

TRANSITORY DWELLING

Europe experienced as one big city. The everyday practices of forced migrants enacting different “homes”

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Abstract

This paper aims to highlight the tension between the mobilities of forced migrants in Europe and the attempts to control and manage their mobilities worked out by the European, national and local institutions. In order to grasp this tension, the paper intersects the literature of *im-mobility* (Cresswell 2006, Tarrus 2010, Glick Shiller 2013) with that of Border Studies (Mezzadra 2013; Andrijasevic, Walters 2010; De Genova 2013), highlighting the creation of “border places” within the national territories and urban spaces as a consequence of this tension.

This work is based on the empirical case-study of a group of forced migrants that have crossed several territorial and juridical borders in Europe to follow their desire to move free. These people arrived in Italy in 2011 because of the Libyan war, and have obtained a humanitarian protection. Because of the difficult living condition – homeless and unemployed – most of them decided to leave Italy heading to North Europe although they were not allowed because of the Schengen and Dublin agreement. Some of them have moved to Germany, and in the city of Berlin they gave rise to a protest to claim their rights to freely work and move through Europe. They occupied a square – Oranienplatz – for almost two years. They are living “illegal” in Berlin and move back and forth between Germany and Italy in order to renew their documents, living several months in both countries. The research fields are set in the city of Milan and Berlin, and the methodology used is multi-sited ethnography.

The trajectories of these forced migrants in Europe draw different circuits beyond, across and within the national-states. This allows to consider the cities as knots of a network instead as the end-point of the migration paths. Also the way in which the cities are experienced by the forced migrants shows this new role. Furthermore, their everyday practices in the urban space underline how the public space such as park or train stations can change its nature through the meaning that the subjects give to them. The concept of place change and it is transformed by these mobilities and by the re-appropriation practices of forced migrants that create spaces and times free from the power dynamics of migration control. These became *transit places* with an ambivalent nature: on one side are experienced as “home”, i.e. a place to sleep and feel safe, as *haven*; on the other side are experienced as border place, i.e. spaces where they experience a time suspension and uncertainty. Moreover, the concept of “home” change because of the high mobility of these forced migrants that are living in Berlin, but their bureaucratic procedures occur in Italy, where they also have access to several education courses, and where they can easier find a job in the agricultural sector or in the informal labor market. The whole European territory is experienced and enacted as one place, where each place absolves a different function, and where the forced migrants build different “homes”.

Keywords: (Im)mobility Regime, forced migrants, public spaces, borders, everyday practices

1. Literature references

I relate to the literature on *border studies*, *mobility studies* and to that on critical *citizenship studies*. The union of these currents of social and political sciences supports the theoretical purpose of my work, i.e. to highlight the tensions between the structure and agency dimensions through a relational perspective, looking at the reality as constructed by social processes that involve power relations. I grasp this theoretical issue through the theme of migration phenomena and the attempts to control and manage it, employed by governments in Europe. Specifically, I here focus on the relations – and tensions – between migration control and management mechanisms and the migrants' mobilities, i.e. the attempt of forced migrants to move and

live free overcoming the European internal and external borders.

I refer to the *border studies* that address the centrality of power dimension through the analytical category of *border*, and that analysed the mechanisms of migration control through the Foucauldian category of *governmentality* (Andrijasevic, Walters 2010; Mezzadra & Neilson 2013; De Genova 2013). Moreover, I refer to the theories of *European border regime* that shed light on the complexity of the system of management and control implemented by the European governments and the international agencies in order to filter, rank and organise the migrants' mobilities (Hess & Kasparek 2010; Karakayali & Tsianos 2010). According to these theories, Europe is become a “*borderland*” where the government of mobilities – and above all migrants mobilities – is developed through the strengthening of external borders and a proliferation of internal borders, i.e. borders within a national territory. Control devices such as deportation prisons, reception camps, continuous police controls through racial profiling within cities, the reduction of rights' access through temporary legal statuses, and the restriction of mobility, are some examples of these internal borders employed in order to manage and control the migration phenomenon. Other scholars speak about the creation of a *global mobility regime* (Shamir 2005) that maintains a high social inequality among different categories of people, since it is predicated on the classification of people and groups according to principles of perceived threats and risks – also as a consequence of new phenomena such as the war on terrorism after the 11th September 2001. These scholars address the dynamics between mobility and stasis within unequal fields of globe-spanning power, that allow to speak of a global *im-mobility regime* (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013) that encourage various kinds of mobility – such as business travellers, tourists, students – and discourage others, such as illegal migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers.

Despite these control mechanisms of mobilities, “legal” and “illegal” migrants live and move within European territory, overcoming several juridical and territorial borders in order to follow their desire to freely move and autonomously build their lives. Therefore, European border regime is considered as a space of negotiating practices, where the dialectical struggle between migrants' subjective instance of freely moving across borders and the control of human mobility emerge (Karakajali & Rigo 2010). The perspective of *mobility studies* allows me to shed light on the agency dimension of my research protagonists: a group of forced migrants who have obtained a humanitarian protection in Italy and try to build their future moving across Europe, although they are not allowed. According to authors of «mobility turn» (Hannam, Sheller, Urry 2006) the issue of *mobilities* is not any longer just a question of getting to a destination, but rather seen as performance that has its own effect on social life. Mobility, indeed, is a socially produced motion, it is practiced, experienced, and embodied in power relations. Moving people and objects are agents in the production of time and space, and mobility itself is part of the process of the social production of time and space. It is not just a function of time and space, but an *agent* in their production (Cresswell 2010). This perspective allows to understand migration as the result of multiple factors and even contradictory, individual decisions, creativity, personal dreams and expectations, entailing freedom as well as social pressure or sheer necessity of survival (Friese, Mezzadra 2010). Furthermore, the perspective of transnational mobility helps to also overcome the understanding of society as “container” and migration as a one-way movement, introducing concepts such as *social spaces* and *networks*, that shed light on how space and place are socially

constructed and how they are interconnected through the movement of people (Schiller, Basch, Szanton Blanc 1992). Hence, also the so-called *methodological nationalism* is overcome, i.e. the assumption that the nation/state/society is the natural social and political form of the modern world, and sedentariness the normal social way of life (Wimmer, Schiller 2002). According to the methodological nationalism and the “container model” of society, migrants were seen as problematic object of integration policies, since they destroy the “natural” relation between people, sovereign and citizenry. Particularly, all those subjects who are categorized as forced migrants (Castels 2003) – stateless people, refugees, asylum-seekers – emerge as the main *threat* and *dysfunction* for the national-state order (Malkki 1995). In the theoretical and political debate on “refugees”, those migrants forced to move have been considered as *victim*, as people with a lack of agency in comparison with the “illegal” migrants who are considered people with a strong agency (Scheel & Squire 2014). By contrast, I here consider forced migrants as *social actors* that move and act within several social constraints, learning resistance practices in order to overcome the constraints. Therefore, I refer also to those critical *citizenship studies*, which look at citizenship as a practice from below that can be well grasped at the urban level. Accordingly, the urban realm is a site of negotiating, shaping and interconnecting local practices of border control and *urban citizenship* (Lebhun 2013) or *act of citizenship* (Isin & Nielsen 2008). The ambivalence nature of citizenship as a legal tool through which the control of migrants' mobility is implemented, and as a social practice from below, allows to better understand the power dynamics deployed in my empirical case-study. However, the empirical focus of this paper is not predominantly on political struggles of non-citizens, but rather on the wider issue of social practices of everyday life worked out by forced migrants in order to overcome several internal borders in Europe and within European cities.

Methodology

This work is based on the empirical case-study of a specific group of forced migrants that have crossed several territorial and juridical borders in Europe to follow their desire to move and live free. The protagonists of my research arrived in Italy in 2011 because of the Libyan war, and have obtained a humanitarian protection in Italy. Because of the difficult living condition – homeless and unemployed – most of them decided to leave Italy heading to North Europe although they were not allowed because of Schengen and Dublin agreements. Some of them have moved to Germany, and in the city of Berlin they gave rise to a protest to claim their rights to freely work and move through Europe. They occupied a square – Oranienplatz – where they lived inside tents for almost two years. Now they are living “illegal” in Berlin and move back and forth between Germany and Italy in order to renew their documents, living several months in both countries.

The research fields are set in the city of Milan and Berlin, but not for comparative purpose. Indeed, the methodology applied is the multi-sited ethnography (Marcus 1995) which allows to consider these cities as two case-studies through which the wider issue of my research is grasped. By applying the conventional comparative approach the risk is to consider this issue in a monolithic and static way. Instead, research in this field has demonstrated that multi-sited ethnography can be a useful methodology, in order to understand the issue of European border regime as a space of negotiating practices (Tsianos, Hess, Karakajali 2009). In

order to grasp the trajectories of forced migrants that criss-cross European borders, and the interconnection of their agency and the mechanism of control and management, I worked in both cities with two associations of volunteers (*Naga* in Milan and *KuB* in Berlin), which deal with legal, social and psychological supports for migrants, asylum seekers and refugees. The work with the associations gave me access to the research field, in particular the everyday work allowed me to build a close relationship of trust and confidence with the protagonists of the research. As methodological tools, I use in-depth interviews, participant observation, and shadowing – following the protagonists of my research in their everyday life. A reflexive and critic approach (Melucci 1998) to the research process has been always applied, looking at forced migrants as active subjects of the research process, rather than research objects; for this reason I prefer to use the term *protagonists* of the research.

2. Italy: no country for mobile-migrant man

During the year 2011, in total 55.000 forced migrants arrived at the Italian coasts because of the so-called “Arabic Spring” and the subsequent Libyan war. The protagonists of my research escaped from the Libyan war. Almost none of the protagonists has a Libyan citizenship, since their origin countries are in the sub-sahara region. Indeed, among the 30.000 forced migrants escaping from Libyan war, the majority were people working in Libya as “guest-workers” for several years, who have not planned to come to Europe.

As a response the Italian government declared the *state of emergency*, and consequently faced this phenomenon through measures and devices characterized by an overlapping of humanitarian and securitarian guide-lines. This overlapping entailed to decrease the quality of the services, from one side, and to strengthen the link between the police logic and the humanitarian logic (Marchetti 2011). Indeed, this new emergency program called *Emergenza Nord Africa*¹, developed a new reception system that worked parallel to the official one, the SPRAR². The building of big asylum-seekers camps in isolated zones – above all in South Italy – and the use of old or less frequented hotels as reception centers reveal the nature of this reception system that progressively blurred the distinction between social-humanitarian aid and security-control mechanisms. The management of hotels as reception centers was given to NGOs or social cooperatives through an unclear procedure of allocation. Moreover, the majority of the staff within these hotels-reception-centers was not well – or not at all – expert in the juridical issue of asylum. The treatment of the phenomenon as an *emergence* was however the crucial problem, which directly implies a time limitation of the reception program. The Italian government, in fact, did not cover a “second assistance program” that accompanied the “integration” path of those forced migrant who have obtained a residence permit. When in December 2012 the Italian government gave a humanitarian protection to all forced migrants that fled the Libya war, it declared the end of the *state of emergency* and, consequently, all the hotels-reception-centers closed and evicted the forced migrants living inside. Thus, the majority of the people with humanitarian protection found themselves on the street without any home and work, and without knowing where they

1 Translation: North Africa Emergency

2 “Sistema di Protezione per Richiedenti Asilo e Rifugiati” that literally means System of Protection for Asylum Seekers and Refugees.

should go. Indeed, the reception centers of the program *Emergenza Nord Africa* received from the Italian government 500 Euros for each person they hosted, and they had to give it to each forced migrants as “severance” money. The local authorities³ that give this money suggested informally to all the forced migrants with humanitarian protection to go abroad, because in Italy there was the economical crisis.

The local authorities omitted to inform forced migrants about the rights and the restriction of their humanitarian protection. This document is the so called “reduced legal status” (Cuttitta 2007; Campesi 2011), i.e. a temporary protection that is time-limited and that denies the access to some rights. The document needs to be renewed once a year and is anchored to the Italian national jurisdiction, implying it not being under the international protection that refers to the Geneva Convention. According to Schengen Agreement and Dublin III Regulation, the beneficiaries of a temporary protection obtained in a EU member state have to live and work only in this country, which is the first one where they arrived – and where their fingerprints were taken – and not the country the migrant subjects chose. Temporary protection allows to freely move in Europe for just three months and as “tourists”, it denies the possibility to work and settle abroad.

Thus, all those forced migrants that left Italy heading North Europe, found themselves again in the condition of “illegal” migrants in other European countries, but without the possibility to apply for a document there⁴.

Fragmented lives in the transit-city of Milan

Some of the migrant subjects decided immediately after being expelled from the reception centers to leave Italy heading to the North European countries, but others remained in the Italian territory looking for a job and a place to sleep. I will report in this paragraph on the experience of the migrant subjects, who remained in Italy and specifically lived in the city of Milan.

Milan has always been one of the top destinations for the migrants who arrived in Italy, because it constitutes the only Italian urban metropolis – thus it is an economic hub and center of attraction for labour – and also because it has a strategic geographical position, being the crossroad to North Europe. During and after the *Emergenza Nord Africa* program, the function of Milan as a place of haven, transit and re-departure has increased.

Since in Italy there was at this time – in the beginning of 2013 – the economic crisis, it has been difficult for the migrant subjects to find a work and hence a place to sleep. Some of them found precarious employments within the agricultural sector, they started to follow the seasonal rhythm moving from one place to the next looking for harvest work. The follow experience of Kwame:

«I have done the camp in *Gavirate*. I was working at the restaurant as dish washer, and it was black job. In Italy you can find just black job [he smiles]. Then, once they close the camp and they throw us away, I went to *Foggia* to work in the countryside. I had a lot of friends there, so I called them and they told me that I could go there and find some work. I stayed in *Foggia* six months. I harvested grapes, peppers and tomatoes. I have done a lot of work there. Once the work was finished in *Foggia*, I moved to *Rosarno*: harvest of oranges. You know how it is working! When you arrive in Italy, after

3 Sometimes were the staff of the reception centers, and sometimes the police officers of *Questura*, the immigration office that deal with migrant issue.

4 According to the European Asylum and Migration jurisdiction each forced migrant has just “one chance” to apply for protection in only one EU member states.

some time you know exactly where you can find a job: tomatoes in *Foggia*, apples in *Torino*, grapes here, and peppers there. But the problem is that the life condition were very bad, they pay you less money and you sleep in a self-fabricated barrack. You cannot live in this condition too much. So I decided to move again. My document had to be renewed, so I decided to move to North Italy again. And I arrived in *Milano*, where I am still looking for a job». (Interview with Kwan in Milan, April 2014)

In the seasons without harvest work, the forced migrants chose big cities as haven places, such as Milan, Rome, Naples or Turin, where it is easier to find a temporary place to sleep and a job. Once the next agricultural season would start, they would leave the big city again and move to the regions of agricultural work. Thus, the big cities were lived in this time as temporary transit places, more than as destination and stability places. Here it was possible to find a place to sleep in the homeless dormitories, occupied or abandoned houses. And once they found a place to sleep, it was easier also to handle the bureaucratic practices such as the renewal of the document every year. The high level of mobility characterizes this particular group of forced migrants with humanitarian protection, who keep moving through the whole national territory also several years after their first arrival, looking for a *haven* place to settle. This mobility has the characteristic of circularity, since it does not followed the typical one-way line from south to north. Forced migrants moved within Italy tracing several paths based on their networks, which they have build during their whole migratory path, from the origin country, passing through Libya, until the first European haven places – the reception camps and the Italian cities. As Kwame's experience shows, various information about works, places to sleep, or cities in which the bureaucratic practices are easy to handle circulate through this social connection. The circularity of migrant paths led to the emergence of the so called «territoire circulatoire» (Tarrus 2010), which describes well the socio-spatial nature of the migrant's movements. It is important to highlight the presence of these circular territories, the several mobilities within them and the role of transnational networks that are often underestimated by the dominant sedentary narratives. It allows to reconsider the role of cities as places of connection rather than as arrival or aim points (Schmoll, Semi 2013).

The western societies respond to the new phenomenon of circular movements through the strengthening of the sedentary culture, that proposes a reception system for migrants, which is inadequate to these social changes. The tension between the mobile migrant subjects and the attempts to control and govern them implemented by the European, national and local authorities has direct consequences on the biographies of these subjects.

The city of Milan offers an interesting social field since it highlights the inadequacy of the local government on the territory, which considers the stable permanence as the only way in which the relation between space and society can be expressed (Pezzoni 2013). The temporary dwelling of migrants, asylum seekers and other mobile subjects in Milan highlight the incongruity between the space of the subjects' social practices and the political and administrative space of the local authorities.

The city of Milan organizes the reception of migrants through a network of social services provided by social private enterprises, churches and local authorities: this reception system provides the basic needs for the survival, but does not provide the means to become autonomous subjects; instead it leads to a dependence on this “helpful” system that creates a high level of frustration.

The different services, such as dormitories, Italian classes, kitchen for the poor, public showers, are scattered in the urban space and articulate hence the movements, trajectories and times of migrants within the city, as Nassor's experience shows us:

«I wake up at 7 o'clock in the morning, because I have to leave the dormitory at 8 o'clock. I would like to take a shower, but we have few shower and we are so many people that you need to wake up at 4 o'clock if you want to get in. So I decide to go to the public shower. I take the tram in direction to the public shower. Once there, I have to wait in a queue long time in order to get inside. After the shower is 10:30 am, now I have to eat, also because the kitchen for poor, which is in a church, will closed at 11:30 am. I arrive there and I have to stand in a queue, again. Wait, always wait in order to get inside, in every place, this is our everyday life in Italy. I feel ashamed to eat in that place, I don't like to get food for free. I would like to buy my food and cook by myself. But it is impossible, I don't have a job. After eating ... I have nothing to do. What I can do? Go around, turn, turn, turn, in all the city, just go around; is the only thing that we can do. I look for a job, I leave my curriculum everywhere, but without hope; I'm doing like this since 3 years, but no job. Sometimes I need to rest a bit, because I'm tired and frustrated, so I look for a place in which I can keep quiet. There are different places, such as the train station, or a park, or the mosque, or the bingo. I go in those places to rest, to meet friends with whom we share a lot of information: where it is possible to find a work, a place to sleep, in which cities or countries in Europe we should have to move, in order to get better condition. I cannot wait any more, I have already waste to much time! I have to move away, otherwise I get crazy». (Interview with Nassor in Milan, November 2013)

The fragmentation of the everyday life activities reproduces itself within the urban spaces: the places in which the basic needs such as sleeping, taking a shower, eating, which usually occur in private places like the *home*, are instead scattered in the urban space. The first effect on the subjects lives is the overturning of the public and private dimensions in their everyday lives. The activities that usually happened in the private dimension, instead are experienced and practiced in public situation, and the consequent lack of privacy and intimacy lead to a high level of frustration. Moreover, since the whole day is occupied by activities to cover the basic needs, which implies long routes from a place to another, they struggle to find time and space of autonomy. The city is thus marked by the lines which sign the reference points linked to the functions that these places absolve in the everyday life of migrant subjects. Since they are forced to stay outside the dormitory and since they have no work, the migrants with humanitarian protection spend the days moving around in the city, in public transport and by foot, increasing thus the level of their mobility also within the urban space. This fragmentation doesn't affect just the spacial, but also a temporal dimension. Indeed, the temporariness of their legal status, and the fragmented rhythm of their everyday lives, leads to an experience of time extension that becomes a barrier for the construction of their future. The continuous standing in a queue waiting for get inside, the inactivity because of the absence of job leads to frustration. The biggest frustration is the waste of time, because it is a barrier to their projects, to look to the future.

The space and time fragmentation produced by different structural constraints, such as the social-economic condition in Italy and the reception system, play a crucial role in the construction of these uncertain and fragmented existences.

Producing homes in the public space through everyday life practices

The protagonists of my research experience the city, moving from one dormitory to another – every three months –, living sometime on the street, sleeping on the public benches, in the public parks or in abandoned

houses. Thus, they are living and dwelling the public space, i.e. the first place in which they ran into and the first place that led to orient themselves in the new urban context. At the beginning the use of the public space is due to emergency, it fulfils the necessity of a place to sleep. After some time, a dimension of intimacy emerges that is usually present in the private space as the home; this new dimension gives the possibility to domesticate the city, to shape it to their own imaginary, giving to it new meanings (Brivio 2013). Since the dormitory cannot be experienced as “home”, the migrant subjects spend the most of the time outside in the public space and give a new meaning to the urban space, constructing a relation of intimacy with it.

«After three months I had to leave the dormitory. I didn't have any place to go ... so I slept in the train station, *Stazione Centrale* in *Milano*. There I meet some friends, African people, my brothers! They told me to go with them. They brought me to the abandoned houses in *Corvetto*. [...] I found another dormitory, where I staid other three months. After these, again I was on the street. I went to the public park in *Corvetto*, and at this time there was the *Ramadan*, and I was always in the mosque in that neighbourhood. When I saw this park, close to the mosque, I liked it immediately! There were Italian people, African people, a lot of people with whom I could speak ... it was great! I slept there one week. You see this bench? That was my sleeping room! [he smiles] I was happy there. My bag was still in the abandoned house in *Corvetto*, I could go there, keep my cloths, and than go further to the mosque». (Interview with Dakarai in Milan, January 2014)

The public space adopts a meaning according to the function that it absolves for the person who is dwelling this place, thus a bench can be a “sleeping room”, a public park can be a “home”, or a particular street a place to rest, to “feel at home”.

«Sometimes I need to rest, so I look for a quiet place where I can keep calm, because there is a lot of frustration! There are different place where you can go, but I always choose that park close to the mosque. Here is good for me, because I can do some gymnastic, I can move myself, and this is very important. Further, there is the quiet bench, a very special place for me. I go there when I want to keep quiet, no one goes there, this is “my place”, where I eat and where I rest. Is close to the mosque, a good place for me. So this neighbourhood where there is the mosque let me feel good. And this bench [he smiles] this is my home!» (Interview with Dakarai in Milan, January 2014)

Dakarai's experience shows how, in the absence of a “second assistance” program, the subjects build their *haven* in those places where they feel at home and they can create an intimacy feeling – in Dakarai's experience the mosque plays a crucial role in shaping the meaning of that neighbourhood. In this way migrant subjects use and appropriate public spaces as a source of “derived domesticity” and as a practice of home-making out of their dwelling places – i.e. the dormitory.

These everyday life practices of re-shaping the public space can be understood as practices of re-appropriation of space and autonomous time, and not just as a search for a place to sleep or a construction of a “home”. The routine imposed by the reception system in Milan, can be broken through the re-appropriation of public spaces, where it is possible to autonomously manage personal time. The *havens* are created as places that are free from the power dynamics, which usually the forced migrants experience within the reception places and administrative office – such as victimization and infantilization power relations (Fassain 2005, 2009). Thus, the re-appropriation practices are not acted just in the space, but concern also an action of a time re-appropriation that breaks the waiting rhythms, the long queues, and the continuous moving around in the city. The achievement of some autonomy happens in places such as the public parks, the bingos, the train station, which are experienced and lived as sociability places, where it is possible to meet friends, to share contacts and important information.

«If I want to rest, I go to the bingo. Is a great place for me, I like it because I can watch football, and I can meet there some friends! We spend time together, and I ask them where I can find a job, in which European city it is better to move in order to find better condition. There one friends told me to go to France, since there some friends of us have found a job. We are now planing to move there, maybe. I can not stop my self, you understand? Otherwise I run crazy! I am in Italy since three years, and nothing! I have to keep moving, to looking for a job, for better condition ... so I leave Italy, I go to another country!» (Interview with Radu in Milan, March 2014).

Radu decided to leave Italy in order to find better life condition, similarly as many other forced migrants that had obtained the humanitarian protection during the *Emergenza Nord Africa* program in 2011. The “second migration” movement leads to a perpetuation of the experience of the first arrival in the time and space, since they arrive in a new country with an unknown language and as “illegal” migrants.

«*Basta Italia!* I am tired! There I waste too much time! Now I am here in Berlin, but I cannot work because of this Italian document. So, no home and no work, nothing also here! They didn't want us! They say that we have to go back to Italy, but Italy doesn't want us. Germany doesn't want us too! Eh ... ! But it wasn't me who has done the war in Libya!! I was happy in Libya, I had a home, a work, every thing was good. Then came the war, and at this time every thing has started. But you have done the war! Europe has done the war! And now? Where should I go? In Italy there is no work, I wasted three years there! Germany doesn't want me because of my document ... I have to decide what I should do ... maybe I go to France, or to Belgium, but in Italy I will not go back! Eh, so we are ... we move around and around, among Italy and within Europe, we are going everywhere, also if no one wants us!» (Interview with Asante in Milan, February 2014)

The transit experience is lengthened into an indefinite time, becoming a definitive condition rather than a temporary one. Those who decided to leave Italy have found themselves in other European countries without the right to work and to settle there, because of the Schengen agreement and the Dublin III Regulation.

3. “We are here, and we will stay”⁵. The square-Oranienplatz occupation in Berlin

At the beginning of 2013 several forced migrants with the Italian humanitarian protection have started a protest in Berlin claiming the rights to freely move in Europe and to autonomously decide in which countries they live and work. In the months before the protest, some of these people moved around in the whole German country trying to find a work, after they had lived as homeless and unemployed in Italy for at least one year. According to Schengen Agreement and the Dublin III Regulation migrants who have obtained an international protection – or other forms of national protection – in one European country, have to live and work just in this country and they can move among Europe just for three months as “tourists”. The political protest in Berlin developed around the occupation of a square, Oranienplatz, in the neighbourhood of Kreuzberg, that is in the center of the German capital. The forced migrants with Italian documents organized themselves in a political group called *Lampedusa in Berlin*, in order to point out that “Lampedusa”, i.e. the *borders*, are not just situated at the external frontiers of Europe, but also within the European territory and the European cities. Indeed, the prohibition of the access to the German labour market for the holders of an Italian document was interpreted as an action of the European borders within the European urban spaces. The protest went on for almost two years in the occupied square that was dwelled by almost 40 forced migrants sleeping in tents. During the protest time, the group *Lampedusa in Berlin* was politically supported by several European activists groups, church organisations and German citizens, that met every day in Oranienplatz in order to support the protest and to block the police eviction. There were a lot of

5 Political slogan of the group *Lampedusa in Berlin*.

demonstrations and protests directed to the local political authority, the Senate of Berlin that refused to legally recognize the presence of migrants with the Italian document living in Berlin and claiming the access to the German territory and society. During the protest months the group of *Lampedusa in Berlin* grew rapidly, in April 2014 there were officially almost 450 forced migrants with an Italian document living in Berlin and politically active in the protest.

«After four months travelling for the whole Germany, finally I arrived in Berlin at the central station, Hauptbahnhof. I meet there some Africans like me, and they told me about Oranienplatz. They gave me the address and I started to looking for this Oranienplatz all the day long. I found it in the night. There I saw a lot of refugees like me, who were sleeping in the tents. I asked them whether I should sleep there with them, and they told me that it was difficult, because they were a lot and there was no space. That night we didn't find a place for me, so I slept in a bed with another person. The day after, they help me to build my own bed in a tent with other two persons. It was the end of 2013, I meet a lot of friends in the group *Lampedusa in Berlin*. I decided to remain with them. I saw that they were in the same condition of me, so I thought that I should have to follow them and to stay with them. I should become one of them, so I remain there and I became also a *Lampedusa in Berlin*. And we stay there, I found a lot of friends also among the European supporters. We have organized a lot of strikes and demonstrations together». (Interview with Hasani in Berlin, October 2014)

The occupation of Oranienplatz has played different roles. First, it was a protest action in which migrants whose right to stay was not legally recognized, take place in a public space in the center of the city. Second, it was a process of home-making enacted by displaced people who were moving around the European territory looking for a place to stay, for a haven. As Hasani explains us, the fact that he found there other people sharing the same situation, gave him a feeling of “home”, i.e. a possibility to build a community around the occupation of that public space. Oranienplatz became a source of “derived domesticity” thanks to the strong relationships that were build during the political fights; and these relationships remained also after the Oranienplatz eviction. The experience of the square occupation was a mixture of negotiation for the rights – to stay and freely move – and a cultivation of feelings of home. Indeed, once the occupied square was evicted from the police in April 2014, the collective character of the political fight persisted and the people considered Berlin as their “home”:

«Now is difficult ... my head is turning. I don't know what I have to do ... but in Italy is a chaos now, the problem is the work there ... is a chaos, and also to eat, to find a place to sleep, there is very difficult. So if I go back to Italy, I don't know where I should go .. and how I could survive. You know, I don't know anyone in Italy, I don't have the same connections that I have here in Berlin! Here in Berlin I have a lot of friends, that help me .. they cannot help for the work, because is a problem of document .. but they are friends, you know? This is my place at the moment». (Interview with Yasser in Berlin, February 2015)

In April 2014 the group *Lampedusa in Berlin* signed a political agreement with the Senate of Berlin, after more than one year of political negotiation between the migrants and their European supporters, the Berlin Senate and the municipality of the neighbourhood Kreuzberg. The Berliner Senate promise an analysis of every single case in order to decide who should be allowed to access of German labour market. Once the agreement was signed, the Oranienplatz was evicted and the group of forced migrants with Italian documents was split and allocated to different sleeping places, i.e. church dormitories or residential accommodation used for people who have applied asylum in Germany. Oranienplatz – as a meeting place – was lost⁶. The case-by-case review *de facto* never happened, since the German office of immigration send a letter to each migrant, asserting the impossibility for them to have the access of German society because of their Italian

⁶ The agreement allowed to keep in Oranienplatz an info-point where the group *Lampedusa in Berlin* could meet, but at the same time there was an everyday presence of police in the square.

document. The acceptance of the case of forced migrants with an Italian humanitarian protection to stay and work in Germany would have constituted an exception to the Schengen Agreement and the Dublin Regulation, and thus would have created a leading case in German policy and law. German political authorities feared that such precedent may open the access doors of German welfare state to all the migrants in Europe. At least, such argument was used to justify the decision against the recognition of the *Lampedusa* group. After five months from the agreement's signature, the inner senator of Berlin declared the annulment of Oranienplatz-agreement and affirmed that Italy was the only place where these forced migrants should have been living. Thus, the people of *Lampedusa* group found themselves again without a possibility to find a home and a job, since they were sleeping in dormitories and they were “illegal” on the German territory because of their Italian document.

Building homes in transit

«I'm Pugliese, *camm' a' fa'*?! But ok, now I'm a bit German too, *deutsch* from Berlin! Let's say that I'm 60% African, 30% Italian, and 10% German!»(Interviews with Lamin in Berlin, Mai 2015)

Some people of the *Lampedusa* group decided to move further to other North European countries, looking for better life condition; few of them went back to Italy, but the majority decided to remain in Berlin. There they live a reiteration of space and time as fragmented experience in the everyday life, as they had lived in Italian urban spaces. After Oranienplatz eviction, the majority of *Lampedusa* group changed the place of sleep every three or five months; thus produced a high level of mobility within the city of Berlin.

«After Oranienplatz agreement some of us were living in the Caritas dormitory in Wedding. We should have stayed there for three months, after which they promised that we could move to a real house. They even showed it to us, a normal house in Kreuzberg! But after three months they changed their mind, and told us that this house was not habitable. So, the Senate extended our stay in Caritas place for other three months, although the Caritas chief did not agree. Some days there was no water, the shower and the toilette were broken, nothing was good there. After this time they transferred us to another place, in Blaschkoallee [...] Since they send us out of the dormitory, we stayed some months in the occupied school in Kreuzberg until it was evicted. And then we slept in a church building close to Rosenthalerplatz, but we could only stay there for three weeks. This place was a student dormitory: the students are sleeping in the normal rooms upstairs, and we were sleeping in the big hall downstairs. After that, they split us into groups: ten of us were moved to Wedding, other ten to Friedrichstr., and other ten to So here we are, but we don't know what's going to happen, how the situation will end.» (Interview with Amal in Berlin, September 2014)

Moreover, the mobility is also produced by the constraints from the bureaucratic procedures linked to the forced migrant's documents. Indeed, since the Italian humanitarian protection is a one-year document, the migrant subjects are forced to move back to Italy every year in order to renew it, developing hence continuous mobility practices criss-crossing the European territorial and juridical borders. Thus, “commuters-movements” develop between Berlin and several Italian cities, where the administrative offices are situated. Since the bureaucratic practices for the document renewal take more or less three months, the migrant subjects have to find a place to sleep in Italy. Therefore, they activate their social connections and networks of people that are still living in Italy, and through them circulate information where there is a place to sleep in occupied houses – as in Turin – or in abandoned houses as in Milan. The central train station in

Milan, for example, plays a crucial role for these continued commute-movements: it is the place where people arrive and depart, but also a social place where migrants spend most of their time (as explained in the paragraph on Italy) and where they sleep if there is no other place to go.

«So I arrived in *Milano*, and I tried to look for you, for *Naga*⁷. I arrived around 11 or 12 in *Centrale*, there was so much foreigners like me!! so much! I asked to all of them about *Naga*, and all of them know it! They told me, go here, go there, they explain me how to reach *Naga* [...] I slept in the metro in *Stazione Centrale*, around 7 o'clock in the evening they close one part of down stairs of metro and they put little beds, and many people slept there. Many people, all close to each others. And we have to go out at 6 o'clock. I slept there two week, after I get a place in a dormitory. [...] During the day I am lock out from the dormitory, and I go to *Stazione Centrale* because inside in *Centrale* it was hot! At that time in *Milano* it was cold, so I needed a hot place to go. I go up where all the people are, is hot and you meet people like you. Then you sit down all the time since you go eating in *Tricolore*, and the days is finish. You know it very well. I meet many people in *Centrale*, from every country, they come back to renew their documents». (Interview with Rashid in Milan, March 2014)

In the cartography of migrants movements, the train station in Milan emerges as a border place, a liminal place with an ambivalent nature: it is perceived as a dangerous place subjected to the control and surveillance through the everyday presence of police and cameras. At the same time, it is a social place where it is possible to meet many friends and share important information and connections. As Nadir tells us below, *Stazione Centrale* is a crossroad where it is possible to find a job and to reorient one's migration path:

«I met these people in *Stazione Centrale*. They were African, like me! I had to wait long time for my document renewal, so I decided to follow them to *Puglia*, where there was this work. I stayed there two months, and then I came back to Milan in order to pick up my new document. I slept again in *Centrale*, and one day a friends told me that we people with humanitarian protection could have the possibility to do a continuing education course. I thought “fine, let's do it!”. So I remain several months more in Milan for the *formazione*. But after that .. again no work! So I came back to Berlin, where I live now and which the place where I decide to live. Let's see in the future where I will be, but for the moment, I stay in Berlin». (Interview with Nadir in Berlin, April 2015)

This narration highlights how the high (im-)mobility of these people play a crucial role in the production of European space as a “whole” city. Some movements are forced, as that for the renewal of documents, but others are the result of an autonomous choice of the subject, as for example to remain in Italy in order to do the education course or to leave Italy living thus “illegally” in Berlin. The practices of home-making are, thus, influenced by the high level of (im-)mobility that characterizes this particular group of migrants, who transform the public space into their *haven* that is separated from the place where they sleep, which are mostly dormitories:

«Now that Oranienplatz does not exist any more, we found new places where we can meet, always in Kreuzberg, there are a lot of supporters there. Yes .. if I have to think a place where I feel home, that place is Kreuzberg: there are a lot of place there where we meet, a bingo close to the underground Kottbusertor, there is a square where we spend the most of the time. And a lot of people that live in Kreuzberg and have restaurants or bars there, they know us, they know our political protest, so they support us. This is *our* neighbourhood, *our* place». (Interview with Dakari in Berlin, March 2015)

The neighbourhood Kreuzberg is the place where the people of *Lampedusa* group feel at home, because they have build there a source of “derived domesticity” through their everyday presence in the main neighbourhood's square, Oranienplatz. The public visibility and the collective character, which usually refers

⁷ Association of volunteers dealing with legal and social consulting for migrants in Milan.

to the work- and cultural-political sphere (Duyvendak 2011), played a crucial role here. It is a process of home-making enacted by people that are living in continuous transit.

The role of the political fight in the construction of the “home-feeling” can be understood also through an etymological analysis of the two concepts: to occupy and to inhabit. The verb “occupy” derives from the Latin *occupare*, composed by the from *ob* and *cupare*, i.e. *capere*. The prefix *ob*, *obs* means *in front of, against, face, in view*. The verb *capio*, *capere* means *take control of, take in the hand*. This verb refers to the old Greek form *κάπτω* that means *succeed to take* (something), which recall the term *kapādu* from the Akkadic language that means *to desire*. This word has reference also to the Latin verb *habeo*. The act of occupation implicates hence the subjective dimension of the desire, which pushes the migrant subjects to the act of re-appropriation of a place. The etymology of the verb “inhabit” also includes the meaning of *re-appropriation*: the Latin word *habitus* derives from the verb *habeo* - *habere* that means *to have, to own (possess)*. The word refers also to the Akkadian language *habu*; cfr. *kappu* “*capio*” that means “*cup in the hands*”, which has influenced *habeo* in the direction of “*have in the hands*”, i.e. *to possess*. So, inhabit a place is not just a space where we sleep and live, but is a place that the subjects have build and produced through their everyday practices, a place that they have *taken in their hands*. This helps to understand how the feeling of home – build by the migrant subjects in the neighbourhood Kreuzberg and based on long-lasting relationships – is strong enough to choose living in Berlin as “illegal”, rather than going back to Italy as “legal” – but temporary – migrants.

Conclusive remarks

The movements of migrants that criss-cross the European territory trace new geographies that can be interpreted as a beginning process of “Europeanisation from below”, where migrants work out strategies to find their way to live and freely move in Europe despite the proliferation of borders. The whole European territory is experienced as one place: living in Berlin, renewing the documents in Milan, attending education courses in Turin, and working seasonally in Sicily or Apulia. This is a consequence of the tension between the structural constrains, i.e. the control and management mechanisms implemented in order to block and reduce the migrants mobilities, and the autonomous movement of the migrant subjectivities that try to overcome the several internal European borders. The twofold consequence of this tension can be observed in the act of connecting different places through the migrants mobilities, and in the creation of border place within national territories.

The migrants' mobilities connect different places with each other: the train station of Milan, *Stazione Centrale*, is directly linked with the neighbourhood Kreuzberg in Berlin, like the abandoned houses in the neighbourhood *Corvetto* in Milan are connected with the bingo in Kottbusertor in Berlin. The frequent circulatory movements of migrant subjects through these places, and the consequent circulation of information and social contacts, leads to the production of cities and urban places as knots of a network that is extended beyond the national borders. At the same time, the European border regime creates a regime of (im)mobility for people who are not allowed to freely move within the European juridical space. The action

of this regime involves not only the space, but also the time dimension, having an effect on the biographies of the migrants that live a perpetuation of the transit experience.

Urban places such as train stations, occupied houses, and public spaces make visible this tension between the mobilities of migrant subjects and the structural constraints. Migrant subjects experience them as *transit places*, i.e. places where different networks cross each other, allowing the exchange of information and connections. The temporariness is the main feature of these transit-urban places, although they allow the creation of long-lasting relationships that are the main resource for migrant subjects to find a place to sleep, a job and to share information. Migrant subjects react to the structural constraints through their everyday practices crossing the borders and producing new urban spaces.

Home-making within the urban space is part of the mobility practices of the protagonists of my research. In Milan migrant subjects break their time- and space-fragmented life, creating new spaces of autonomy where they can re-appropriate their time, free from the power relations that occur in the local reception system. They build a relation of intimacy with several urban spaces, opening channels of home-making practices in order to produce their individual and private sphere. In Berlin, instead, the practices of home-making are shaped by the collective character of public space experience enacted by the people of *Lampedusa in Berlin* group, which implies a high level of public visibility. The practice to occupy a square and the political fights create strong relationships within the *Lampedusa* group itself but also between the group and the neighbourhood Kreuzberg, so that this place is perceived as *home* also after the protest has been evicted. The fact that they have filled an urban public place with their presence allows them to perceive it as their *home*.

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