

*Embodying Temporary Stay Centres.
An ethnography of immigrants and institutions
in the south-eastern border of Italy (Apulia)*

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Introduction

In the European Union countries, what is referred to as “illegal immigration” has increasingly become a politically demanding problem, enmeshed in a web of cultural, social, economic and public communication factors. Generally speaking, despite an international situation, dominated by wars and world wide socio-economic inequality, which produces continuous migratory waves, European countries adopt increasingly restrictive non-EU entry policies even towards refugees and asylum seekers. This contrast in migratory processes, inevitably produces a massive presence of foreign entries that greatly exceed the limits foreseen by EU Governments, and that is defined as “illegal immigration”.

In Italy, in the wake of this trend, the migratory wave is often dealt with as a problem of public order. Thus, a status of exceptionality and continuous menace is constituted. This fuels huge social tensions which find expression in terms of insecurity and the need for control. Such management modalities have gradually developed in the last decades by means of overlapping action plans correlated into what could be termed a system. Actions such as military coast surveillance or the constitution of illegal immigration as a crime, are decisions that have been put forward by the continuous and effective momentum of public debate and political “communication” factors. The frequent wide-spread use of stereotypes and oversimplification has given weight to identifying immigration with criminality, or immigration with terrorism.

Radical and adverse representations of the “other” have been produced such as “the invasion of immigrants” that by reducing the subjectivity of each immigrant to that identifiable with the hordes of immigrants landing

on our shores, contributed in legitimating the position of Governments with regard to this issue (DAL LAGO A. 1998, MINELLI M. - PIZZA G. 2004, RIVERA A. 2003) and justifying the establishment of CPTs (Centri di Permanenza Temporanea – Administrative Detention Centres in Italy henceforth referred to as Temporary Stay Centres). Special institutions, which have the aim of forcefully detaining irregular immigrants, who are without regular visas or permits, of identifying, or, according to the various cases, expelling them.

Therefore, if on one hand, the images of men and women huddled together on unlikely boats, their faces worn by weariness and fear are now part of daily television scenes, on the other, these same images, on first sight, are suggestive of a core project of immigration essentially based on the individual's physical capacity to endure hardship. As pointed out by the sociologist Abdelmalek Sayad, in the inevitable lack of economic resources and the lack of social support networks, the body of the immigrant becomes his or her main resource: «More than any other dominated person (...) the immigrant possesses his body. He exists only to the extent that he is his body and, ultimately, only to the extent that he is a physical body, a labour-body» (SAYAD A. 1999). The immigrants experience of the voyage is experienced in a body-mind dimension and it is in this dimension that the negotiation and the crossing of cultural and institutional borders take place. As compensation for this way seeing, in an overall vision, it is important to stress the presence of a legislative system which has been considered by many scholars as a "special law" for immigrants that is somewhat in contrast with the Italian Constitution (CAPUTO A. 2007, MIRAGLIA F. 2007, PUGIOTTO A. 2001); to the extent that it intervenes directly on the human body by means of fingerprinting technology, detaining "illegal" immigrants without permits in Temporary Stay Centres, as well as forced expulsion. These Migratory Government abnormalities, that have been investigated at length by jurists and magistrates, need to be integrated by anthropological enquiry that looks into the day to day vicissitudes of the immigrant's experience.

In this article the topic of international immigration will be dealt with by focusing our attention on *embodiment* processes and *biopolitical* mechanisms in the relationships between migrants and institutions in Apulia, on the Italian south-eastern border. In the course of this analysis, by examining certain case studies as examples of an ethnographical study carried out within a Temporary Stay Centre, I intend to follow two strictly correlated analysis lines. I will refer to recent trends in certain Medical Anthropological studies that have dealt with international migration, according to which

national government policies tend to ascribe themselves upon the body [of the individual immigrant] by means of a dynamic relationship between the exercise of sovereign power and the agency of the immigrant (FASSIN D. 2001, 2005, TALIANI S. - VACCHIANO F. 2006). As the anthropologist Didier Fassin pointed out (FASSIN D. 2001, 2005), in disputes with the French State, illness for the “irregular immigrant” can become a resource for regularisation, so that the body turns out to be the real “place” where the negotiation of categories such as “citizenship” or “legality” actually takes place. Along these lines, I will examine cases of self-injury and suicide attempts regarding migrants that have been detained in Temporary Stay Centres, in relation to the frequent administration of psychotropic drugs by operators. In conclusion I will try to make some considerations upon the category of “illegal” or “irregular immigration” disentangling it from the process that the American anthropologist Nicholas De Genova (DE GENOVA N. 2002) has defined as “the legal production of illegality”, as also stressed by the Italian magistrate Angelo Caputo (CAPUTO A. 2007), «Clandestinity (...) is not a natural attribute of migrants, but obviously, the effect of specific migratory policies».

Apulia - the ethnographical context

Apulia is a region which extends over the south-eastern border of the Italian State, where in 2003 I started (and still am) carrying out research which deals with the relationship between the immigrant and the institutions and which pays special attention to the treatment of migrants without residential permits and with expulsion orders. Because of its “cultural” and geographical Mediterranean propensity, this has often been an area of crucial importance for government policies for the management of migration flows, especially those immigrants from the Balkan area. I am referring to the stream of migration from Albania during 1990's, which was at the time defined in such portentous terms as “the biblical exodus of the Albanian people”, “the clandestine landings” and “the sea carts”, which, in the light of a constant and substantial arrival of immigrants, caused the activation of institutional and non-institutional mechanisms aimed at controlling and managing this phenomenon. As sustained by many observers and scholars such as the Italian sociologist Alessandro Dal Lago (DAL LAGO A. 1998) during this period, the region became a kind of laboratory whereby one could experiment techniques from “welcoming” “first identification” “collection and sorting” to the eventual “expulsion” of foreign migrants, by means of the creation of “welcome centres” and “refugee camps”

as well as coastal surveillance that was set up bilaterally with the country of emigration. This was thorough display of techniques and strategies, which was probably due to the limited experience of the Italian institutions in the management of migratory flows, made blatantly clear by the regulatory attempts produced for the greater part of 1990's and which only by 1998 were finally outlined in the "Legge 40" (Law 40) better known as the Turco-Napolitano (ANGEL-AJANI A. 2000, CAPUTO A. 2003). Mechanisms, therefore, that still today remain as residual images and features within current government policies on foreign entry and that are still evoked in local discourse on immigration, as if it were some sort of "welcome" expertise and one is tempted to add of "expulsion" beyond the specific institutional domain. The above concern would, because of its complexity, no doubt merit greater analysis than the one established for the setting out of this article. However, I would like to briefly outline, in chronological order, three episodes which took place in Apulia in the years mentioned above. These episodes, which have some startling peculiarities, the outcomes of which are quite contrasting and useful, in my opinion, in helping us to interpret the issues which will be dealt with in the following paragraphs. 1) During March 1991, on the wake of the economic and political crisis of the Enver Hoxa regime, 20,000 Albanian citizens arrived in the Apulian harbours. The local citizens were caught completely unawares and had to deal with the emergency despite the serious delays and inadequacy of the Italian Government.

The Albanian issue, given the various historically definable factors which characterised it, can probably be set within that re-organisation process of the geo-political scenario in Eastern Europe, which was set in motion after the Soviet block crisis and that of the so-called real Socialism countries. (HOBSBAWM E. J. 1994). By embodying these historical-political dynamics, the Albanian immigrants were de-codified, by the local citizens and media, as our "Adriatic neighbours" escaping from a "poor and underdeveloped" country, devoid of "democratic" and "liberal" models that needed to be sought in the West. However, the sudden and massive presence of these people, with unfashionable clothes and hairstyles, and who were exhausted and dirty after journeying in precarious conditions, aroused in the eyes of the Apulians impressions of an alienating aesthetic sense, in which they saw these people as symbols of underdevelopment and poverty. The most common feelings expressed in public, as a consequence, were based on a level of charitable considerations with elements of irony towards the quality of these bodies that seemed to arrive from an obscure and unknown past, far from Western affluence, though the social and economic situation

of Apulia was not a shining light of “development”. Thus, one talked of “poor desperate people” in need of assistance and welcome (RAVENDA A. 2005). The first meeting, however, with the local citizens took place in a direct and spontaneous manner, without the mediation of national institutions or of the mass media. Schools, churches, private homes were set up as welcome centres. As the sociologist Marcella Delle Donne recalls, the demonstration of this openness became clear when the problem of the right of asylum arose – the protests of the trade unions and public opinion stopped the Government from sending the refugees back home. Hospitality facilities were negotiated in order to deal with the public security issues. The Ministry of Internal Affairs had the responsibility of dealing with the problem, and at the local level, one-year residential work permits were given by the local authorities, on the basis of the Consolidated Law (Testo Unico) on public security (DELLE DONNE M. 2004). However, how this was managed began to change rapidly. Because of the instability of the Albanian situation, in the summer of the same year the migratory flow remained intense, but this time the Italian reaction changed. 2) In August 1991 a ship overloaded with immigrants reached the harbour of Bari, the regional capital. The local and national authorities were initially reluctant to allow the ship to berth, conceded the mooring, and immediately transferred all the passengers to the old stadium of the city, with the promise of supplying them with jobs and residential permits. All the men, women, and children were held for about a week in facilities that were no doubt unsuitable without toilets and running water; constantly under police surveillance. On August 14, the stadium was cleared out and some Albanian migrants were transferred to other camps, and others expelled. It was without doubt a detention procedure. These events in the Bari Stadium conveyed the impression around the world, however, of the Albanians as a locked up “crowd of animals” in order to avoid their dangerous circulation (DAL LAGO A. 1998). From this moment on, the way the migratory waves were managed changed completely, and entrusted ad interim to the police and the Navy. They were no longer “poor desperate people” who needed help – for the local and national communication media, the Albanians gradually started to become thieves, drug dealers and rapists (ANDRISANI P. 2003, DAL LAGO A. 1998, DEVOLE R. - VEHIU A. 1996, VEHIU A. 1997). In order to safeguard national public security, coasts were constantly patrolled by the Navy corvettes. The Albanians who arrived were identified and brought to the “refugee camps”, which had by then been set up throughout the whole region, and then, in most cases, they were sent back. Due to these procedures, the immigrants were confined to liminal spaces, set “outside”, with the aim of nipping the migratory flow in the bud. A clear example of the

severity of the measures adopted in order to manage the Albanian immigration is given by the following case. 3) Once again during the month of March, this time in 1997, an Albanian ship, loaded with migrants, while trying to evade a blockade off the port of Brindisi, collided with (or probably was rammed by) an Italian Navy ship - about a hundred people died.

I went back to Apulia twelve years after the first landings of 1991, to begin some fieldwork and found quite an interesting situation. In 1998, in relation to the above-mentioned "legge 40" which, being the first organic law on immigration by the Italian Government, instituted the crime of illegal immigration and the subsequent administrative detention in Temporary Stay Centres, along regional borders, the arrival of immigrants gradually reduced in number until it became insignificant after the year 2000 (CARITAS 2006). Nonetheless, many of the immigrant centres that arose during the Albanian immigration have remained active, and have been transformed into distinct and functioning facilities according to the various typologies defined by the current regulations on immigration, among which various Temporary Stay Centres, that are used to receive "irregular migrants" from other Italian regions that have recently experienced the arrival of large numbers of immigrants. Apulia, thus, within the process that we have here tried to summarise, has gradually "specialised" in dealing with foreign immigrants without residential permits. This region was, therefore, a crucial territory for the observation of the management strategies dealing with this phenomenon. In a local context, which over a decade completely changed its institutional organisation with regards to the treatment of migrants, I focussed my attention on two facilities which were set up in the 1990's as Assistance centres, and later transformed into Temporary Stay Centres (CPT), located in the Southern part of Apulia in the Salento district. These institutions have become central to my study both from the ethnographical, as well as the historical point of view. I have, therefore, analysed the ways these centres have functioned and how they have become part of the territory. At the same time, I have also studied the detained immigrants' perception of their condition, with regular visits over a period of almost a year. I observed and analysed the "daily" and the "extraordinary" nature of life within such an institution, by building relationships by means of semi-structured interviews with the administrators of the facilities as well as with the immigrants themselves. People with different experiences and origins, who only share the fact of being without residential permits and thus, subject to administrative detention.

Administrative detention

With the approval of “legge 40” by the Parliament in 1998, Italy had the first organic law on immigration, in line with immigration policies, that is, with those management modalities of migratory phenomena that are already present in many European countries and in the United States, based on political-administrative regulations of foreign entries. The reasons for such regulations are essentially two. On one hand, this regulation is a means for border protection and the limitation of the immigration phenomenon as a prohibitionist measure. On the other, it has the task of contrasting clandestine immigration carried out by criminal organisations, and consequently the phenomena of *trafficking and smuggling* (CAPUTO A. 2007). Furthermore, the relationship between immigration flow policies and regular entries for immigrants also raises a number of issues. The possibility of obtaining a residential permit, except in particular cases, is determined by the possibility of having a regular job that paradoxically cannot exist without a residential permit. It would be necessary, in fact, to come to Italy with a work contract and a residential permit from the outset. These flow policies (VITALE E. 2004) therefore are inevitably linked to a binary logic – those with regular jobs and residential permits are in, all the others are out. A dichotomic approach that tends to distinguish between “good immigrants” that are accepted and introduced into the “integration process”, and the “illegal” immigrants, who are “clandestine” and thus to be detained in Temporary Stay Centres as administrative detainees. In this way, there seems to be an identification between “crime” and “punishment” proposed as a detention for an administrative sanction, which contrasts with the fundamental principles of the Italian Constitution by revealing «the existence of a criminal-administrative subsystem capable of assuming paradigmatic values of a general orientation of control policies» (CAPUTO A. 2007). For this reason, I think it would be useful to briefly say something about the bureaucratic procedure that leads a specific body to manage a Temporary Stay Centre. Once the structure is ready, having been built (or restored if already existing) by private bodies who have won tenders, the Ministry entrusts the responsibility and management to the local prefecture, that supplies police control, and by means of a tender, entrusts the management to a private or associative external body. This delegation system transfers the responsibility in exchange for funding that is agreed upon during the tender, with regards to each detained individual immigrant. Whoever manages the centre receives a payment, and is responsible for whatever may happen within the centre itself. Furthermore, specific services, such as health assistance or the supply of meals, which in compliance with

the rules and regulations must be guaranteed to the detained migrants, can be sub-contracted to third parties. The Temporary Stay Centres, which have been set up throughout the whole peninsula, symbolically and actually represent a government control by the Italian State on the phenomenon of immigration, but the state does not exercise any direct action and thus it is exonerated of any responsibility. In summary, these facilities, should be thought of as an example of “non intervention”, “governing less and with maximum effectiveness”, typical of that liberal governmentality that has become the subject of the last lessons held by Michel Foucault at the Collège de France (FOUCAULT M. 2004). Systems of delegation and of privatisation and profit that, as highlighted by Loic Wacquant, find examples of concrete applications in the neo-liberal socio-economic structures with regard to the «new government of social insecurity» and to the punitive changes that this implies (WACQUANT L. 1999, 2004). Within these centres, the immigrant is detained in a coercive manner up to a maximum of sixty days (even if in some cases the detention can be prolonged for a longer period), until the immigrant’s identity is ascertained and a decision is taken regarding his or her future permanence in Italian and therefore within the European Community – the release of residential permits, direct expulsion, or, as in the majority of cases, expulsion orders to be carried out within five days. In this “space of boundaries” and uncertainty, there are no distinctions with regard to the past or the individual situations of the detained immigrants - foreigners with criminal records, as well as immigrants who have just arrived in Italy, even those requesting asylum, and cases of people who, despite having lived in Italy for many years, are caught without residential permits. These facilities are usually set up in suburban areas far away from the city centre and surrounded by high walls and patrolled by the police and video surveillance. They look like and function like prisons, closed off to unauthorised access. In addition, although the management regulations contain references to the observance of the rights and dignity of human beings, the few surveys that have been carried out within the facilities, have produced data that have aroused heated debate in the public arena. Within the detention areas, there have been reports of constant fights and brawls between the immigrants and the police, who have on various occasions demonstrated excessive interference in the management of the centre. Furthermore, organised and systematic police brutality has been put on record as well as violence against detained immigrants guilty of having tried to escape or simply for having requested improvements in the way they were treated. It thus seems that violence is a frequently used technique in the management of the centres or, to use an expression I have often heard during my research “to calm the agitated detainees”. Often no

attempt is made to hide this violence. It is justified as being the only possible way of controlling the detainees. In fact, during a meeting I had with a surveillance agent of an Apulian Temporary Stay Centre, to my questions regarding the way the immigrants were treated, he sharply replied that:

«At first we tell them to keep quiet, then we shout at them to keep quiet, after we take some of them, we bring them in a room, we make a mess of them and then see how they keep quiet».

A violence that does not only take place in the ways mentioned above, but also through a whole series of practices and techniques. Dirty toilets, often without doors, small and crowded rooms, lack of respect of different religious beliefs, the obligation to keep in line during roll-call and counts, offensive language, to the point of writing recognition codes in ink on the arms of some of the detainees.. Administrative detention, therefore, considers the immigrant's body as an object of constant manipulation in a context that, to use the words of the anthropologist Paul Farmer, we could define as structural violence (FARMER P. 2003), that is an induced suffering «'structured' by historically given (and often economically driven) processes and forces that conspire – whether through routine, ritual, or, as is more commonly the case, the hard surfaces of life – to constrain agency». From this point of view a very important issue needs to be discussed, namely that in all the centres, without distinction, self-injury practices and suicide attempts on the part of the immigrants are quite frequent, and therefore, often these people are given psychotropic drugs.

Positioning in the "Field"

A certain current of thought and polarisation of opinions which are deeply rooted in the national debate regarding Temporary Stay Centres, tend to associate the qualities and functions of these institutions to those of the Nazi concentration camps or more generally, to the various "camps" that, in the course of contemporary history have been sadly known as «the space of the outside» (RAHOLA F. 2005) that are used to collect or detain minority groups, victims of war or, more generally, of discrimination or persecution. The camp is a spatial-temporal dimension where rights do not exist, and which is simply meant for sheer, temporary physical restraint – within which, immigrants are detained, obliged to what Giorgio Agamben defines as «bare life» (AGAMBEN G. 1995). An existence produced by a state of exception and reduced to a minimum physicality, depleted of its actual juridical peculiarities. Studies and opinions, which are confirmed by the stance expressed by the Italian philosopher according to which the "camp" is a bio-political

paradigm of modernity - it being the space produced by a permanent state of exception, within which one's "own" biological body is inseparable from the political one (*ibid.* 1995). As the Temporary Stay Centre is my "field", in the ethnographic sense of the term, here, though agreeing with most of the above-mentioned studies dealing with the issue, I would like to further examine, at this point, the notion of "camp" with the notion of "field", as stated above, which is specifically concerned with ethnography and further elaborated by Pierre Bourdieu. In the work of the French sociologist marked by concepts of "practical theorising" and "scientific practice" in the ethnographic research, the notion of "field" takes on the meaning of a relational space, regulated by relations of strength through which the subjects that are present place themselves in a continuous negotiation, which is at the same time dialogic and conflictual (BOURDIEU P. 1972, 2002). We are dealing with a set of processes and practices that tend to draw the researcher "within" the dialectics of a performative "observed observation", that is made up of speech, silence, fiction, body postures, and glances that are encountered, taken in and reproduced by the ethnographer as a body (PIZZA G. 2005) by means of the simultaneously structured and structuring exposition of one's own *habitus*. If we assume such a theoretical, methodological and epistemological position, the Temporary Stay Centre, despite the high walls that surround it and within the above-mentioned historical, political and juridical complex network of determinates, constitutes itself as a "field" with changeable spatial-temporal co-ordinates, that is fragmented by actions that are aimed at controlling as well as at re-inventing many of the aspects of the phenomenon of immigration. Besides the ethnographer, the managers of the Centre, the immigrants and the police, there are also journalists, lawyers, humanitarian associations, religious organisations, politicians and scholars in this "field"; all active subjects, with various motivations and objectives. From this perspective, the Temporary Stay Centre, Regina Pacis, in Southern Apulia, will be used as an exemplary case. The Regina Pacis began its activity in 1997. At first it was a detention centre that dealt with the vast migratory waves arriving from the Balkan area. It was later transformed into a temporary stay centre, according to the "legge 40", the Italian law of 1998, and funded for an amount that in 2004 was equal to 3 million Euro a year. The management of the centre was immediately entrusted to the homonymous Foundation Regina Pacis, an institution that owned the building, formerly a summer camp for children, restored for this purpose. This Foundation was seen as a direct emanation of the Episcopate of Lecce and of the Apulian Episcopal conference, and the director was a trusted man of the Episcopate. At the beginning of my research, in the initial months of 2004, a particular situation

occurred in this institution - the Director, a priest, some of his collaborators and 11 surveillance *carabinieri*, were under investigation in various trials for allegedly bashing some of the detainees who had attempted to escape from the centre. Some of the indictments were of excessive corrective practices, mendacity, and cruel behaviour. Contrary to other national Temporary Stay Centres, about which, it was very difficult to obtain information, and in response to the attention of the mass media which had focussed on the centre, the Regina Pacis carried out an intense public communication activity in order to apologise for the accusations that had been made against it in the trials. There were frequent public declarations by the directors and a thick network of public relations with the mass media, with scholars and schools, for which guided visits to the structure were organised and even a documentary on the subject was produced. These communication strategies were not focused on what had happened within the Centre, but they referred to the enormous experience of Catholic charity work carried out by the organisation staff and by the Foundation during the Albanian immigration of the 1990's as "knowledge for assistance". Enormous importance was given to the activities that had taken place at the same time and parallel to those of the Temporary Stay Centre, such as distributing food to the poor, or saving young women from prostitution. My role was seen in the following way - after negotiations with the director of the centre, which took place without informing the local authorities, I was granted access on the proviso that my research would be "scientific" and not journalistic, and that it would communicate to the public the "real truth" concerning the centre. In this communication and public relations activity, the director was undoubtedly the most charismatic figure. He headed a close-knit staff that was indebted to him because it was mainly made up of his own relatives and by immigrants who had passed through the structure and been regularised thanks to him. He made every management decision autonomously, in an office full of photos depicting himself together with the Pope, with the President of the Republic and with various other dignitaries. He said he wanted to follow my work with care and was always available to discuss matters but, at the same time, he restricted my movements and the modalities of my research. Don Cesare, during our meetings, had always tried to highlight his skill and experience in managing the immigrant centre, a range of qualities that he held up to justify his role and defend himself against the accusations directed towards him. On one occasion, while answering a question I asked regarding the criticisms posed by a national TV programme, he said «why doesn't somebody else come and do my job» in this way sustaining that those who criticised him, would never have been able to manage such a structure. His words were

often loaded with paternalistic rhetoric as well as with the recollection of the emergencies in Apulia, in which, in his opinion, he had always had a leading role. He sustained that the average detainee in his Centre was an unlucky person who needed help, tainted, however, by an initial mistake, and that is of having arrived in Italy illegally. As he, himself, sustained:

«The immigrant at Regina Pacis is a person who has made an initial mistake, that of having entered Italy, duped by information that has not led him or her on the right path, because whoever comes from prison, what has that person got to start with? Illegal immigration».

From this perspective, the immigrant detainee was, therefore, seen as an individual who was unaware of his condition and needing guided assistance. At the same time, he was held to be responsible for his or her “illegal immigration” and depicted as being desperate and thus ready to commit any act whatsoever to the point of self-injury or suicide.

“Inside” and “outside”

The logistic and architectural features of a Temporary Stay Centre tend to define spaces according to difference. As shown in the previous paragraph, the area that was meant for the detainees, could be defined as the contrast between the external and internal space of the institution itself (inside and outside). This relationship is posited as a difference by a whole series of real, as well as symbolic barriers – the peripheral location of the facilities, armed surveillance, high walls of enclosure, barbed wire, but also by a call to a proper adherence to regulations that have to do with the respect for the privacy of the detainees (for example, a call that justifies limiting access for research purposes). Though for a long period I entered the premises on a daily basis, the surveillance staff, who knew me well, would always ask me who I was, my personal details and the reasons for my visit, and always withheld my identity card for the duration of the visit. Therefore, if practices and conflicts concerning the relationships between the detainees, the managing staff and the surveillance police are characteristic of the “inside”, what pertains to the “outside” has to do with the institution becoming part of the territory, that is, of a specific, historical and geo-political context, but also of a whole range of discourse, which often takes place in an argumentative and partial manner, and actions that have to do with the issue of emigration-immigration at a local, as well as at a national level. In this context, the simple fact of having entered the Regina Pacis, placed me in a specific position – if the managing body had not allowed me to enter, I would not have been able to enter. I had tried to gain access to other

centres by following the bureaucratic procedures but without success. As this entry was negotiated with the institution, I was therefore, considered by the detainees as inevitably connected to the managing body. I was confused with the many figures present in the centre and the protagonists of detention practices – policemen, lawyers, psychologists – in this way instigating either mistrust or requests for assistance on the part of those who wanted to be regularised and leave the centre. From the situation described, the obstacles to the survey appear quite clear, though, in all sincerity, they were never imposed. They were implicitly injected – time spent waiting to be received by the directors of the facility or to meet the immigrants, re-scheduling of meetings, kindly requesting me not to take pictures, the consideration that some detainees were not suitable for interviewing, the police provocation – I never tried to go against these obstacles, I knew it would have been very difficult to overcome them. The construction of these obstacles was a concrete manifestation of management techniques and of the “life” of such a structure that had a direct bearing on the ethnographer. In particular, there was a gradual delineation of the “spaces” conceded to me for my research that were restricted to the area that was reserved for the managing body, namely, a long corridor that from the entrance led through to a door kept under constant watch and which led to the “internal” part of the centre, where there was the dormitory and the infirmary, to which I did not have any access. Along the corridor, which metaphorically presented itself as a kind of filter, that hid the impenetrable realities of the institution, there were the canteen and all the offices. This simple set of rooms was the central point where all the meetings took place and where the management decisions were made; where police examinations and psychoanalytic sessions were also carried out; where expulsions and transfers to other centres were organised; and where the paperwork for the new detainee arrivals was filled out (personal details, identification photographs, life history). This is where the archives were held and where the centre carried out its functions. With the help of an operator, I was able to examine a folder which contained the files with the photos and personal details of all the detainees, from which I was able to “choose” who to meet. At this point, I would like to add that I had thought a lot about whether the word “choose” was the correct word to use, and whether it was apt from an ethical point of view for the issue that I am dealing with here. In my opinion, this word perfectly represents the series of processes that in Temporary Stay Centres tends to objectify every element of the body of the detainees; processes from which, given the situation, my research has not been exempt. The detained immigrant is a number, a photo, a provenance, in some cases

just a brief report or a “life history” kept in a folder. Thus, once I had made my choice, the operator would clearly enunciate the name of the detainee over the microphone so that it could echo throughout the structure and the owner of the name would be taken by surprise without understanding the reason for the call. Often they would arrive in their pyjamas and slippers, with a look on their faces marked by disrupted sleep. From another point of view, the relationship I had on a daily basis with the supervisors was intense. They continually asked me information regarding the progress of my survey, and in underlining their complete availability to communicate, they kept saying that since I was working “freely” I would surely be able to write and bring out the “truth” about the centre. At this stage, it is therefore fundamental to clarify that the meeting between the ethnographer and the detainee was embodied in a complex network of power relationships among subjects who were placed between the “inside” and the “outside” of the institution. Being able to decode “true” information within a Temporary Stay Centre is quite a problematic exercise, which involves a continuous negotiation within the relationships described above. During the first interviews carried out with the detainees, I had started my task with the aim and the expectation of obtaining information with regards to life within the centre (testimony), but over the course of the encounters, it was more and more difficult to establish this kind of interaction. The questions I asked were turned around and became requests for help and outbursts against detention which was considered unjust by everybody without exception. The present, during the narration, was enclosed between the recollection of the past and the projection (fears, desires, expectations) for the future. This was above all evident especially when explicit enquiries were made regarding the treatment reserved for the detainees, the self-injury practices and the administration of psychotropic drugs. At times, the answers were reduced to a mere silence, sometimes the meetings were interrupted by tears induced by my questions. The action itself of the ethnographer, which was simplified by means of the interview, sometimes ran the risk of implicitly becoming part of those mechanisms typical of the institution, as a form of violence against the detainee. In this situation, it is necessary to be aware of what Veena Das (DAS V. 2000) affirms, namely, that in specific contexts of endured violence, where the presence of pain and anguish is very harsh, it does not make much sense to ask questions like “what happened?”, “What did you see?”, “What did you feel?”. In referring to the medical anthropology studies on illness narratives carried out by Good (GOOD B. 1994), Das stresses the importance of working on the narratives as fragments of stories which are still taking place, as discursive strategies that are produced in specific contexts and that tend to repro-

duce themselves by means of the integration of gestures, in an array of implicit gestures. Many of the tales of the “life stories” of immigrants in the Temporary Stay Centres, are given the benefit of the doubt (false names and origins), if they cannot be assessed as “truthful”, they are lies to the extent to which within daily and extraordinary practices (the meeting with the ethnographer), they contribute to the negotiation as well as to the production of the subjectivity of the detainee, where the context is a place of loss of personal freedom, of suffering and violence. Being aware of this, and in relation to the territorial and ethnographic context described above, it is my intention to deal with the issue of self-injury practices and suicide attempts within the Temporary Stay Centres.

“Cutting oneself” - blackmail - “medicine”

The various forms of self-injury which frequently take place are interpreted by the centre’s professionals in a very contradictory manner. During my research I had the possibility of listening to essentially four types of explanations for inflicting self-injury: 1) as an act which is a characteristic feature of Muslims, because they are “culturally equipped to deal with pain”; 2) as an impulsive act of desperation; 3) as a “childlike” form of blackmail against the operators; 4) in order to be transferred to a hospital with the intention of escaping. The Director of Regina Pacis summarised the last three points in particular, thus endorsing his own precise characterisation of the immigrant under detention. In his opinion, self-injury was a child-like act carried out by unwitting and desperate people, with the intent to blackmail. He said he responded to this behaviour with indifference, and recorded every instance of self-injury in personal file cards that he kept in a folder. He did this, he told me, in order not to have any problems, and to discourage any further acts of this nature. I think that the question of self-injury is central to an understanding of how Temporary Stay Centres carry out their functions. To illustrate my point I will discuss four different cases of self-injury that occurred in three different Temporary Stay Centres in Apulia and one in another national centre.

Case N. 1: Taken from a case that had been investigated by Medecins Sans Frontiers (MSF 2004) and reported to me by an operator at Regina Pacis who told me of a Romanian couple who arrived at Regina Pacis. Upon their arrival, the couple were immediately separated – the husband was put in the male section, and the wife in the female section. They could only see each other for an hour every day in the office area. The husband would then spend the rest of the time seated next to the door that divided the two

sections talking to his wife through a small hole in the door. Only after a few days of being detained in this way, the husband no longer able to bear the situation, cut his veins on his forearm with a razorblade, after which the couple were expelled.

Case N. 2: A story that I have been told many times during my investigations, and that I have read about in other works, concerns a young North African man, who was held in a Temporary Stay Centre in Apulia, though he had not committed any crimes; he continually requested to be set free without success. After spending a few days without anyone paying any attention to him, he decided to “cut” himself. Unable to obtain any sharp object, after weeks of searching, he decided to remove a spring from his bed that a few days later he used to cause a deep wound in his abdomen.

Case N. 3: Alberto was a 33 year old Romanian citizen with whom I had the opportunity to meet several times during his frequent conversations with the psychologist of the centre. He had an untidy appearance and always kept his hand on his belly, and he would frequently cry. In his own country, as an orphan he had often been the victim of beatings and violence. When he reached the age of 20, he decided to come to Italy. In Florence he was kept as a hostage by one of his countrymen (probably the same person who brought him to Italy). He was forced to beg and to commit petty larceny, and he was often beaten up. One day he was caught by the police while robbing in a supermarket and then arrested. After a few months of imprisonment, he was transported to the Temporary Stay Centre. He said that he was suffering inside the centre and that some of the detainees, during the night, after having “snorted the medicine” (probably psychotropic drugs taken from the infirmary) became quite violent. In all of the meetings, he would cry and repeat continuously that if he remained in the centre, someone would kill him, or he would kill himself.

Case N. 4: Salam’s story has been told by an Italian writer (ROVELLI M. 2006) and deals with a detention in a Temporary Stay Centre in Northern Italy. The Tunisian youth was taken to the consulate of his country in order to be recognised, and then, a few days later, he would have had to be put on a flight and expelled. In order to avoid the planned expulsion, Salam, as a last resort, decided to cut himself, in the hope that he would be taken to a hospital, so that he could then escape and avoid, or at least delay, his repatriation. He knew that if he missed the flight, it would have taken many days to organise another, and therefore, once the sixty day term of detention expired, he would, probably have to be set free and given a notice of expulsion that would have to be executed within five days. He cut himself on the arm, but the cut was very deep and the medical assistance

was slow to arrive - it took more than forty minutes for the ambulance to arrive and to finally take him to the hospital. Salam risked his life to obtain a transfer to the hospital. The idea that self injury practices are common among Muslims is no doubt false. In cases 1 and 3, the acts of self-injury were committed by people of various provenance. This type of explanation is based on a series of stereotypes of Islamic people, created within a well known international situation marked by the continuous reconstruction and re-invention of religious, political and national identities. As all the four cases show, self-injury or suicide attempts are behaviours that take place in situations of suffering and pain. It is, however, a relevant fact that it is very difficult to obtain sharp objects inside the Centres without the permission of the police and sometimes it may take days or even weeks. Often, as in cases 2 and 4, the act is not exclusively induced by suffering in an "impulsive" way but it is often rationalised and organised. The blackmail theory, also, seems to be fallacious, from another point of view. If it is true that many observers have witnessed self injury cases that had the aim of acquiring a transfer from the centre to a hospital, or to delay the expulsion process as in case 4, it is also important to consider that blackmail implies that the blackmailer is in a position of power and that certainly is not the case of the immigrants. Furthermore, the immigrant would tend to use his position as a potential threat, without actually accomplishing the act itself. At the very most, we could speak of a kind of technique. The case studies of self-injury inside the centres is however extremely varied, as I have tried to show in the 4 cases and relative explanations, and it may be misleading to try to objectify this kind of behaviour. Within an articulated variability of biographies, provenance, ways of accomplishing the act - what is common among these subjects is that they are all forced into situations of violence and the limitation of personal freedom. As sustained by Paul Farmer, in referring to the connections between suffering and structural violence - «What these victims, from the past to the present, share, aren't personal or psychological attributes - they don't share culture, language or race. What they share is, rather the experience of occupying the bottom rung of the social ladder in an unequal society» (FARMER P. 2003: 31). Therefore, acts of self-injury in the Temporary Stay Centres can be seen as a form of embodiment of the malaise and suffering characteristic of detention, but also in relation to the complex array of contexts in which they occur and to the set of dynamic factors that influence their various forms of manifestations. They can be the subject of new complementary considerations. From this point of view it may be worth making some further considerations on the above-mentioned use of psychotropic drugs administered by the operators of the Centre to the detainees. This relationship

between corporal practices entrenched in suffering, and the process of medicalisation that has the aim of controlling, is of vital importance in understanding what Temporary Stay Centres actually do and how they manage migratory phenomena.

Embodying Temporary Stay Centres

Although every structure should be able to supply health assistance to the detainees, a very frequent procedure is that of bringing those who are considered “agitated” to the Mental Health centres of the nearby towns, in order to subject them to psychiatric visits and in many cases, they are given pharmacological treatment. As referred to me by a doctor of a Mental Health centre in an Apulian city, it is very difficult to visit this type of patient, because the “agitated” immigrant is escorted under custody, handcuffed and guarded for the whole duration of the visit, after which he is taken back to the centre. I would like to reconstruct this relationship among institutions by using the editing technique in order to compare two distinct but correlated experiences, undergone by two psychiatrists, one as a doctor in a Mental Health centre, the other as an inspector in a Stay Centre. Doctor Rossi, who works in the Mental health centre of the hospital unit of Brindisi in Apulia, told me he had dealt with many different cases of immigrants taken from the Temporary Stay Centre of the same city:

«They phone us when they have a particular case they cannot manage independently. In the majority of cases these are people from prison experiences (...) therefore after a period of time in prison they are sent to the Temporary Stay Centre. During these months they have to be managed by the Stay centre and, in some cases, since many of them, who come from prison are already undergoing pharmacological treatment, and take specific medicines, they need to be seen by us in order to improve the treatment or change it completely».

The doctor continues by underlining the particular connection that exists between the prison system of administering psychotropic drugs and the one used in the Stay Centre:

«We discovered that Rivotril is commonly used in jail as a sedative. Rivotril is a benzodiazepine that we rarely use because it is a drug used by neurologists to keep epileptic symptoms under control. Let's say that it's a strong sedative. Therefore a lot of people were brought to us who had already strong withdrawal symptoms because they couldn't manage this habit, this addiction to the medicine. When the patients were brought in, I tried to convince them to replace this type of therapy with a milder and less proble-

matic treatment, because most of them showed symptoms of depression and aggressiveness which was self-directed or directed towards others».

Some years before recording this interview, Doctor Canosa was carrying out an inspection visit at the same Temporary Stay Centre that Doctor Rossi had talked about, and he wrote a report which can be found on the internet:

«90% of the detainees take psychotropic drugs. (...) the operators admit that foreigners frequently commit self-injury acts, but they are unable to specify the quantity. The majority of operators, affirm that the “guests” have feelings of anger that doctors try to treat with psychotropic drugs, others sustain that self-injury is a way of being hospitalised in order to attempt to escape (...) [In the ambulatory] there are large quantities of anxiolytic drugs (benzodiazepines such as Valium, Rivotril, Minias, EN), but also neuroleptic medicines (Nozinan) that are used to treat psychosis and Farganese, an obsolete antipsychotic drug which has a highly sedative effect (...)».

The administration of psychotropic drugs and practices of self-injury reported by both doctors under detention conditions and meant for the detainees. Doctor Rossi:

«Therefore, there are many people that have unwillingly accepted the centre’s coercive approach, where detainees are kept in a sort of prison, with very few facilities and very little recreational or occupational possibilities. They are kept in quarantine, awaiting an uncertain future. Actually some of them had already been quite well settled in jobs and family situations. I dealt with people who were desperate because they had left their partner or their child in a more or less acceptable situation and they had been uprooted and brought to the centre. Generally they hurt themselves, they cut themselves, this is the characteristic that distinguishes them and at the same time makes them different from the patients we usually have to deal with».

DOCTOR CANOSA: «The detainees eat on the floor or on beds (...) there are six toilets for are about 60 beds. Some of these toilets are without doors (...) the walls of the rooms, but especially those of the corridors, are dirty, flaking, often covered with illegible writing (...) the Temporary Stay Centre reproduces all the characteristics of the “total” institution – isolation from the external world, lack of privacy, that puts a strain on the sense of personal identity, a kind of concentration camp life that annuls a person’s individuality, a violation of the body (physiological needs carried out in public), eating meals on the floor like animals, being constantly observed and watched over in enclosures out in the open like monkeys in a zoo, basically living in conditions similar to those of prison or mental asylums, which not only damage human dignity, but also induce reactions of frustration and anger, and which are at the basis of mental disorders, acts of self-injury and episodes of violence».

The administration of particularly sedative psychotropic drugs as a type of medicalisation and control? Self-injury practices as a process of embodi-

ment of detention? What are the possible reactions to this? Detention conditions as the basis of mental disorders and acts of self-injury? Dynamics that are mutually connected and directly played out on the detainee's body being the result of power relations beyond the walls of the centre, produced by political, historical and socio-cultural decisions. Relationships that lead one to reconsider the notion of embodiment not exclusively as a function pertaining to an anthropological object of study, but from a theoretical-ethnographic perspective along the lines of what Thomas Csordas suggests (CSORDAS T. 1990). From this point of view, the relationship between self-injury practices and the administration of highly sedative psychotropic drugs, is presented as a real and substantial praxis of detention: a constant interchange between the lived body and the provisions of an organisational action produced by the institution. An interaction that is expressed in terms of a «“perception” but also in terms of “evaluation” and ‘action’ marking agentivity, namely the acting capacity of people» (PIZZA G. 2005) at a conscious as well as at an unconscious level. A path that, I believe, contributes to the building or to the re-negotiation of the *habitus* of the “irregular immigrant” who is thus detained, which, according to the notion used by Pierre Bourdieu is decoded as a practice that is at the same time structured and structuring.

Conclusions

The immigrants arriving today in Europe or in “developed” countries, as external bodies in somebody else's territory, are defined and considered through the thought categories typical of the country they immigrate into (GREEN S. 1998, SAYAD A. 1999). It is commonly held in socio-anthropological analysis (ANDERSON B. 1983, APPADURAI A. 1996, BENDER B. - WINER M. 2001) that the State-Nation founds its territorial sovereignty on the relationship between nativity and nationality, by means of the constant production of narration, landscape, social imagination, through a never-ending construction of the *US* community, that is strongly rooted in the intimacy of the social subjects, by means of what Michael Herzfeld has defined «structural nostalgia» (HERZFELD M. 1997), in contrast to an external alterity or internal anomalies, which one absorbs or from which one differentiates oneself or from which one needs to protect oneself. The immigrant finds himself in this state of affairs – it is in this space that his social definition and the treatment he is going to receive are generated. As shown by recent ethnographic studies, which emphasise the critical-political aspect rather than ethnical-cultural approach (DE GENOVA N. 2002, 2005, FASSIN D. 2001,

2005, ONG A. 2003), the State establishes the entry and insertion modalities of foreign immigrants, not only through government choices and administrative procedures, but also by elaborating classification categories relative to morals, "race", gender, religion, work, health. In this way the possibility of citizenship for new arrivals is negotiated. A recent and extensive review of ethnographic studies on contemporary transnational migrations clearly shows the innovative elements that have emerged in the research field in relation to the question of the what is called "clandestine" or "illegal" immigration. Various ethnographies tend to shift the research focus of national policies in relation to immigration, towards citizenship rights and their negotiation. At the same time, they do not consider the size of the "illegality" or "clandestinity" in itself, but rather the series of problematic issues it raises. From an ethnographic point of view, according to the positions expressed by the anthropologist Nicholas De Genova, "illegality" therefore appears as a theoretical, epistemological and political issue (DE GENOVA N. 2002). The question of the "illegality" of immigration is no longer considered as the point from which to start and not only in relation to its consequences. It becomes the object of accounts that reconstruct, by means of a strict ethnographic and historical methodology, those political, cultural, bureaucratic processes of rendering "legal" the "illegality" of the immigrant. Such an ethnographic approach makes it possible to understand how rights and in particular citizenship are negotiated, especially in the current historical phase, which is characterised by government choices, that are strongly conditioned by security policies and the "war against terrorism" (DE GENOVA N. 2002, MINELLI M. - PIZZA G. 2004, ONG A. 2003). Within this framework, the Temporary Stay Centres are characteristic features that are used as tools by the Italian government to control immigration to the point of becoming a fundamental step in the personal history of many immigrants, as an experience or threat in the twofold function, instrumental and symbolic, that is performed by each of these facilities. If on the one hand, they are vectors of government power, on the other they tend to materially symbolise the division between "legal" and "illegal" immigrants, thus making this division visible and evident. Such considerations should be read in relation to a presumed uselessness of these facilities (MIRAGLIA F. 2007). According to estimates of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, in 2004, 70% of immigrants were not expelled, but after having undergone sixty days of this type of detention, they remained in Italy "illegally" with an expulsion order to be respected within five days. According to the data published in 2006 by the De Mistura Ministerial commission this fact changes only by a few percentage points. In actuality, the Temporary Stay Centres are management techniques that as a set of

institutionalised (or non) practices, directly manipulate the body of the immigrant, thus contributing by means of this manipulation, to the production and negotiation of categories of the “legality” and “illegality” of the immigrant, categories by which they justify their function.

[translated from the Italian by Paul Dominici]

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