	60	60	540

The foreigner can regain the range of his roles back in the outside world, but he is provisionally deprived of them during the internment. The ritual of admission coincides with an act of dispossession of the self to the individual. As mentioned above, this passes through the delivery of the belongings, the shower, the recording of personal information, the medical examination, the distribution of clothing and linen and the assignment to a bed.

The desecration of the self of each person continues during his stay through the obligation of deference towards the staff, the loss of the personal name, the invasion of the spaces and the distortion of the daily times.

The “guest” of Turin’s CIE had an average space of 4.5 square meters, of which 2.7 walkable, until 2008, when the masonry structure was built (Various author, 2004: 94-95). Up to now there are no precise data of the average space per person in the new rooms, but the bed is still the only thing people can consider personal: all the rest is shared with other inmates, that change abruptly. The individual is forced to have social relations with his comrades, he is never alone and doesn’t have any backstage available.

One wants to sleep, one wants the television on, one wants that channel, one... one wants to smoke at four ‘o clock in the morning and I sleep, I can’t sleep with the smell of cigarette and clothes all dirty! (Mustafa).

The detainee is subject to searches, if the police deems it appropriate. He is always visible and seen through the cameras. In addition, during the night the square is floodlit, making it difficult to sleep.

At night the lights are on. There are lights, big neon lights, stadium-type floodlights and so it is all lit up. I think, yes, I remember that in fact I had thought: what a drag sleeping with the light! But I think they hold them for safety reasons. So it's not that rest... (Policeman).

The "personal contamination" concerns, as mentioned, the proximity with people of other nationalities and other age, but one can feel contaminated also because he’s forced to eat "what they give you", which is considered by all the witnesses "lousy", and to use “dirty” clothes and bed linen.

I'm starving for sure. Then they give you a blanket, let it be, just disgusting! I'll show you! You definitely get scabies. It's really scary stuff here (Brahim).

The person is forced to observe a timetable for any daily activity: there is a time for meals, a time for the talks, a time for the distribution of medicines. The individual does not have the autonomy to decide for any of the actions that he may carry out, except for access to toilet facilities, if they are not busy. To take advantage of your right to smoke,

for example, you must have a lighter and you have to ask for it. Whereas for the right to call, you have to ask the Red Cross for the charger.

For example I want to smoke a cigarette at five in the morning, I have to call: oh! Oh! Red Cross! For the cigarette! (Mustafa).

I witnessed the attempt of the girls to behave "as if" they were living in "normal" conditions. They spent a lot of time putting make-up on and then they joked with the Director about where they would go that evening for a pizza and a movie, or dancing. Yet to women like them, in past years, a course of personal hygiene was proposed, which, to the astonishment of the staff, had not been successful. The unusual choice of teaching "how to clean yourself"⁸ to girls who spend their time making up, is part of a vision of the detainee as "childish" (Quarta, 2006) or "not fully adult" (Goffman, 2003: 142) from the staff point of view.

The concept of the "childish detainee" passes through the emptying of his time. Living on cement ground of a few square meters, that offers no diversion and in the absence of objects with which to entertain, if not a magazine every now and then, the inmates occupy most of their time with the game. The Red Cross provides a soccer ball, on request and football has become the sport of Brunelleschi CIE.

We always play hide-and-peek, we dance because we have the music. Tonight we're going to play the ball as always, football. When I get out from here, like a Shevchenko! (Olga).

Women can dance, because they have a radio with cd of Moldova music, while men can't. Anyhow men can play cards: *"I wake up, play cards, rummy. If there is no rummy, I play football* (Hamid). Since November 2011 a new activity has started inside the camp of Turin: the "special agility" dog training workshops. This is a distraction, the only organized one, and an opportunity for the "guests" to learn some Italian (Assandri, 2011). Weird initiative this one, considered that Italian is taught to people whose stay in Italy is forbidden! Moreover, in a place where people are kept into cages, the attention given to dogs can easily be perceived as offensive.

⁸ These are the exact words used by the supervisor of the center.

The staff has strengthened its idea that detainees not only don't have any interest, but don't even respond when spurred on to do something. By introducing me to the life of the camp, in fact, the director told me that few people require newspapers or magazines, although they may receive them in their own language. Similarly, he mentioned the level of ignorance of the detainees (many would be illiterate), stating that "*the smart ones live the life on their own.*"

As he was speaking, we watched together the cages and his speech was continually interrupted by the elusive answers to requests shouted from behind the bars, "Colonel!, Colonel!, I asked ...!, When will you bring ...?, I need to ...". He said, "Later!, Wait, we have much to do!, I said: in a moment!" He maybe noticed I was perplexed by the lack of functionality of this method of collecting applications, and said, smiling: "*They behave like children: they want to catch my attention because they want me to give heed to them.*"

5. Final considerations

A self of the immigrant emerges from the interviews: it describes itself as "illegal" and clarifies itself this way its administrative detention. The fact that they identify themselves with a category and match it with the punishment they are serving is not enough to accept it as legitimately imposed by the Italian Government. The common perception is rather to be victims of injustice: "*the law is equal for everyone, but whenever!?*"⁹, and to live in a State where the legality is extremely flexible, which is why you have to learn and put into practice a migratory *savoir faire* (Palidda, 1999), that allows you to keep afloat in the "*Land of the traffic*"¹⁰. This is the comment of the lawyer interviewed in reference to certain procedures of expulsion on the borderline of legality, reserved to certain of his customers:

What image is given to foreigners about the Italian Government? That is, they say so often: foreigners need to adapt to our rules. We try to understand what the rules are, in the sense that if we should learn from the Italian State, you can go whistle for it! From an educational point of view it's a disaster!

⁹ From Brahim's interview.

¹⁰ From the interview with Hassan, Moroccan, four times in Brunelleschi CIE.

For immigration detention centers the "way" to reach a goal seems to be unimportant. And the goal here is the removal of dangerous individuals. The stranger is showed up in Italy as an enemy, an indistinguishable collective actor that is guilty of serious crimes and CIE are the link between the detection of social threat and its punishment.

These institutions in Italy, as in other European countries, were born in the wake of the immigration alert, which has been the shelter for the safety-hysteria that has overwhelmed the West after the events of 11 September 2001. From the state of emergency of the first few months, we have quickly slipped down to a permanent state of exception, in which everything is permitted, if the goal is to defend against the enemy. That's why in CIE any causative link is easily lost, so that most of the detainees has no idea what the place he was taken is, nor why they conducted him there. The centers meet the needs of an hypertrophic present that has no antecedent causes, nor should give explanations (Pitch, 2006).

On a political level, the existence of CIE is the only thing that matters, because it is the answer to the immigration emergency, a response aimed to reassure the citizenry. What's behind it, that is to say how CIE work, whether or not they respect human rights, whether or not they have some results in the fight against illegal immigration, it is not known, nor asked.

The press over the years has given little attention to the issue, it has exceptionally mentioned CIE, with specific reference to the island of Lampedusa and to boats arriving on Italian shores. The widespread trend among the media of not analyzing the issue has always contributed to the maintenance of an air of denial and confusion that prevents the public to get an idea and to issue a personal judgment.

Since 1998, two influential NGOs have extensively dealt with CIE: Amnesty International and Doctors Without Borders. From their investigations, detailed reports on the living conditions in the centers have been published. Regarding Turin, for example, the request to close the structure in the immediate was thus reasoned:

“The immigration detention center Brunelleschi of Turin has many critical issues. The first concerns the structure. [...] We have detected an excessive interference of law enforcement within the Centre. [...] it has revealed clear gaps in the legal counseling, mediation and cultural interpretation. The acts of vandalism are recurrent practice [...]” (Medici senza Frontiere, 2004).

Their complaints were added to that of the De Mistura Commission, appointed in 2006 by the Minister of the Interior Amato, in order to supervise the situation of the Italian centers. This group of experts above all suspicion deemed it essential to "go beyond" these institutions.

At present there hasn't been any change in the direction of the "resolution". Rather the crime of illegal immigration has been introduced and the maximum terms of detention have been extended to 18 months.

These measures have been taken as a solution to the "security emergency" that is (apparently) gripping Italy. In this way we insist in a direction that has been proven to be more damaging than useful to the State itself, not only in terms of costs and effectiveness, but also in the perspective of building an intercultural society.

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