LIFE AFTER THE BOAT: UNDERSTANDING THE NEEDS OF REFUGEES LIVING IN SECOND RECEPTION CENTERS IN SICILY

by

RUSSELL RICE MANZANO
B.A. University of Alabama

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Major Professor: Joanna Mishtal
ABSTRACT

Migration to Italy has drastically increased, with thousands of refugees traveling by sea to Sicily every month. International refugee policy is largely managed through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and although it attempts to regulate refugee assistance, immigration policy within the European Union is complex and continuously fluctuating. Upon arrival in Sicily, authorities send refugees to first reception centers, and then transfer them to second reception centers operated by local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). The implementation of Italian immigration policy varies among regions; resettlement agencies often transfer refugees among centers where they receive different economic assistance, thus creating further harm to this marginalized population. While there is abundant scholarship regarding refugee resettlement, there is little anthropological research concerning the conditions of second reception centers for refugees in the specific geopolitical region of Siracusa, Sicily. Further, little is known about centers for unaccompanied minors, and due to the increasing number of minors arriving in Italy, additional anthropological research is critical in understanding the conditions of second reception centers for children in Sicily.

I conducted ethnographic research in 2015 and 2016 at six refugee centers in Siracusa: three for unaccompanied minors, two for adults, and one for men, women, and children. In this thesis, I explore the perceptions of refugees concerning the treatment and services that they receive at second reception centers after arriving in Italy. I examine how resettlement policies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) shape refugees’ experiences in transitioning within Sicilian society, arguing that certain policies and NGO practices restrict refugees’ socioeconomic mobility. Specifically, this project aims to answer the following research questions:
• What challenges do refugees face after arriving at reception and resettlement centers in Sicily?
• How do current migration policies affect newly arrived refugees and asylum seekers?

I argue that current policies, and their implementation, place refugees in circumstances that restrict their socioeconomic mobility, keeping them in impoverished conditions. The effectiveness of humanitarian aid is important to understand, not only within anthropology, but also concerning refugee policy to identify ineffective practices, as well as successful non-governmental practices for assisting refugees. Through ethnographic analysis, this research will deepen the understanding of the effects refugee policy creates in the lives of refugees in Sicily; therefore, contributing to scholarship of how policy can prevent future harm to refugees after they arrive to Italy.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

I don’t know this interview, the place where you share this interview, so I want you to know and I want you to write everything… so those people who help the refugees know that we need too much. Because you never put their life in the dangerous sea if [you] don’t have a reason. Because this sea, it is 50/50 because you can die or you can survive. But one thing I want to tell you is that we need help, we are tired, we need too much help. So, what I want to tell you my sister, life is not easy—when you see a refugee, salute that refugee. A person that leaves their country, it is not easy [and] we are suffering. If you can [write] ten books you can never finish the story [of a refugee].

Elijah, a 16-year-old boy from Ghana who I quote above, is one of thousands of refugees who fled their homes and crossed the Mediterranean Sea for Italy. The number of refugees and migrants like Elijah fleeing Africa and the Middle East due to the escalation of conflict in these regions has increased dramatically in recent years, with thousands arriving in Italy by sea every month. In 2015 alone, over one million refugees and migrants arrived in Europe by boat, and over 3,700 drowned at sea (UNHCR 2015). By July of 2016 approximately, 93,774 refugees and migrants arrived in Italy by sea (UNHCR 2016). The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) called for further support from European Union (EU) Member states, specifically in regards to entry points, to effectively assist receiving countries in screening, relocating, and resettling refugees. However, as greater numbers of refugees attempt to flee to Europe, countries within the EU are beginning to increase border control efforts and decrease the number of refugees accepted within their respective countries (UNHCR 2016).
According to the Transnational Observatory for Refugee's Resettlement in Europe (TORRE) (2014b), the Italian Coast Guard rescues thousands from defunct boats every year, and from there refugees are typically taken to first reception centers where they receive medical care, clothing, and food. Once the Italian government grants refugees the opportunity to request asylum, they are then sent to small second reception centers operated by local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). However, these NGOs are largely unregulated by the state, and little is known about the challenges that migrants and refugees face after their placement in these centers.

Based on ethnographic research conducted in 2015 and 2016, I examine the experiences of refugees living at six local second reception centers in Siracusa, Italy. Specifically, I address two main research questions. First, I examine the challenges refugees face after arriving to reception and resettlement centers in Siracusa, Sicily. Second, I explore current migration policies and NGO practices to determine how they affect refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants. I examine how local NGOs operate second reception centers, and how their practices shape refugees’ experiences. These practices and experiences are contextualized within larger policies that influence organizations’ approaches to managing aid to refugees. I argue in this thesis that the humanitarian aid system for refugees in Siracusa is not only complicated, but contradictory: informal NGO practices often circumvent the guidelines for national and international refugee policy, and prevalent inefficiencies, shortages, and corruption adversely affect refugees who receive services from second reception centers. This research shows that refugee centers seldom meet the needs of refugees nor facilitate their integration into society. Thus, many refugee centers and NGOs restrict the socioeconomic mobility of refugees and place them in a liminal state where they must wait for legal documents and basic humanitarian aid services. This
research contributes to a deeper understanding of the experiences of refugees after they arrive in their host countries and the humanitarian aid organizations that assist refugees.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Identifying as a Refugee

When analyzing refugee experiences in Siracusa, it is useful to first consider the terminology used to identify refugees, as well as the historical and political differences between refugees and migrants because many individuals arriving in Sicily are not considered refugees. Political scientists Zolberg, and Suhrke, and Aguayo (1989) examined the historical and political context for the classification of a refugee, specifically after World War II when Europe produced approximately 30 million refugees, thereby creating an international response to attempt to resettle the refugees. Subsequently, these states determined that specific guidelines should be established to identify who is in the most need of asylum and international aid (Zolberg, Suhrke, and Aguayo 1989). Thus, in 1949, the United Nations (UN) created the Office of the United Nations Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to operate as a legal and service advocate for refugees across the world. Since beginning operations in 1951, the UNHCR Refugee Convention defines a refugee as someone who, "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, social group or political opinion," is outside their home country and unable to return (UNHCR 2011). The United States and 25 other countries participated in the convention, thus creating an international law that protects people fleeing from oppressive governments, war, and other forms of persecution. Therefore, refugee status distinguishes individuals from “migrants” who may flee poverty, violence, or famine, but do not qualify for international protection based on the definition outlined above.

Anthropologists and other scholars examining the legal definition of a refugee show how these classifications significantly affect refugees. Anthropologist Liisa Malkki (1992, 35), for example, argues that Burundian refugees in Tanzania value “refugee-ness” because it legitimizes
their claims for international protection. This observation is also relevant in Italy where such discourses function to validate refugees’ reasons for fleeing their home countries, both legally and within the public perception. Many refugees in Siracusa wait years to obtain official refugee status—an experience that augments the value of the term due to the long waiting periods. During this time, refugees must tell their stories about why they fled their homes and could not return multiple times. For example, anthropologist Cristiana Giordano (2014) explains how refugees are expected to reduce their experiences to specific narratives to prove the need for international protection. Accordingly, refugees in Siracusa must tell these narratives to aid workers when they apply for international protection.

Migration Patterns and Assistance for Refugees

Italy was a country of emigration until the 1970s, and as sociologist Victoria Chell-Robinson (2000) states, immigration in Italy has increased due to its proximity to North Africa, historically lax immigration laws, and colonial heritage in Africa. According to the National Statistical Yearbooks: SOPEMI reports, estimates of immigrants living in Italy rose from 147,000 in 1970, to 781,100 in 1990 (Chell-Robinson 2000). However, this number has drastically increased in recent years. The United Nations Statistical Division shows that 4,803,567 immigrants resided in Italy in 2011, and the International Migration Outlook for 2015 reports that 5,696,000 immigrants resided in Italy in 2013. The UNHCR reports that the total “population of concern,” which includes refugees, asylum seekers, and stateless persons, in Italy for 2014 was 140,277 individuals.
Assistance for refugees is often influenced by various factors that create challenges for refugees as they adjust to life in the new country, including Italy. Anthropologists Seth Holmes and Heide Castañeda (2016) argue, for example, that one of these challenges involves the way in which a refugee’s “deservingness” of humanitarian aid is represented and judged based on their country of origin. They show that Syrian refugees in Germany are viewed as more deserving than those from African countries, yet are still considered threatening to the European way of life due to xenophobia and fears of terrorism. Research also shows that local NGO practices often contribute to refugees’ marginalization. Anthropologist Barbara Smith (2008), for instance, documents the conditions of refugee resettlement programs for Kurdish migrants in Greece, noting that there is little assistance for refugees or migrants. This meager support stands typically in stark contrast to the expectations of refugees who often assume that their economic status will remain the same and feel that they are entitled to certain services and economic assistance by host countries (Stein 1981). In his analysis of the relationship between refugees and Italian social workers, Anthropologist Roberto Beneduce (2008) argues that, even when refugees do receive social services, they are often ineffective or even harmful, as many health and social workers overlook refugees’ political and social backgrounds and see them as manipulative “others” instead of people in need.

Community Building

Research also illustrates how refugees often experience physical and social isolation in the host community. In Norway, for example, Tamil refugees’ main obstacles to resettlement are cultural differences and loss of social ties resulting from their socially separate position in the local community (Grønseth 2001). Similar to the situation in Siracusa, the rebuilding of
community, both within and separate from the local culture, Anthropologist Anne Grønseth argues, is critical to the successful integration of refugees into the host society. As anthropologist Faith Warner’s (2007) analysis of concepts of community among refugee women in Mexico demonstrates, individuals with larger support networks have less stress and better health. Yet such support networks are challenging for many new migrants to re-create, as strong ties to the country of origin often hinder the creation of new networks because refugees may not become involved with the local community (Chell-Robinson 2000). However, according to historian Egon Kunz (1981), finding communities that share their language and culture, however, makes integration into the new society easier.

**Gender and Ethnicity**

Sociologists Floya Anthias and Gabriella Lazaridis (2000) call for an analysis of gender roles in migration studies, claiming that women were previously viewed as dependents traveling with their husbands. Anthias and Lazaridis (2000) show that women migrants in Italy often face greater difficulties than male migrants with regards to their economic position in society; many women work in domestic jobs, and there have been recent increases in sex trafficking. Similarly, in Siracusa, many women refugees encounter challenges resulting from employment and childcare, and often resort to prostitution for financial support. Further, Anthias and Lazaridis (2000) show that the ethnicity of women migrants in southern Europe determines their economic and social position within society. For example, in Siracusa, black women from Nigeria reported that they experienced greater discrimination than brown women from Somalia. While many Sicilians have begun to accept refugees and migrants from North African countries such as
Tunisia, Egypt, and Somalia, ethnic groups from sub-Saharan Africa are still viewed as “the other” by many Italians.

Policy

International Policy

In addition to scholarship about experiences of refugees and local level dynamics, it is also important to consider policy literature to determine how policies impact the experiences of refugees. International refugee policy is largely managed through the UNHCR, which, among other roles, creates international refugee camps, designates refugee status, and provides monetary assistance to countries that receive refugees. Although the UNHCR attempts to monitor and regulate refugee assistance, immigration policy within the EU is continuously fluctuating. Legal scholar Roland Bank (2014) explained that the EU and The Council of Europe (CoE), created after World War II to establish universal human rights laws, provides the regulations for human rights and migration laws within the EU. Immigration within the EU is regulated by the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) consisting of EU member states, as well as those outside the EU, an agency that is interconnected with the CoE regarding asylum procedures (Bank 2014). In 1999, the Treaty of Amsterdam redirected European asylum policy, and attempted to unify asylum procedures, but the UNHCR found discrepancies in the implementation of EU immigration laws, partly due to vague policies that leave certain asylum procedures to the discretion of the state (Bank 2014). In these cases, other local legal systems and policies direct asylum procedures that regulate the criteria for refugee and humanitarian
protection. (Bank 2014). Refugee policy is no different in Siracusa; local policies and practices often vary greatly from those in other cities and regions in Italy.

As the number of refugees and migrants continues to increase, “border countries” within the EU often take the majority of refugees (EU 2016). These countries, such as Italy and Greece on the Southern EU border, often have a weaker economy than countries in Northern Europe, as well as inadequate infrastructure to assist large numbers of refugees (UNHCR 2016). However, according to an EU immigration law, the 2013 Dublin Regulation III, refugees must remain in the country in which they first filed for asylum. Therefore, most refugees remain in poor and overcrowded conditions in border states. Holmes and Castañeda (2016) analyze this policy that requires refugees to claim their status in their country of first arrival, noting that Germany recently exempted Syrian refugees from their immigration policy. Similarly, refugees in Siracusa cannot leave Italy to travel to northern European countries with stronger economies, and if they do, they risk deportation back to Italy.

*Italian Immigration Law*

Italy did not create its first law on immigration until 1986, Law no. 943, which gave amnesty to undocumented immigrants in Italy (Chell-Robinson 2000). In 1989, Italy passed the Martelli Law, which reformed much of the asylum procedure in Italy, and required the creation of reception centers for refugees (Chell-Robinson 2000, Von Gunten et al. 2011). However, Chell-Robinson notes that three years after the Martelli Law passed, only two reception centers were open in Italy, both in Rome. Italy created a new asylum status to include “asylum for humanitarian reasons” which allowed for the protection of those not fleeing political persecution (Chell-Robinson 2000). However, in 2002, the Bossi-Fini Law aimed to restrict immigration; it
established Territorial Commissions to determine refugee status, gave Italy the right to send back migrants found in international waters, and created other measures to tighten immigration and asylum procedures (MAECI 2015). In 2009, the government passed the Security Set 94 law, which criminalized illegal immigration, and increased the amount of time that the government holds undocumented immigrants before deportation to six months (Woodward 2009).

Although refugees often face overcrowded conditions, and often wait extended lengths of time for legal status, large groups continue to travel to Italy by boat. In 2013, the Italian Government created the Mare Nostrum Operation, in an attempt to reduce deaths at sea; since its implementation, the Operation rescued over 100,000 refugees and migrants (UNHCR 2015). However, the Operation ended in 2014 and was replaced by the European border control agency Triton, which has no mandate to rescue refugees and migrants at sea. Rather, its policies are based on the assumption that rescue operations would encourage more migrants to attempt to cross the Mediterranean (Crawley and Sigona 2016).

_Resettlement Programs_

The structure of resettlement programs is important to consider in this research because it aids in the examination of the direct impact of NGO practices on refugees. According to the Transnational Observatory for Refugee Resettlement in Europe (TORRE) Italy decentralized its asylum and refugee program in 2001, and designated NGOs to facilitate refugees’ needs. Accordingly, there are various types of centers and organizations that house and assist refugees and asylum seekers. Upon first arrival, authorities take fingerprints and photographs of asylum seekers per the Dublin Regulation. They are then sent to the Territorial Commission for the Recognition of International Protection, where they tell their account of how they fled their
country to Italian and UNHCR authorities, and officially begin the asylum procedure (TORRE 2014b). Refugees may obtain three different legal forms of status, which include asylum, subsidiary protection, or humanitarian protection (TORRE 2014b). If asylum seekers are recognized under the protection of the Geneva Convention, they are granted refugee status and a five year permit to remain in Italy; both subsidiary protection and humanitarian protection are given to individuals who do not meet the Geneva Convention requirements, but have a well-founded fear of oppressive conditions in their home country and reasons not to return home (TORRE 2014b).

Asylum-seekers in Italy are housed at reception centers known as First Aide Reception Centers (CPSA), Reception Centers (CDA), and Accommodation Centers for Asylum Seekers (CARA) while they receive medical care and await registration and reception procedures (Von Gunten et al. 2011, TORRE 2014a). After leaving first reception centers many refugees are sent to NGOs for resettlement and integration assistance. Anthropologists Adam Kersch and Joanna Mishtal (2016) argue that problems with migrant reception also occur in Siracusa, where reception centers marginalize refugees and migrants by providing inadequate services and keeping them in first reception centers for months that are only designed to house individuals for 72 hours. Thus, when refugees arrive to second reception centers, they already received inadequate care and extended waiting periods in first reception centers.

In 2002, the Italian government created a network of NGOs providing services to refugees and asylum-seekers called The System for the Protection of Asylum Seekers and Refugees (SPRAR), which receives funds from the Interior Ministry program and the National Fund for Asylum Policies and Services (SPRAR 2016). Individuals living at SPRAR centers vary in legal status, including those who have applied for asylum, and people who have already
received refugee status (TORRE 2014a). However, SPRAR is not able to provide adequate assistance for refugees due to the increasing number of asylum-seekers; larger numbers of refugees leave first reception centers than the number of organizations that can accommodate them (Von Gunten et al. 2011). In 2010, NGOs within the SPRAR network provided assistance to 6,855 refugees (5,209 men and 1,646 women) (SPRAR 2016). Additionally, the Italian refugee program also has Multi-functional Centers, and Civil Protection Centers that assist programs during times of emergency and large flows of migrants and asylum seekers (TORRE 2014a). However, not all refugees and asylum-seekers are accepted into the SPRAR network due to the small size of the program and the increasing number of refugees, and many are left without government assistance. Since 2013, a growing number of refugees moved into the abandoned Olympic Village in Turin, demonstrating the lack of adequate resettlement assistance (Rankin 2016).

While many migrants are eventually sent back to their home country, Italian immigration policy shows specific regard for “vulnerable populations,” including families and single women, by advising authorities to refrain from sending these populations back (Von Gunten et al. 2011). The analysis presented in this thesis is mainly based on data collected at these second reception SPRAR centers.

Theoretical Considerations

Three theoretical concepts developed in anthropology and other social sciences are particularly relevant to this research, namely political economy, liminality, and structural violence. I will discuss these concepts, and how they relate to refugees in Siracusa below.
Political Economy

The theoretical concept of political economy is important to the examination of refugee resettlement because it contextualizes the experiences of refugees. According to anthropologist William Roseberry (1988, 163), political economy attempts to “see local communities as products of centuries of social, political, economic, and cultural processes and in the sense that it is understood those processes in global terms.” In the case of refugee resettlement in Siracusa, the examination of historical and political processes throughout Europe is crucial to understanding the culture and subjectivities of refugees because it provides depth to the anthropological analysis of the issues affecting refugees. As social scientist Philip Marfleet (2006) describes, after World War II, refugees and migrants began traveling longer distances to countries in Europe and North America due to government and corporate systems of chain migration to establish low wage labor flows. Marfleet argued that globalization theories relating to refugees fail to examine the true impact of a “globalized” world that results in prosperity for some and poverty for others. Although increased poverty is not the only factor in displacement, it is associated with political and social instability (Marfleet 2006). This is particularly true for many of the informants in this study who fled conflict in regions with extreme poverty and food shortages. The consolidation of wealth and power of states in the Global North due to the uneven flow of capital exacerbates global disparities (Marfleet 2006). For example, many refugees and migrants are not only victims of persecution and war, but also victims of the global economic system that perpetuates poverty and instability in sub-Saharan African countries.
Liminality

The concept of liminality is important to consider to understand refugees’ experiences in Siracusa. Anthropologist Victor Turner (1969, 95) described liminality as a phase in rituals where individuals are “neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremony.” As Turner explains, those in the liminal phase occupy a state of uncertainty, one where elements of culture may move outside of what is considered normal within the society. Anthropologist Roberto Beneduce (2008, 512) relates liminality to refugees, explaining that refugees are “inside and outside the world at the same time.” During this phase refugees have very few social attributes and become external from society (Malkki 1995, 9). As I describe in Chapter Six, refugees in Siracusa experience extended waiting periods for legal status, documents, and employment, placing them in a liminal state where they are not able to fully integrate into the local culture. Similarly, anthropologist Carol Mortland (1987) found that while refugees expect their socioeconomic status to change once they arrive to the United States, they remain in a liminal stage even after resettlement due to language and job skills. The concept of liminality and extended waiting periods for refugees also affects refugees living in Siracusa because they are between refugee and citizen, as well as cultures. This hinders their ability to integrate into the local community in Siracusa.

Structural Violence

Structural violence also affects refugees after they arrive to host countries. Anthropologist Paul Farmer (1996, 12) argues that large scale social and economic forces create suffering that is “structured by historically given (and often economically driven) processes and forces that conspire… to constrain agency.” Anthropologist Peter Van Arsdale (2006) discusses
Farmer’s theory on structural violence, stating that it operates under the premise that structures within society produce inequalities that are legitimized by elites, and that create oppressive conditions. Structural violence, interconnected with structural inequality, appears in the form of everyday issues faced by the oppressed, creating suffering for those with the least power. Push factors that drive many refugees to flee are the result of suffering, or the fear of suffering, in the form of persecution (Van Arsdale 2006). However, once refugees flee one system of structural violence, they may also face other oppressive systems within the receiving country. For example, anthropologists Anders and Lester (2013) examine structural violence in the United States created by refugee resettlement policies within government institutions as well as nonprofit organizations that provide resettlement services. They found that Burundian refugees are placed at an economic disadvantage due to programs that limit the number of months they can receive assistance as well as inadequate financial assistance (Anders and Lester 2013). Refugees in Siracusa face similar systems of structural violence due to inconsistencies in government and NGO economic and social support systems. Despite the categorization of refugees as a population in need of humanitarian assistance, many refugees are not provided assistance in ways that can truly help them. Rather, socioeconomic inequalities continue to marginalize refugees in host countries (Van Arsdale 2006).

Gaps in the Literature

While refugee scholarship is substantial and growing, further research on the subject of refugee resettlement is necessary to examine how refugees experience acceptance in their new country, and how they navigate the culture of the host country after their arrival. Specifically, further research is necessary in the geopolitical region Sicily due to the increasing numbers of
refugees and migrants arriving in Italy by sea. Furthermore, resettlement within Italy and the EU needs to be examined to determine the abilities of states to adequately resettle the thousands of refugees arriving to Europe, and how they are integrated into society. This research builds upon the existing refugee scholarship in Sicily by expanding the knowledge concerning the challenges and conditions for refugees in second reception centers after their arrival in Siracusa.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

In this chapter I explain my methods for data collection and analysis. I also describe the participants in this study and my field sites.

Data Collection

This research examines the needs of refugees after they arrive at second reception centers and how immigration policies affect refugees and migrants in Siracusa. Based on current scholarship and preliminary research, I developed two research questions for this research:

• RQ1. What challenges do refugees face after arriving at reception and resettlement centers in Sicily?

• RQ2. How do current migration policies affect newly arrived refugees and asylum seekers?

I conducted ethnographic fieldwork over the course of three months in six second reception centers for refugees in Siracusa in 2015 and 2016. This research also focuses on the Siracusa Centro per i Rifugiati (SCR), an organization in Siracusa that promotes dialogue about the issues affecting immigrants and refugees. SCR works closely with the five of the six centers, and provides programs that help refugees and migrants. I conducted informal and semi-structured interviews with 43 refugees, 6 migrants, and 14 NGO workers. Refugees’ origin countries include Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria, Mali, Senegal, Liberia, Egypt, Somalia, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Most refugee participants were unaccompanied minors. However, some were single adult women or men. Participants’ ages ranged from 14 to 65. The Internal Review Board at the University of Central Florida approved this study’s ethics procedures. For their protection, I assigned pseudonyms to all participants unless they requested that their real names to be used.
This research also benefited from a trusted “gate-keeper” (Fetterman 2010) and key informant, the president of SCR and a local immigration activist, with whom I established a professional relationship during a previous visit to Sicily in 2010.

I collected data through participant observation and semi-structured interviews. Ethnographer David Fetterman (2010) states that participant observation is necessary for effective fieldwork because it allows the ethnographer to participate in people’s daily lives to accurately observe and record data. Therefore, I utilized participant observation and maintained detailed fieldnotes throughout this research. Additionally, I interviewed approximately 40 informants. The length of interviews ranged from 30 minutes to two hours. The interviews were conducted mainly in English, but also in Italian; three interviews were conducted in Arabic with the assistance of a translator. I directed interviews through the use of an interview guide, with semi-structured and open ended questions, so that I could obtain reliable qualitative data (Bernard 2006). I used an audio recorder when a participant gave consent. However, some individuals preferred that their interviews not be audio recorded for fear of reprisal. In these cases, I handwrote their responses as close to verbatim as possible. Locations for interviews included the NGOs, as well a local park and café near the city center to ensure informants were not identified as talking to an “outsider,” and to ensure confidentiality. The informants chose the locations for each interview. After I completed the transcription of an interview, I deleted the audio recording. I saved the interview transcription in a password protected file in a password protected laptop to which only I have access.
**Sampling**

Informants were refugees and migrants living in Sicily, and NGO workers. I recruited informants through personal introductions as well as participant observation. According to Fetterman (2010), a strong introduction is highly beneficial because it strengthens an ethnographer’s ability to conduct research in a community, creating more accurate data. Therefore, I relied on the introduction to the research sites from my gate-keeper and key informant in Siracusa, who is a trusted member of the community and an advocate for refugees and migrants.

I also met individuals while conducting participant observation at each center, as well on buses and at a local park. I circulated flyers that provided a basic explanation of the research and my contact information. Initially, I used the “big-net” approach of interacting with as many individuals as possible to obtain general information and then theoretical sampling to select individuals for the study based on my research questions (Fetterman 2010). After establishing rapport and a basic level of trust, I explained my research with individuals in further detail to screen for eligibility. I then invited selected informants to participate in interviews and proceeded with the full consenting process. I also provided a detailed written explanation of the research and consent process to informants before the interview.

**Research Sites**

The six reception centers included three centers for unaccompanied minor boys, a center for women and children, a center for men, and a center for men, women, and children. My key informant gave me permission to conduct research through his organization, Centre Belvedere (adult men), Vento (adult women), and the three centers for unaccompanied minors: Paradise,
Liberation, and La Vita è Bella. His work contracts with the organizations allow him to bring outside volunteers and researchers as long as he notified the director.

Access for conducting this research at the three centers for minors was easily obtained; after my initial introduction from my key informant, each center gave me permission to visit the boys at any time. I obtained prior permission to conduct research at the two centers for adults, which were managed by the same NGO. However, when I first arrived, the managers at Centre Belvedere and Vento were reluctant to allow me to have full access to the centers, and I had to further negotiate with the managers. The sixth center, The Garden, is located in a deserted city two hours north of Siracusa. This site was included in this project based on recommendations of the refugees living at Vento because they told me that the conditions there were deplorable; some of the women had been transferred from The Garden, or knew refugees who lived there. This center was gated and heavily guarded by the military. Therefore, rather than seeking clearance to conduct research there, I recruited refugees from this center while traveling from Siracusa to the town on the intercity bus, or at the bus station near the center.

Data Analysis

Interview audio recordings were transcribed verbatim and then coded and analyzed along with the fieldnotes for key themes and sub-themes, which provide the organizational framework for the findings presented in the following chapters. Using Microsoft Word and handwritten notes, I coded transcripts and field notes using both predetermined codes and codes that emerged from patterns in the data after I began the analysis (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011). During the coding process, I maintained a codebook to list and define these predetermined and emergent codes (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011). Additionally, I used triangulation to help understand any
differences in the narratives of refugees who live at the same center, as well as the NGO workers at their respective centers (Fetterman 2010). Throughout fieldwork and data analysis, I utilized reflexive writing to determine my own biases, if any, that might affect the data collection and analysis.

**Reflexivity**

In this section, I will examine my own biases and subjectivity as I began my research, and throughout my fieldwork. As anthropologists, we must consider our possible biases and subjectivities, and how they may impact abilities to do fieldwork and interpret data. First, my nationality and ethnicity almost always made me stand out, either as a topic of interest or contention. My informants would often inquire about life in the United States, what city I was from, and the landscape, making my nationality a means to begin conversation. I would often sit with one of the boys while we showed each other pictures on our phones of our home cities. However, it also negatively impacted my ability to conduct fieldwork based on refugees’ prior experiences with Americans. For example, one woman explained to me that she did not want to talk to me because Americans, like me, come and want to hear what happened to them, but never do anything to benefit them. As a woman, my gender often played a complex role in my fieldwork. My gender benefited my research with women, and even though most women were reluctant to talk to me, I think that if I had been a man attempting to research women refugees, the women would have been even less eager to interact with me; I may not have been granted access at all. However, my gender also complicated fieldwork since many of my participants were single men. Throughout my fieldwork I had to be careful when interacting with men, as well as the boys, to ensure that they did not misunderstand our friendship. I often showed
refugees a picture of my husband and son at the beginning of the interview to reinforce the professional nature of my intentions. Most of the time, I could avoid any misunderstandings, but there were occasions that gender hindered my ability to conduct research. For example, I began conducting participant observation at a local park that many migrants visit. One man began to follow me. I told him to leave me alone in Italian, and he continued following me through the park until I sat with a group of Somali migrants who helped me tell this man to leave. Of course, this was my last day visiting the park, and I was no longer able to conduct participant observation or interview anyone at the park because I did not want to risk another encounter like this. Understanding these two factors and how they affect ability to conduct field work is important because I better understand why refugees and migrants may react in a particular way.

Another subjective aspect of my role as the researcher was the differences in the cultures of myself and my informants. The host countries of refugees were often vastly different from my own, and since my participants’ host countries include Gambia, Ghana, Mali, Senegal, Nigeria, Somalia, Tunisia, Egypt, and Pakistan, I had to attempt to understand the subtleties of these countries, in addition to Italian culture. There were occasions where I spent several days speaking with Muslim informants from Gambia, and then spoke mainly with Christian individuals from Nigeria later in the week. Maintaining a comprehensive and continued understanding of the specific culture of each refugee proved to be necessary after the beginning of Ramadan. Nationality did not always determine religion for refugees, or the ways in which they practiced their religion. I was always careful to attempt to find out if someone was fasting before offering them food or anything to drink. When I took food donations to The Garden I always asked if someone was fasting—not their religion, but if they fasted, as I did not want to assume that someone was practicing their religion in a particular way. If they were fasting, I
would give them a bag of food and tell them to take it for later after the fast was over. Reflecting on these interactions, I think that this consideration for refugees’ religious practices helped me to gain the trust of many of my informants, especially when this occurred during our first meeting. For example, I was waiting for the bus one day with a boy and I had oranges to give to the refugees. We sat quietly until I asked if he was fasting. He said yes, and so I gave him the oranges to eat later. I understand the act of offering oranges affected our conversation, but my question about fasting did as well. This was apparent when the boy described to me when Ramadan began and ended, and what times he ate. When reflecting on these occasions, I think that since Italy is a Catholic country, Muslim refugees are not accustomed to Italians understanding their religion; rather, many people are fearful of Muslims. I think that this initial question and consideration for religious practices helped facilitate conversations with many refugees. Therefore, I had to be careful to conduct field work from an emic perspective for many different cultures.

Another aspect of my possible biases is my prior experiences with refugees in Siracusa. When I traveled to Italy in 2010, I volunteered with one of the organizations, and had an overall positive experience with the refugees and the NGO. Prior to my preliminary research in 2015, I maintained this perspective that the NGO and its practices benefited refugees and provided them with effective socioeconomic services. However, in 2010, I did not visit as an anthropologist; I volunteered teaching English. Thus, I had to overcome previous positive conceptions of this particular organization and their treatment of refugees when I found data that showed they did not provide adequate services. I also had to become more openminded about my perceptions of Ali. I first met Ali in 2010, and I thought of him as a friend. Further, he was my main connection to the refugee community and centers in Siracusa. Since Ali interacted with the refugees in this
study, I found that my own biases about Ali often conflicted with information that informants reported. Thus, I had to maintain an objective point of view when refugees told me negative information about Ali and his organization.
CHAPTER FOUR: BECOMING A REFUGEE AND TRAVELING TO ITALY

In this chapter I examine the narratives of my informants, beginning with their initial flight. I also discuss their journeys to smuggling hubs, travel across the Sahara Desert, time in Libya, and travel by boat in the Mediterranean Sea. During the two and a half months that I was in Siracusa, I tried to speak with the women at Vento, a reception center for adult women, to understand their experiences. While they shared some information about their life in Italy, none of these women revealed information about the details of their journey to Italy. They were very quick to say that they left because they could not live in their host country, but all of the women appeared uncomfortable about this topic and expressed that they did not have anything else to say. Therefore, I did not ask the women refugees further information about their past. My participant observation and interviews with NGO workers revealed that most of the women at the center were victims of human trafficking, particularly those from Nigeria, which I discuss further in Chapter Five. Similarly, the adult men informants did not discuss in detail their reasons for leaving their countries of origin, omitting large gaps in time.

However, unaccompanied minor boys, who comprised 28 of my 43 informants, seemed more open to share their experiences than adult refugees. Most of the boys were eager to relate information about their journey and their treatment in Sicily, and explained that they wanted people to know what happened to them and to understand refugees. Thus, in this chapter, I will focus on the stories of unaccompanied minor informants who fled their homes in Nigeria, Gambia, Senegal, and Ghana. I argue that refugees who flee their home countries in West Africa share similar common experiences through their land travel, time spent in Libya, and sea travel, creating a “refugee subjectivity” that allows them to understand the inner lives of refugees from other cultures.
Flight

While the boys’ stories of how they traveled to Italy varied, almost all my informants from this group fled their home countries due to their perception of an immediate threat, making them “acute” refugees (Stein 1981). Isa, a 17-year-old boy from Gambia, explained why he fled his home:

I have a problem with the government. There was a coup there with the president. So, my father was with him there that day, and he knew about the coup. They took him before I came [to Italy]. After I came here they say they kill him, but I don’t believe it, sometimes I do, sometimes I don’t. So, [in Gambia] I went and asked them where is my father, and they don’t want to tell me. Then one day they tell me the president wants to see me. They said now you have to have an appointment with the president and you have to see him. When I go, they keep me and lock me up.

When I have chance to go, I leave and go, and I run.

Isa explained his concerns about his father with intense emotion. He was older than many of the boys at the center, and Ali explained that in his town, he was seen as an adult before he left. Thus, based on this insight from Ali and Isa’s explanation of events, I interpreted his affect to represent his frustration that, as adult he placed more responsibility on himself to support his family, but he could not do more to rescue his father. Due to his father’s involvement in the 2014 attempted coup in Gambia, government officials sought out Isa as well as a supporter of anti-government forces. Even though he was not personally involved in the coup, family associations forced Isa to flee based on the fear of political persecution. Isa is an example of an acute refugee, or someone who perceives an immediate threat, and is forced to leave the country immediately (Stein 1981). Many of the minors that I spoke to were also acute refugees, and fled their country without prior planning. When I spoke to him in 2016, he still did not know if his father is alive in
prison or if the government murdered him after the 2014 coup attempt. Some days I would arrive at the center, and Isa was quiet or seemed angry. When I asked him if he was upset about something, he often replied that he was thinking about his father.

While some refugees are forced to leave home due to oppressive governments, others also flee due to terrorist groups in the region that oppose the legitimate government. Christopher, a 17-year-old boy, explained why he left his home in Nigeria:

I left home because of Boko Haram. They came to one or two places, and then our town. They bombed and destroyed everything, and they destroyed the market where my mom sold items. After the bomb, there was no money, and I was in the street. I wanted a better life but it was difficult and I decided to travel to Abuja and work there. So, I started to work in a hotel for 4 months, but Boko Haram attacked the hotel. So, my friend and I wanted to leave because of Boko Haram so we went to go to Libya.

Christopher described the push factor that forced him to flee his home. As he explained, an attack in his town forced him to leave his city, and when he tried to move to another city in Nigeria, Boko Haram also attacked his town again. Christopher never explained what happened to his mother, and I did not ask. She was present in the first section of his narrative, but after the bomb explosion, he did not mention her again, making it likely that she was either captured, or did not survive the bomb explosion.

Religion is also often a main push factor for refugees to flee their countries. For example, Elijah, a 15-year-old boy from Ghana, and a devout Muslim, explained that he left his home because of his religion after the death of his mother:
So, that time [my mother] died, [my family was] sitting there, and my father came and told us that we should go back to Christianity. I ask him how come we go back to Christian? He told me because of my mother, that is why we go back to Christian. So, after my father told me to go back to Christian, I told him no, I cannot go back to Christian, and he asked me why I cannot go back to Christian, and I tell him that I do not know anything about Christian. I tell him you give me birth, and I wake up Muslim, I know how to do everything Muslim, so I cannot go back to Christian, you understand. So, since from then, even if he used to see me playing, he used to beat me. So, one day he hit me and he just took my head and started hitting the door, so I just escaped from his hand. I run.

Before Elijah was born, his family was Christian, but they later converted to Islam. His mother died during childbirth, and Elijah’s father attributed her death to god’s anger over their conversion. When Elijah discussed his reason for fleeing his home, religion, he was very serious, expressing that his belief in Islam was not a matter to be questioned. Flight for religious reasons is not limited to the three major monotheistic religions. Some of my informants explained that they had to leave their country due to the perceived threat of religious cults black magic, and voodoo, as Ebrima from Nigeria explained. He told me, “My life was at risk from a cult and they wanted to force me to be part of the group, so I left.” Tairu, now 16, fled Gambia when he was 13 due to fears of voodoo:

I come from Gambia, in 2013 I took this journey… because of my stepmother.

Before, I was there and my mother died when I was born. So, [my stepmother] was

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1 The term Voodoo often refers to specific practices in Africa and the African diaspora. Although I am unaware if this term was used accurately to describe these practices, this Voodoo was referenced by some of my informants.
controlling my father too, like in Africa they do something called black magic, so whatever she told my father, my father do that.

Although he did not explain in detail what his father did, he painfully described this aspect of his story and expressed his grief over losing his family. Like other boys, the reasons Elijah, Ebrima, and Tairu had for leaving their homes show the impact that religious beliefs can have on children. Ebrima was targeted by a religious cult, while Elijah and Tairu were impacted by their families’ belief systems. Religious persecution is typically exhibited on a larger scale, with one group persecuting another. However, these boys’ stories show how religious persecution can occur on a smaller scale in everyday life and within families.

From Country of Origin to Libya

Although there were, of course, many differences between my informants’ narratives concerning their travel to Italy, there were also many similarities. Depending on who they were traveling with, or what city they were from, they took different routes through sub-Saharan Africa to Libya, Tunisia to Italy, or Alexandria, Egypt to Italy. The points on figure 1 represent the countries of origin of my informants, their point of departure for travel across the Mediterranean Sea, and their point of arrival or rescue. Most of the refugee journeys described in this chapter begin in sub-Saharan West Africa, as shown by the green, brown, blue, and purple markers on the map. Arrows indicate the smuggling hubs, which I discuss further in this chapter, where refugees and migrants arranged for land and sea travel: Agadez for desert travel and Tripoli for sea travel.
Many boys told me that they ran and fled their home, but then found other refugees and migrants at different junctures along their journey. When Ebrima fled from his father in Ghana, he did not know where he was going; he just ran:

That time I run and I go to the bus station and I sleep inside the bus station five days. And that five days I am begging food, the driver that was there ask me, “come to me, why you small boy, what are you doing here five days and you are begging for things?” I tell him I have a problem, and he see me crying... So, he bring his car and he told me I could go with him to where he was going. So, when we arrive where he is going he told me to sit down and got out of the car and said he is going to check something. So, I sat in the car four or five hours, and I did not see him again. That time I go there I see some three boys, they were eating. I go to them and I tell them I need food... They ask me what I am doing here, I tell them I have problem with my pop, so I do not think I can go back... So, I am here and I do not
know where to pass\textsuperscript{2}, and they ask me where am I going, and I tell them I do not know where to pass. And they tell me, no problem, I should stop crying and come and eat their food. After they eat, they are going to Libya. And I ask them, I don’t know which country is Libya, and they told me to keep quiet because I am young, and I should keep quiet because I do not know what I am saying. I tell them ok, no problem, so let me keep quiet. So, at night we sleep inside, and then we leave for Libya.

Ebrima’s description of his journey was often disjointed and he talked rapidly about what happened. Ebrima said that he did not have a goal to travel to a particular location, and did not refer to a specific country; he ran from his home until he saw a bus station. After he revealed to other migrants that he was alone and did not know where to go, he found people who allowed him to travel with them. Since many migrants that he met on his journey were traveling to Libya, Ebrima also traveled to Italy. Ebrima’s story shows how many parts of the boys’ journey to Italy occurred by chance. After his initial flight, Ebrima encountered a bus driver who took him to an unknown location and left him. He later found another group of migrants and traveled with them. Like many others, he did not have much control over his travel arrangements; he traveled according to the plans of each group. The same was true for Peter, a 16-year-old boy from Nigeria. Concerning his journey from his home in Nigeria to Libya, he said, “I had no plan. I followed any step and then found that I was in Libya.” Similarly, other boys told me that after their initial escape from danger, they did not know where to go, and traveled to Libya based on reactions to certain situations, rather than predetermined plans.

\textsuperscript{2} In this context, Ebrima refers to “pass” as where to travel in general. He did not refer to a particular destination, and did not know where he should go. Since many migrants he met on his journey were traveling to Libya, he found himself also traveling to Italy.
While the boys came from different parts of Africa, most traveled through Agadez, Niger, which is just south of the Sahara Desert (figure 1). The route is mostly rural, although the driver occasionally stopped at a small town when they passed one along their route. This section of their journey is not easy for refugees and migrants; they are often packed into overcrowded cars, trucks, and trailers. Refugees also reported the difficulties of the temperature, where they were exposed to extreme heat and cold. All but one informant, Kibiru, from sub-Saharan Africa traveled to Agadez before making the journey across the Sahara. However, Kibiru’s circumstances for travel were completely different than those of the other boys at the centers. He left his home in Gambia at 13 because both his parents died and he had nowhere to go. When describing how he traveled through Africa he said, “I traveled with my friends, but you know if you are on the journey, and your money is finished they will leave you there. [When my friends left,] I have a kidnap in Mali, and then Algeria. One month I have there—one month for kidnap, and they took me to Libya.” Kibiru was reluctant to explain further details of his journey other than telling me that smugglers abducted him, both in Mali and Algeria. He was held captive for one month before traffickers took him to Libya. Kibiru’s experience shows the dangers that refugees and migrants face throughout the journey to Libya, especially for vulnerable populations such as unaccompanied minors because they are often very young during the initial flight; Kabiru was only 12-years-old when fled his home. Smugglers may see children as easier targets for exploitation and abuse than adults.

The rest of the boys left their respective homes in sub-Saharan Africa and traveled to Agadez. I noticed this pattern when I heard two boys mention Agadez as they described their journey. I then incorporated it into my interview guide to determine if Agadez was an emerging travel pattern for these boys. I soon learned that Agadez is a smuggling hub, where refugees and
migrants find traffickers to take them across the Sahara Desert. Ebrima said “At the time the fourth night we enter bus and we entered in Agadez, Niger. And we did not stay [in Agadez], we just entered the bus and go to Algeria. And from Algeria to the desert to enter Libya we spent 17 days on the desert.” Others confirmed my conclusions about Agadez. Malik left his home in Ghana at age 16, eventually arriving in Agadez. He traveled with a group of other migrants and refugees. He explained we enter Niger. After Niger, we [go to] one city, the name is Agadez. That place is the place you go and take Libya bus, Libya car. To enter Libya you pass the Sahara desert, and you go to that city [to cross the desert]. In Agadez, refugees and migrants can pay for different forms of transportation. One Nigerian woman, Hope, told me that she traveled across the desert by car. She did not know how the arrangements were made for travel because her husband managed their travel plans. However, most of the boys I spoke with traveled on buses or overcrowded trucks, and used Agadez as a location to hire smugglers to take them across the desert.

Many refugees described their journey through the Sahara Desert briefly, or did not describe desert travel at all, simply stating that they went to Libya. However, those who did share this experience revealed the extreme difficulty of this portion of their journey. This section of travel was extremely long. For example, as Ebrima explained above, he spent 17 days in the desert before reaching Libya. Malik revealed further details about the brutal desert crossing:

After Agadez we take the Sahara car, the desert. When you see the way they arrange the passengers, you cry. They arrange human beings like sardines in the car. We are 25 in the back. So, if you are going, one person fall [out], the driver will never stop. So, you die there. Even the desert you see many, many dead body. And you see the bones, the human being bones. You see human being, but you see dead
body... You have some place when the driver see he is tired. You stop so that everybody can find water to drink and can buy small food to eat, but you have only bread and water. So, you use that bread and water to pass that journey because that journey you spend two weeks in the desert, so it is hard... [There is] too much cold is inside the desert and too much sun is inside of the desert. Refugees, we are suffer, sister, we are suffer.

Malik recounted the journey across the desert where he was forced to stand due to the number of people in the truck. As he explained, it was so crowded that sometimes people would fall out of the truck, but the driver would never stop to let them back on the truck. These unfortunate individuals faced the same fate of others that Malik described, those who did not survive the journey—the dead bodies and skeletons that Malik saw along the journey through the desert. Although Malik wanted to share his experience so that others will understand the difficulties for refugee minors, he showed signs of anxiety while recounting his desert journey. I asked him if he wanted to stop the interview at one point when he became emotional and looked like he might cry, but he said that he wanted me to know what happened. He explained that the smugglers overcrowded the truck to the point that people would sometimes fall out. He almost cried when he explained that the driver would never stop for the person who fell, even if someone told him. These people were left to die in the desert, and as Malik explained, there were many dead bodies along the route.

After crossing the desert, the boys reached the end of their journey in Africa in Libya. However, the boys did not travel directly to the Libyan capital of Tripoli from the desert to take a boat across the Mediterranean Sea. Rather, Libyan authorities detained most of them for months in prison. The boys were easily identified as “outsiders,” usually because their skin is much
darker than the Arab population in Libya. For example, Peter explained, “We were arrested because we were immigrants and we stayed in the prison for five months.” Similarly, after arriving in Libya, Hakim, a 17-year-old boy from Gambia, explained how police detained him:

So, we go to the street, and we stop taxi. And that taxi we entered, that man is police, but we don’t know he is police. He tells us to remove our documents. We told him we don’t have documents. He took us and we arrived straight to the police station. They put us inside the prison. So, inside the prison we spent five months.

Almost all my research participants told me that they were imprisoned in Libya, and reported conditions there to be horrific and inhumane. My informants revealed that most of the people in the prison were black Africans, arrested for being immigrants. Abdou, a 15-year-old boy from Senegal, described his time in the Libyan prison:

So, they see me and take me to prison, and I was in prison for five months. So [in prison] when people die, they do not take the dead body at night, they take it the next day then they put fire. You will see example like my friend, tomorrow morning they put my friend in the fire. You ask yourself so when you die, they will do you this way. In the prison, always people die because there are many, and too much hot. You sleep on your left side, and they arrange the people like this so you cannot get chance to move. So, when you lie down in prison, if you sleep, you sleep on your left until tomorrow morning, and you cannot turn because you disturb your neighbor.

Migrants and refugees were packed in so tight into one room that when they slept, they could not move because they were so close to others next to them. As Abdou described, the prisons were overcrowded to the point that people became sick and died. This is likely due to tuberculosis, as
many refugees are treated for it when they arrive in Italy. Many of the boys also explained that they were tortured while in Libyan prisons, and that they were treated for their injuries after arriving in Italy. Four Nigerian boys that I met outside of The Garden reception center all experienced torture while imprisoned. They showed me their scars, including one boy who revealed a large scar from a gunshot in his arm that he received in prison. Hassan, a 16-year-old boy from Gambia, went to prison after he arrived in Libya. While imprisoned, the guards took him outside to work, but if he did not, he was tortured:

So, I was in prison, and they were making us work for nothing. They would say that they would leave you [in the desert if you did not work]. So, we are working there and if you say if you are sick, they would say that you are not willing to work, so they would beat you, they would beat you up on the foot, they would beat you [on the bottom of your feet] for you to force yourself to get up.

Hassan was so overcome with emotion of remembering this traumatic memory, he began crying, and I stopped recording. I told him that we could stop the interview, but he also explained that he wanted to finish his story, and we soon resumed the interview. Hassan is only one example of minors that were tortured in Libyan prisons. In fact, it was more common for me to hear that refugees were tortured, rather than stories that did not include experiences of torture in prison.

Many refugees and migrants remained in prison for an undetermined amount of time; I never heard stories of their release. Rather, most informants either escaped or were released after someone paid their “bail,” which, according to the boys’ descriptions, seemed more like the price for which they were bought by Libyan farmers. Often, Libyan men would pay the boys’ bail, and they were released to go with them. Due to the conditions of the prison, the boys saw these
men as their rescuers. This may be true to an extent, but in each case, the boys went to the house of the man who bailed them out of prison to work on his farm. The boys stayed on the farm for approximately three to five months, until the man who took them from the prison then took them to seashore in Tripoli for unknown reasons. Again, these boys were subjected to systems of human trafficking. For those who escaped prison, they did so seemingly by chance. For example, Ebrima explained that he escaped when the guards went to pray; they left the door unlocked and he ran out of the prison. Similarly, Hassan escaped due to police negligence when ran one day while he was out working. He explained that he saw that they were not looking and he ran away as fast as he could. Following their escape from prison, my informants revealed that they still did not know where they were going; their journey had become an escape from one danger to another.

**Across the Mediterranean**

The boys told stories about how, after escaping prison or leaving the house of a farmer, they arrived at the Mediterranean Sea in Tripoli. Those who escaped from prison typically joined a group of other migrants, and soon found themselves at the shore. Libyan farmers, as explained above, often took the boys to the sea and forced onto a boat, but they did not know the reason that they were forced on the boat. They simply said that the man who took them from prison either left them at the seashore, or threatened and beat them until they entered the boat. Robert, a 17-year-old boy from Nigeria explained, “When we got to the boat I told [the farmer] that I did not want to go but he forced me with a gun and started beating me. When I was in the boat I thought I was already dead.” He explained that cried when they told him to get in the boat and he was fearful for his life. This information conflicted with data I previously obtained during my
fieldwork in 2015 concerning sea travel to Italy. Typically, refugees and migrants must pay
thousands of dollars to travel on the boat to Sicily. However, a pattern emerged showing that
many of the boys were forced onto the boat at gunpoint, which I discuss further in Chapter Five.
I soon found out that even the boys who ran from prison found themselves in the position where
they were forced onto a boat by Libyans.

There are two different types of boats used by smugglers in North Africa: large, typically
blue, wooden boats, and small rubber rafts as shown in figure 2.

![Figure 2: The Italian Coast Guard rescuing migrants. Photo credit: BBC 2016](image)

At one point in my field work, I visited a “boat graveyard” where boats taken by the Italian
Coast Guard are often abandoned. There are approximately 20 large wooden boats in this boat
graveyard in southeast Sicily. Many of them were rotten or burned, and still contained the
belongings of refugees and migrants (figure 3).
According to my informants, the smugglers usually provided refugees and migrants with a small boat motor and an emergency radio; often, neither are functional enough to be used throughout the duration of the journey across the Mediterranean Sea. While talking with Malik one day, he began to reflect on his journey from Libya to Italy. When he stepped in the boat, Malik sat on the edge, and a woman gave him her baby and sat next to him while a man sat on his other side. He told me that he could not move because if he did, he would end up sitting on top of someone else. After they departed Libya, another migrant attempted to steer the boat to cross for Italy, but soon, no one knew where they were, or where to go, and so they waited at sea, hoping that the Coast Guard would find them. Malik waited approximately 17 hours at sea, a section of the journey that can take up to two days, before the boat was rescued by the Italian Coast Guard and taken to a first reception center.
Refugee Subjectivities

My unaccompanied minor informants all have shared subjectivities that affect the ways in which they view the world. According to anthropologist T.M. Luhrmann (2006, 345) subjectivity refers to the “shared inner life of the subject, to the way subjects feel, respond, experience.” In her analysis of homeless women in the United States, Luhrmann (2006, 359) explains how common emotions and experiences contribute to a kind of shared subjectivity for these women. She explains because the women share a common history and experiences, they also share a common social knowledge of how to interact within society. Similarly, anthropologists João Biehl, Byron Good, and Arthur Kleinman (2007, 6) describe “subjectivity as a synonym for inner life processes and affective. These shared inner lives and affects are visible in the boys’ narratives of their journey to Italy. The commonalities in their narratives reveal specific experiences that unaccompanied minor refugees from sub-Saharan African living in Italy share. Although the boys do not always share the same culture, they share a specific “refugee subjectivity” based on their flight from home, the unplanned nature of their journey, travel across the Sahara Desert, time spent in Libya, the trip across the Mediterranean, and their subsequent rescue by the Italian Coast Guard. Furthermore, they not only share the same experience of traveling to Italy, but also living as an unaccompanied minor refugee there. As I will discuss in Chapter Five, I found that these boys also encountered similar challenges after their arrival at second reception centers.

Understanding the shared subjectivity of refugee boys from West Africa is important to understanding refugee resettlement because it offers insight as to how these boys perceive the world, thus indicating what are their specific socioeconomic needs. For instance, as I explain further in Chapter Six, many of the adult and child refugees disliked working with Ali, and did not want to give his volunteer programs a chance. I began to wonder why there was so much
distrust for Ali, especially since I had known of his dedication to migrants and refugees since I first met him six years prior to witnessing this developing pattern. Many of the boys that I interviewed explained that they had never met an Arab African outside of Libya; one boy explained that he had prejudices about Arab Africans that he knew were not true. I often witnessed the boys’ reluctance to talk to Ali when he entered the center and participate in his events. They would usually mumble something skeptical about Ali or the event, and then create an excuse not to participate. I asked Ali one day if he thought that some of the boys do not like to work with him due to their biases about North African Arabs, and his own country of origin, Egypt. He told me that he thought many of the boys see the face of their capture in him. He explained that he did not judge them for this, or take it personally, because they had experienced intense physical and emotional trauma in Libya, and he is the only person that the boys know, other than Libyans, of Arab Africans. Thus, due to their shared experiences of abuse and exploitation, part of the subjectivity of these boys was a fear or distrust of Arab men.

My research participants also exhibit behavior related to their specific subjectivity based on their experiences with the physical arrangement of space. My informants expressed that they were subjected to overcrowded spaces in trucks and boats by smugglers, as well as in prison in Libya. This shared experience contributes to the ways in which refugees respond to the physical arrangement of second reception centers. Of course, these conditions are vastly different from those in prison and sections of their travel, refugees’ bedrooms are typically small, with three to four people crowded in one room. Refugees at multiple centers told me that there were too many people in their room. Identifying these elements that contribute to this subjectivity allows NGOs

3 The use of “men” is intentional to indicate that the boys only had this reaction to adult men. I did not observe this to be true with these boys with North African minors of Arab descent.
and refugee scholars to understand the internal reactions of minor refugees in Siracusa to both the methods for delivering humanitarian aid and the social interactions of refugees.

Another element of the refugee subjectivity of these boys is the loss of family. Most of the boys either experienced oppression from their family, or experienced the loss of family. This isolation from family members contributes to their current subjectivities about family. When I asked the boys what they hoped to do in the future after leaving the camp, their ideas almost always included the goal of having a family. Hassan expressed that the only thing that he wanted for his future was to have a family and a job. As described above, his loss of family occurred when his mother passed away when he was young, and when his stepmother was perceived as controlling his father with black magic. The knowledge of this subjectivity can also contribute to the distribution of social services provided to refugees. The feeling of inclusion in a family was very important for them, and most of the centers did not facilitate the creation of similar structures. However, as I discuss in Chapter Six, the directors at La Vita è Bella focused on creating positive social networks for the boys so that they felt as though they were part of a new family at their center. These boys expressed their happiness concerning La Vita è Bella, and considered the workers at the center as part of their family, often calling the women “mama.”

Although my informants traveled from a variety of geographic locations for numerous reasons, their shared experiences as a “refugee” guide their current perspective of society, and how to interact and react to actions or individuals.
CHAPTER FIVE: MARGINALIZATION AFTER ARRIVAL

Italy only rescued you... [said Elijah, a 17-year-old boy from Gambia]. When you go to the street, you will see some refugees sleeping on the street and that is not good. When you know this man, and you do not like him in your country, don’t rescue him or her, leave him there, let him to die there. Like me, if you know that you cannot take care of me, you leave me at the sea and try my solution, whether I die there, it is ok. Because when you come here, you die already.

As Elijah described, refugees often take the dangerous journey from West Africa, escape Libya, and cross the Mediterranean Sea, only to be placed in centers that continue to marginalize refugees through inadequate assistance. The ways in which NGOs provide services to refugees greatly affects their everyday experiences and their integration into the local community. In this chapter, I examine the treatment of refugees in second reception centers and their interactions with employees of the centers and the local community.

Life at the Camps

Most of my informants reported improper treatment by the workers at these centers, and experienced difficulties integrating into the local community in Siracusa. Gender also adds to the problems of women refugees because they often face additional challenges than men. In this chapter, I argue that second reception centers in Siracusa negatively impact refugees how aid is implemented.
Location and Arrangement

Due to the lack of regulation among Italian refugee centers, the practices of the second reception centers that I visited varied. As discussed in Chapter Three, I conducted research at three centers for unaccompanied minor boys, one center for adult women and infants, one center for adult men, and one center for adults and minors. It is important to consider the geographic location of these centers because the location affects refugees’ ability to obtain employment and integrate into society in Siracusa. While some of my field sites are located within the city limits of Siracusa, others are further spread throughout the province of Siracusa, as indicated by the points on the map in figure 4.

![Map of Siracusa showing the approximate locations of the second reception centers.](source: Google Maps)

Figure 4: Approximate locations of the second reception centers

Source: Google Maps
The three centers for unaccompanied minor boys, Paradise, Liberation, and La Vita è Bella, are all located within the city limits, making public transportation easily accessible.

Vento, the center for women and infants is outside the city limits in a small building located in the middle of a neighborhood. Although women could walk 40 minutes to the main section of Siracusa for work, the distance to businesses and the lack of reliable public transportation makes obtaining employment even more difficult for these women; they remain largely isolated from the city. During my first visit to Siracusa in 2010, Centre Belvedere was located within the city limits; however, when I returned in 2015, the center had moved one hour outside of the city, on the outskirts of a rural town, shown in figure 5, and increased the number of refugees living there from 15 to 50.

Figure 5: The closest town to Centre Belvedere Photo Credit: Russell Manzano
While this location allows the center to accommodate more refugees, it also places them at a disadvantage due to the distance to Siracusa. The bus ride to the new Centre Belvedere is approximately 30 minutes from the city center. However, the bus system in Sicily is highly unreliable; it is often early, late, or does not arrive at all, and I often experienced difficulties with the bus during my fieldwork. For example, one day I left Centre Belvedere, and walked to wait for the bus that should have arrived at 5:00 pm. Since the bus had come late before, I waited for over an hour. The next bus was scheduled to arrive at 6:30, so I decided that if it did not come then, I would have to walk at night, so, I made the decision to walk back to my apartment. I found that there was no safe space for people to walk or ride a bike. At one point, the sidewalk ended just before a sharp curve, and I had to resort to walking along the stones on the edge of a Greek monument so that I would not get hit by the speeding cars. I finally arrived home one and a half hours after maneuvering my way through the city. My experience with the bus system in Siracusa illustrates the problem of transportation for men living at this center. If they can find work, they could attempt to take the bus, which could possibly be late; thus, they risk losing their jobs. The other options of traveling by bicycle or on foot might be reliable, but they are also long and dangerous. Further, Italian classes are offered to refugees living at Stella Maris; however, these classes are in the center of the city in Siracusa. This makes the location another barrier to the men because Italian classes are not easily accessible. Therefore, the geographic location of this center places additional strain on the ability of refugees to acquire the necessary skills to integrate into Sicilian economy and society. The last center that I visited, The Garden, housed approximately 150 men, women, and children. It is located in Città Giardino, a deserted city about an hour and a half bus ride from Siracusa. The Garden, pictured in figure 6, is a large,
gated building that is guarded by police. During my initial visit, I walked along the perimeter of The Garden, and found that the gate surrounded the entire camp.

Figure 6: The outside view of The Garden Photo Credit: Russell Manzano

There are no job opportunities in Città Giardino; many buildings are abandoned, and the only businesses that I saw were a small coffee shop, a hotel, and a shopping mall. Therefore, refugees must take the long and unreliable bus ride into Siracusa to search for employment.
Conditions in which the refugees live are meant to provide the most basic of living conditions, but fall short of creating a truly comfortable or home-like space because refugees often live in poor conditions and complain frequently about their daily living arrangements. Other than The Garden and Centre Belvedere, which are large free standing buildings, the remaining centers are old apartments or offices, converted into a dorm-style facility for refugee women or boys. In both the centers for adults and minors, there are three to four refugees in each room, a shared kitchen, a living room, a dining area, and one shared bathroom (figure 7).

The sleeping arrangements at all of the centers are similar. Each room has three to four beds and closets, forcing 3-4 often unrelated people to share each room. Women with infants lived in rooms by themselves, with a crib for the child. Sometimes they may have a desk, or air conditioner unit, but these residences are typically very minimal. None of the centers had functional air-conditioning, and there was always the smell of cigarette smoke from the workers. Each center had common areas where refugees could watch TV or play video games. The
furniture was often old and falling apart. Due to the lack of regulation of second reception centers, many NGOs that house refugees choose locations and arrange the centers in ways that do not benefit refugees economically or socially.

Everyday Life
Throughout my research, I observed the daily lives of refugees living at SPRAR second reception centers in Siracusa. The Garden likely has the worst conditions out of all the centers that I visited. Refugees did not receive basic hygiene supplies and clothing at five of the second reception centers I visited, nor did they have adequate food to eat. For example, The Garden designates specific times for eating; refugees eat breakfast, which consists of milk and bread at 8:00 am. The workers at The Garden serve lunch, pasta with canned tuna, at 1:00 pm, and dinner, consisting of rice and chicken, at 8:00 pm. At each meal, refugees are given a small bottle of water; this is the only water that the camp gives refugees. Refugees also described other rules that required that they sleep in their assigned rooms and smoked outside. Refugees living at the five other centers had similar rules and eating times except that they cooked their own food. Refugees living at all centers, except for one center for minors, explained that every day is the same; they eat the same food every day at the same times, sleep in the same arrangements, and do the same chores. All my informants at every center expressed this sentiment. Since the centers controlled almost all aspects of my informants’ lives, they felt as though they did not have the power to change their socioeconomic status. Refugees at five out of the six centers that I visited operated on a minimal organizational structure that only offered basic, and often dysfunctional services. Occasionally, Italian classes were offered, but the locations of the classes were not easily accessible to refugees. Further, four out of the five centers offered no employment assistance or any other services that might help refugees to “integrate” into the local community.
This organization allows for a simplified NGO structure that may save time and costs for the NGO; however, it continues to marginalize refugees because they do not have the proper social support from the centers in which they live. Often, this simplified organizational structure allows employees to have more free time, but I observed that this time was not spent doing productive activities; rather, it gave most of the employees more time to sit in the office and smoke cigarettes.

The refugees that I spoke to at The Garden were very secretive about talking to me. They explained that if the guards saw them talking to an American, they feared that they might be punished; so, we met at the café across the street. One boy, Christopher, from Nigeria told me that he could not communicate on Facebook because the center monitors their Facebook accounts. Grace, a key informant at Vento from Nigeria, explained to me that when she lived at The Garden, she was instructed not to speak to Italians or “white people.” She said that she did not understand why at the time, but after leaving The Garden, she believed that it was because they did not want refugees telling the public about the deplorable conditions at the center.

Even though refugees often encounter poor conditions in second reception centers, many of my informants were simply happy to be safe in Italy. For example, one 17-year-old boy from Nigeria, Adam, emphasized that “we are treated well, not like the Arabs did in Libya. Here is better and good. I have my life and no fear about threats and I believe that I am free.” While many refugees are eager to share their complaints about the camp, especially The Garden, Adam was simply glad to be out of Libya.

Food

I found that rituals surrounding food and eating held significance for refugees, and indicated a level of trust that I had obtained among the refugees at each center. At two of the
centers for minors, I was always offered food, showing they accepted me enough to allow me to eat with them. I was never offered food at Paradise, or Centre Belvedere; however, I did not visit these centers as often as the two other centers for minors. For example, during my first few days at Liberation, the boys were skeptical of me. At first, most of the boys would not talk to me, and if I approached them, they replied in short answers. During these visits to the center I sat in the common room and tried to speak to the boys when they were there. After four days, many of the boys had asked me more questions about who I was and what I was doing. When it was time for the boys to eat lunch, they invited me to eat with them.

Food for refugees living at Centre Belvedere, Vento, and the three centers for minors is relatively similar. Refugees have bread, milk, and coffee for breakfast, which they typically make themselves and is limited to certain amounts; if they run out of food, workers tell them that they will not receive more. After breakfast, the women can select their food for the day from the pantry, such as rice and chicken that they cook later in the day and other items such as oranges, bread, and other food that the center obtains based on the growing season. They then label their food and leave it in the kitchen to cook later. However, the men and boys at three other centers eat the same meals every day, which are identical to those at The Garden: bread, coffee and milk for breakfast; pasta and tuna for lunch; and rice and chicken for dinner. It was unclear to me why these centers offered the same food, but participants at these four centers reported eating the exact same meals. Occasionally, Centre Belvedere brings in other types of food depending on the cost. At all of the centers except The Garden, refugees cook their own food, either as a group or individually. NGO workers at La Vita è Bella cook Italian lunch, typically pasta, and the boys cook African food for dinner, such as Fufu Banku, which is usually a rice based dish and is described in further detail below. However, there are no cooking classes or health classes, and so
foodborne illnesses are common in the centers, especially the centers for minors. There were no consistent guidelines for how the food should be prepared or help from the staff. In one of the centers for minors, each boy was responsible for cooking and cleaning the kitchen, but these guidelines were often ignored by the boys and not enforced by the staff. I discovered that there were problems with food preparation the first day that I ate lunch with the boys at Liberation. The pasta for lunch typically has tuna in it, but they had made me a plate without tuna since I am vegetarian. I happily ate the food, thinking that the boys had accepted me by making this gesture. However, as soon as I left the center, I knew that I was sick. Likewise, many of the boys complained of stomach problems the next day and throughout the week, which were likely caused by improperly prepared food. These boys fled their homes at ages as young as 10, therefore, they may not have had extensive knowledge about how to properly prepare food. Likewise, another possibility for problems with cooking food could be simply that the type of food was different from the food in their home countries, and they were not familiar with cooking the food provided by the center. Thus, when they arrive to a center that does not aid with this, the problem with foodborne illness becomes an endless cycle. Although I did not eat any other meals at this center, I addressed the problem with Ali, since he volunteers at all of the centers except The Garden. He asked me if I thought they needed to have a cooking class at the centers to teach proper food preparation. I told him that I thought it would be helpful, but I did not see any cooking classes take place while I was in Siracusa.

At the conclusion of my research, I observed how food and rituals surrounding food preparation can impact the experiences of refugees when we collectively cooked one of their native dishes. Since I spent the majority of my field work at Liberation, I wanted to make a gesture of gratitude, and asked them all what food they would like to eat since I knew that they
ate the same Italian food every day. They told me that they wanted to eat Fufu Banku, a traditional dish from Gambia and Ghana. They found a recipe online, and I purchased the ingredients. That night, they taught me how to make the dish, which is a pumpkin and peanut butter based sauce with meat and other ingredients. It also requires quite a bit of preparation; thus, it became a group activity for the boys (figure 8).

Figure 8  Refugees from Gambia preparing Fufu Banku. Photo credit: Russell Manzano

Making Fufu Banku not only allowed them to eat familiar food, but also recreated the communal activity of the preparation. Many of the quiet boys came into the kitchen because they wanted to show me how to make it. We all sat together to eat, further emphasizing communal gathering when eating Fufu Banku.

The Role of Religion

Religion often plays a crucial role in the lives of refugees. Most of the refugees that I met were Muslim; however, some Nigerian refugees were Christian. My informants often spoke of
religion without being prompted by a question. For instance, Tairu often spoke of religion in his
country and the practice of what he referred to as “black magic” in his hometown. One day, he
was working in an art exhibit that Ali managed at a local church. One of the sculptures had a
white shell necklace. Tairu began to talk about how the people use black magic in Banjul, the
capital of Gambia. He explained that many people will use necklaces like the one on the
sculpture to benefit or harm another person. He told me that most people use this practice within
Christianity, rather than as its own religion. This led him to describe how religions in Gambia are
somewhat blended, rather than distinct and separate practices. Christians and Muslims in Gambia
celebrate each other’s holidays, many Christians celebrate the break of the fast during Ramadan.
He explained that the Mosques in Italy have a window cut that shows the direction to pray. He
also told me about the significance of Fridays: “Fridays are like Sundays in Christianity. On
Fridays, they saw two extra Rakas [prayers]. It is supposed to be the day when the Prophet
revealed the scripture and prayers to the people.” I would typically find Tairu alone on Fridays,
quietly praying in his room, and I did not interact with him as often as I did on other days of the
week.

Tairu is more religious than many people I met during my fieldwork; he takes his religion
very seriously, but he does not impose his religion on others. However, he does wonder why
other people are not as devout in their religion, or why some people are too far extreme. To
illustrate his dislike for religious extremes, he used the example of the Ahmadiyya, a sect of
Islam that came to Gambia from Afghanistan. Tairu thought that the Ahmadiyya were too strict
and followed their own rules rather than the guidelines in the Quran. For example, he explained
that they would tell him that he could not have a girlfriend, but he did not listen. He said, “Why
should I listen to the word of man instead of the word of God?” Similarly, Tairu did not
understand individuals who stated that they were Muslim, but did not follow what was written in the Quran. For instance, he was skeptical of Ali and his religious practices, and told me that one night at the art exhibit, Ali had a friend come to visit, and they went to the top floor of the church. Ali told him to wait downstairs in case any customers came to look at the art. After Ali left, Tairu went upstairs and found two beer bottles on a table. He said, “I think Ali was drinking too because you do not have two men sit together and one man drinks two beers.” This was upsetting to Tairu because he looked up to Ali, who was also Muslim, and drinking alcohol is forbidden in their religion.

Almost all of the refugees that I interviewed expressed that god was the force that guided their journey and helped them to survive. During my interview with Ebrima, he expressed that his greatest concern was that Ramadan was coming soon and that he hoped that the center would allow him to practice his religion as he chose. Islam plays an important role in his life, and like Tairu, he is also very devout. In our interview, I asked him about what he hoped to do in the future after leaving the center, and he explained that it was not his decision: What I want to do in the future, that one does not depend on me, it depends on God. Because for now I cannot choose what I want. God will choose it for me. So, for that [question], I don’t know because I am preparing and waiting for God. I am waiting to see what God will do for me. Mohammod attributed his safe journey across the Mediterranean to God. During their crossing, the refugees and migrants traveling on the rubber boat did not know which direction to take, and thought they were lost:

That day I was sitting in the sea, and I see dolphins in the sea. And we are in the sea five hours. So, when the waves come we are shouting because we think the sea wants to turn [our boat] over. But we see that dolphins, they come many, 10-
15, and they surrounded us. Then they all go. Then two come back and they come in front of the boat. So, we say let us follow the animals [because] maybe God sent them. So, everyone said yes, we will follow them. So, we follow that dolphin until we reach one big boat that was there for refugee peoples.

For Mohammod and the other refugees on the boat, their safe arrival to the Italian Coast Guard rescue boat was attributed to God. Esther, a Nigerian woman with a one-year-old son, explained that in Nigeria she had no protection from Boko Haram, a militant Islamic terrorist group prevalent in Nigeria. Boko Haram claims to promote a version of Islam that is against Western culture, views Nigeria as a country dominated by Western values, and wages violent terrorist attacks in Nigeria and other countries, mostly in West Africa (BBC 2016). She said, “If the government could protect me I would not be here, and me being alive is a testimony of God.” These examples illustrate the importance of the role of religious faith for my informants, both Christian and Muslim. Despite undergoing the horrific journey to Italy, they still maintained unwavering faith in a god that was controlling their lives. Attributing the events that happened to them to a god creates significance for their experiences beyond what occurred, and places their journey in a religious context.

Religion can also be a source of contention. For example, one day, Ali hosted a group meeting among the boys at the three centers. He attempted to explain to the boys the importance of taking action to improve their lives, that they cannot wait for God to change it for them. First, he asked which boys had been denied refugee status from the Commission Office. Then he asked them why they thought they received a negative answer, while others were given a positive answer about their refugee status. Most of them believed that they received a positive outcome in their immigration status because they received help from God. In fact, many of my informants
told me that their experiences, both during their journey and in Italy, were influenced by divine intervention. But Ali tried to debate with them. He asked, “Why would God deny your friend? If it is God’s will, why would God tell you to tell the truth, and then punish you for it?” Ebrima was quick to respond. He told Ali, “I don’t know what you are talking about, but I believe in God.” Ali replied, “Well, I do too.” The boys all suggested that maybe they should not have this conversation. Ali tried again with a different explanation, but he was interrupted by the boys again who insisted that he end the conversation. Their religious beliefs were very strict, and they did not want their faith in God’s will to be challenged.

During my fieldwork, I observed everyday religious practices, as well as special religious ceremonies. The Islamic holy month of Ramadan coincided with my research in 2016. During this time, observers of Ramadan cannot eat or drink anything, including water, from sunrise to sunset. Individuals who were fasting would “break the fast” at sunset when they were finally allowed to eat. In many of my participants’ home countries, breaking the fast is a ritualistic group activity; everyone participates and special food is prepared. However, this is not the case for many refugees living in Siracusa. For example, refugees living at Paradise, Liberation, Centre Belvedere, and The Garden had no input into the meals that they ate; every day dinner was chicken and rice. At Vento, Muslim women were given special food during Ramadan. The boys at La Vita è Bella, however, could cook African food at night, and they could break the fast with the traditional food of their choosing.

On World Refugee Day I observed the lack of consideration of religious practices of refugees by one of the centers for minors. The centers for unaccompanied minors took the boys from the three centers to a celebration at the Greek Theatre at 7:00 pm. On this day, the sun set at 4 My informants used the phrase “break the fast” to describe when they would stop fasting for the day at sunset and eat dinner.
approximately 8:30 pm, the time that the boys could break the fast. La Vita è Bella brought pizza and bottled water for the boys; they brought it on time and the boys ate at the appropriate time, after having fasted all day. However, Liberation forgot to bring food for the boys; it did not occur to them that the boys had not eaten all day, and that they would need food and water outside of the center. There were two NGO workers at the festival with the boys, and one sent the other to rush back to bring the boys something to eat. He returned only with stale bread, and they had not eaten or since sunrise. It was surprising that the center only brought bread, and no water. Obviously, the boys from La Vita è Bella shared my sentiments because they all shared their food with those at Liberation. This example illustrates the differences in the treatment of refugees among the centers.

I also observed how refugees living in second reception centers practice Ramadan. For all three centers for minors, as well as the center for adult men, this typically meant that I was more likely to find people sleeping most of the day. Sometimes I received texts from the boys late at night, indicating that they were staying up late when they could eat and drink, and sleeping during much of the daytime when they fast. The women’s center was different; all the women were typically out of bed, and they were cooking, caring for their babies, watching TV, or out working. Part of this difference can be attributed to the simple fact that a greater number of the refugees living at Vento were Christian. However, another major factor is that many of the women had children, some as young as two months. Per the guidelines of Islam, these women were not required to follow the rules of fasting during Ramadan because they were breastfeeding. Further, the women at Vento did not have the luxury of sleeping during the day; they had to take care of their children.
Complaints and Care

My fieldwork revealed that refugees at almost all second reception centers were not receiving the social and economic assistance they needed. It was never difficult for a refugee to answer questions about their treatment at these centers; they had a long list of complaints waiting to be heard. Some individuals at five of the six centers voiced minor complaints, such as the food or clothing provided was inadequate or minimal. But, many also spoke of major problems within the centers such as rotten food, inadequate hygiene supplies, poor access to health care, and mistreatment by the workers. Michael, a 17-year-old boy from Nigeria, was eager to relate his experiences:

I have been here for one month and two days… The food that they give is bad. And the food they cook, they will bring it tomorrow and sometimes it is rotten, but they do not care. And the clothes—they say wait until tomorrow for clothes, but a friend said to go to the dustbin instead to find clothes. There isn’t enough water—they give only two [small] bottles for each day. I don’t have a brush and paste for my teeth… Anytime you go to the office to complain, they don’t do anything. Life in the camp is very hard and there is nothing to do.

Michael’s story is not uncommon. I heard similar complaints from men, women, and children in five centers. The details were often different, but the stories of improper care and mistreatment were comparable.

Like Grace, who I discuss above, Michael explained that he had been instructed not to talk to Italians or “outsiders” because they would try to take advantage of him. He also learned that the directors and workers at the center were the ones exploiting him by limiting his access to healthcare, education, and economic assistance. Elijah and other boys who lived at the center with Michael reported that the workers prevented them from receiving healthcare. Elijah recalled
a time when he had been sick for three days, but no one would take him to see a doctor. In frustration, he exclaimed, “Here, if you are sick and you tell them to take you to the hospital, they will tell you, ‘No, I am going home.’ Now if you died, that man he killed you.” Elijah’s aggravation with the center and the workers was so intense that he had almost lost hope of a new life in Sicily. Like many, Elijah fled his home in West Africa and traveled across the Sahara Desert and the Mediterranean Sea, only to be stranded in a center that ignores his problems. The practices of this refugee center for minors did not provide the boys with adequate assistance so that they could improve their lives. Rather, their lack of services further marginalizes refugees and places them in a liminal stage where they wait, not only to begin a new life, but for basic supplies and humane treatment.

While these visible forms of marginalization certainly affect refugees, they are also subjected to more subtle forms of structural violence that occur in everyday life. As discussed in Chapter Two, Farmer (1996) argues that society is structured by historic economic and social forces, and this structural violence is interconnected with structural inequality that appears in the form of everyday issues faced by the oppressed, creating suffering for those with the least power (Van Arsdale 2006). Many of the negative experiences of refugees observed in this fieldwork in second reception centers reflect the structural violence that affects refugees and migrants living in Sicily. Inadequate living conditions, poor access to healthcare, low quality food, improper treatment by the workers, prolonged waiting for documents, and other regularly occurring problems within second reception centers are embedded in the structures of humanitarian aid for refugees in Sicily. Ali explained that most of the centers in Siracusa are not providing the assistance required by law, and that they are often controlled by the Mafia. My unaccompanied minor informants from one center claimed that the center took donations, such as clothes and
shoes, from the community for refugees and sold them. I found evidence of this one day when I discovered bags of new clothes in the bathroom. I waited to see if the workers would give the clothes to the boys, but they never did until eventually the clothes disappeared from the bathroom.

Treating humanitarian aid like a corrupt business creates immigration systems that exploit refugees and compound the effects of structural violence. For example, Anders and Lester (2013) illustrate this in their examination of the structural violence created by refugee resettlement policies within government institutions, as well as nonprofit organizations that provide resettlement services in the U.S. They find that many refugee families are placed at an economic disadvantage due to programs that provide inadequate assistance. Likewise, refugees in Siracusa who escape violence in their home countries are often re-exposed to structural violence in Sicily and unable to overcome many of the obstacles created by that violence, despite their designation as a person in need of humanitarian aid.

Interactions with Local Residents

Most of my informants were black Africans from sub-Saharan Africa. In Siracusa, there is a significant level of racism, whose intensity varies based on skin tone. For example, refugees from North Africa and the Middle East with brown skin may experience discrimination, but not as extreme as black Africans. Ali explained that it is because Italians have had more time to accept immigrants from North Africa and the Middle East, and that “brown” refugees had previously experienced more intense racism. Adam, a 16-year-old boy from Nigeria, explained

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5 The observation that the degree of discrimination follows the degree of the darkness of skin color has also been reported in other ethnographic research, for example in Brazil (Goldstein 2005).
that if he sits near an Italian on the city bus, they often move to the other side. He was frustrated and explained that he did not understand why they would be scared of him. Grace, a young mother from Nigeria, told me that whenever she goes to a store to buy something for her baby, the store workers often follow her, as if she might steal something. She said that she has even been told to leave stores.

The intensity of racism towards black Africans was especially apparent during my walk home one evening after visiting one of the centers for minors. As I approached the turn to walk down the main street to my apartment, I saw two police cars, a young black man, and a group of Italians standing around. I decided to stop so that I could wait to see what happened. The man gave the police officers his identification card, and the officers wrote down information from his card. Soon after that, he left, and walked in my direction. I recognized him from Centre Belvedere as Mark, a young Nigerian man whom I interviewed two weeks prior to this incident. He explained to me during the interview that racial harassment was a problem that he experienced often. When he walked up to me, he showed me a knot on his forehead, and explained what happened. He said he was walking down the street and a dog started barking at him. He told it to stop, and the Italians got out of their car and started hitting him. He said he did not know why. The police took his document identification, and let him go, but they did not do anything to the Italians. This story illustrates the attitude towards black Africans; it is socially acceptable to be openly rude and aggressive towards individuals based on skin color. This is not only displayed in the behavior of those who attacked Mark, but also in the reaction of the police. Despite the Italians being the obvious aggressors, Mark’s information was taken by the police, and the Italians were released without questions.
Gender and Women Refugees

Although women refugees face many of the same issues as men, they have added challenges that arise due to gender. The women were not as open to talking to me as the men and boys, and while I was at the center, they would stop to say hello, but did not have any interest talking to me further. When I explained why I was at the center, and told the women that I wanted to learn more about their experiences in Italy, they often told me that they only needed jobs and documents. I did not gain the full trust of the women until the last two weeks of my field work in Siracusa. As I will discuss below, my key informant at the women’s center, Grace, did not trust Ali and, by association, did not trust me. She also instructed all the Nigerian women not to talk to me. Much of the information I collected from the women’s center was from participant observation and interviews with NGO workers.

Four women at Vento have infants or small children. Lucia, an NGO worker, explained that many women think that if their child is born in Italy, they are more likely to receive humanitarian assistance. During participant observation at Vento, I found that the treatment of the infants was somewhat erratic. Grace, a refugee from Nigeria, had a two-month-old infant daughter, but her behavior towards her daughter was often unusual as she seemed emotionally detached from her. For example, Grace was consistently leaving her daughter in places in the center crying and unattended. I witnessed this one day as I walked upstairs to Grace’s room. I heard her baby crying and I walked in to see if Grace needed help with the baby, but and I found an empty room with the infant on the open bed crying, even though there was a crib in the room. I told the manager because I did not know where Grace was, and we soon found that Grace had left the infant so that she could go shower. The other women at the center also displayed unusual behavior towards their children; I would often find the children unattended and in unsafe locations. One day in frustration, Lucia told me that she was not sure why Grace behaved that
way, but she sometimes worried for Grace’s daughter’s safety. Grace was considered an “emergency humanitarian case,” as Grace at the center described. Lucia explained that Grace was a victim of human trafficking, and she had been beaten by her captors. She told me that Grace was often erratic, especially towards the care of her daughter. Although I was not able to obtain enough ethnographic data through interviews, I found through participant observation that the women who showed signs of human trafficking and prostitution had more confrontations with the workers. For example, Grace often argued with the workers about how much food she took from the pantry. One day I saw her go in the pantry while one of the workers was stocking new food items and take oranges and run to her room. She returned to tell the worker that she had not gotten her food for the day. On another occasion, I observed a confrontation with Lucia; she told Lucia that she wanted 20 Euro, and said that she would call the police if Lucia did not give her the money. Lucia tried to offer her 5 Euro to get pizza, but Grace left, exclaiming how unfairly Lucia treated her and that she would call the police. Lucia explained that upon her arrival in Italy, and subsequent visits to the hospital, the doctors stated that since Grace had been abused and beaten so badly, she suffered from brain injuries that caused mental illnesses, which the center is not qualified to treat. She told me that she was trying to find another center for Grace that could treat her trauma and injuries, but no one could take her because there was not enough room for more women. Another woman from Nigeria, Hope, lived at the center with her one-year-old son. I witnessed several arguments with her and the other women concerning food, and she would often take other women’s food. Her clothes also indicated that she might be involved in prostitution in Siracusa, which is explained in more detail below. Hope also exhibited an unusual detachment from her son; I often found him in dangerous areas of the center alone, such as in the kitchen or by the stairs.
The trauma and mental illnesses that these women experienced were diagnosed by doctors at emergency first reception centers. However, there is no continuing treatment for these women unless there is room at centers that specialize in the treatment of trauma and mental illness. Thus, the center for women could not provide proper treatment for trauma and psychological problems, as explained by Lucia. She said that women who suffer horrific abuse and violence not only require food and shelter, but the proper mental health care so that they can begin to recover from their assaults. Thus, it is likely that trauma is correlated with other behaviors such as emotional detachment. She said that sometimes women come to the center who became pregnant after being sexually assaulted in Libya, which was the case with one of the residents there. However, many Nigerian women do not receive permission to stay in Italy, and that local commission practices had changed. Lucia explained:

In the Siracusa commission they decide to give only a negative [response to the request for asylum] to all Nigerians. For example, we have a mom with a baby. She is a Nigerian girl with a baby born in Siracusa. She has negative result and I don’t know why. There is a baby born here in Italy, but is Nigerian because the Italian government does not help the baby born in Italy. When I see this, I think that it is not possible. We know that Nigerian people here in Europe have a big problem because of [human] trafficking because trafficking of Nigerian girls is well-known and all people know. You cannot give a negative to these women.

Lucia was dismayed that, although the Italian government is aware that there is a problem with human trafficking of Nigerian women and girls, they did not give this woman with an Italian-born baby permission to stay in Italy. These informal NGO practices restrict the ability of refugee women to integrate into society and keeps them in a liminal state because they must wait
for extended periods to receive their answer from the local commission office, likely a response due to their country of origin, Nigeria.

As Lucia described above, many Nigerian women and young girls fall victim to human trafficking, both in Nigeria and in Italy. In Italy, women refugees have greater difficulties obtaining employment because there are fewer jobs for women in Siracusa than there are for men. Most jobs that my men informants described involved intense physical labor, and even though a woman may be capable of the same job, they are not likely to be hired as a dayworker by Italian owned construction companies. Grace explained that many women turn to prostitution instead. As more women from Nigeria arrived in Italy, Lucia said that she started to notice a change in the behavior of the women in the center:

Last year, I see that something changed in this camp because the victim number one of trafficking is Nigerian women. I see that something changed when the Nigerian girls arrived. Because they are always well dressed, they change the bag and shoes, and they do their hair. This is normal if people have work and have money, but how is it possible that this girl, in this moment, don’t work and I don’t give pocket money because I received little money from the camp…We know that there is this problem [of prostitution] …We try to help these women but it is not easy because every time they say it is not true. The problem is that they have family in Nigeria and if they don’t do this, the man, the boss, does something to the family in Nigeria. So, nobody says, “Yes, it is true, I am a victim of trafficking.” In commission, for women, if you say you are a victim of trafficking the Italian government gives you special help, but they prefer to say no. It is very hard to say yes, because they think of [their] family in Nigeria. There is a
connection with trafficking and voodoo. They believe a lot of voodoo and magic and that these men will hurt their family with voodoo. In this moment, three girls are victims of trafficking.

Lucia’s explanation of prostitution and human trafficking shows the cycle of abuse in which these women are trapped when they leave Nigeria. Their abuse is not limited to traffickers in West Africa; they remain entrapped in trafficking after they arrive in Italy for fear that their traffickers will harm their family, either physically or with magic and voodoo. Therefore, they often do not receive the protection that they need because they are fearful to tell authorities what happened to them.

Single women refugees with infants reported that they could not look for a job because they did not have anyone to watch their baby. Lucia explained that the women with children at the center should watch each other’s children when they are working, but there is no organized system to assist women with infants to obtain childcare. The center provides job training, and the directors arrange sewing classes, cosmetology classes, and other classes to teach the women skills that may help go into the Sicilian community and earn money. However, the women’s skills are not always considered when the center plans these classes. For instance, the center organized a sewing class that taught basic sewing skills, but they did not realize that one woman from Somalia was a seamstress before leaving her home. Additionally, Grace explained to me that she is a teacher: “I taught in Nigeria and in the camp, The Garden. In the camp, I taught Italian for seven months. I taught in Libya too, because I learned how to speak Arabic. I speak Arabic, French, Pidgin⁶, and Yoruba. My mother tongue is Yoruba.” She explained that she wanted to develop her skills as a teacher, but she felt that the center did not support her in this

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⁶ Here, pidgin is a combination of English and local Nigerian dialects.
effort. She also tried to teach at a local NGO, but there were disagreements about the payrate between Grace and the director of the NGO. For example, she explained to me that they said they would pay her 90 Euros for teaching a class, but only paid her 60 Euros. As I have described, women refugees often encounter similar problems as men, but they often experience additional difficulties due to their gender.

While the systems of exploitation or inattention to refugees’ needs after arrival are not as severe as conditions that they faced in Libya or other sections of their journey, the refugee resettlement system in Italy does not end these cycles of abuse. Rather, in some instances, these centers continue to marginalize refugees because the services provided are either clearly harmful, such as contaminated food, or they are less visible, such as the geographic location of the center. These practices are embedded in the ways that most NGOs operate second reception centers in Siracusa.
CHAPTER SIX: POLICY, NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS, AND THE MARGINALIZATION OF REFUGEES

In this chapter, I explore the effects of refugee law on the experiences of refugees and the operations of NGOs that seek to assist them. Certain laws, such as the Dublin III Agreement described in this chapter, restrict the socioeconomic mobility of refugees by forcing them to remain in host countries, such as Italy, that have weak economies and inadequate infrastructure to accommodate large numbers of refugees and migrants. Since NGOs often implement state immigration policies in Italy through second reception centers, I examine the organizational structure of and aid provided by the NGOs that I encountered during my field work. I argue that most NGOs in Siracusa do not provide refugees with proper healthcare, economic support, or social services, and often continue to marginalize refugees by limiting their socioeconomic mobility. These continued cycles of exploitation are not only visible in the practices of NGOs that operate second reception centers, but also other NGOs that claim to assist refugees and migrants. Lastly, I argue that although most refugees do not receive the social, economic, and medical services needed, there are cases in which NGOs effectively assist refugees to provide “good aid,” and improve their socioeconomic standing in Siracusa.

The Effects of International and National Policies

Many refugees are well aware of the impacts of international laws such as the Dublin III agreement, which states that refugees must remain in the country in which they first applied for asylum. Saikou, a 17-year-old boy from Gambia, explained to me that he was waiting until he received his Italian residency documents and could save money to leave Italy and go to Germany. When I asked Saikou how Italy assisted him and other refugees, he gave me an
impassioned response: “Yesterday they put it on the news, you see refugees, many, they are sleeping on the street. There are so many of them. So, that is why the boys go when they have small money to Germany or Switzerland.” Saikou did not know why he wanted to travel to Germany or Switzerland specifically, but he thought that it would be better than living in Siracusa. He explained that many of his friends had already left for other countries; some had even sent him small amounts of money. However, if Saikou successfully travels to Germany, he risks deportation back to Italy due to the Dublin III agreement. These laws that prevent refugees from moving to an economy that can support an increasing immigrant population keeps them in countries and cities where they are unable to find adequate employment and improve their socioeconomic mobility. Thus, the restrictions that the Dublin III places on the mobility of refugees places them in a liminal state between a refugee in need of humanitarian assistance, and someone who can live independently.

Refugees like Saikou also face uncertainty in Italy due to the economic conditions for refugees. Even after obtaining documents that grant permission to stay in Italy, many refugees cannot find jobs. If refugees cannot find enough work to save money to move to an apartment, they risk becoming homeless when their time limit for living at a SPRAR center is over. For instance, Mohammad, a refugee from Somalia, fled to Italy 10 years ago when he was 15. He explained that he left to escape the risk of being captured by Al Shabaab, a militant terrorist in central and south Somalia that targets the Federal Government of Somalia. When he arrived in Italy he stayed in a second reception center for three years, but he could not find a job. He tried to go to France to find work, but he was sent back to Italy because he did not have a passport. He also lived in the Netherlands for three years before getting sent back to Italy by authorities. In

7 Source: https://www.nctc.gov/site/groups/al_shabaab.html
accordance with the Dublin III agreement, Mohammad was forced to return to Italy, the country in which he first applied for asylum. He told me that he liked the Netherlands because he could work, but the only thing he did not like was that they follow the Dublin III agreement: “That’s why they sent me back [because of the Dublin III law]. They are right for the rules, but they would not even give me an interview.” Still unable to find a job, Mohammad spends most days in a nearby park, and sleeps at a friend’s house. He said he was waiting for a passport so that he could go to Ethiopia to visit his mother. I told him that I had met many boys living at local centers. In response to this he told me, “The boys at the center, they still have hope, but I know what it’s really like when you are here for many years.” Mohammad’s story illustrates the long-term effects of laws that prevent refugees from moving to locations where the economy can support them. Border countries that take a majority of the refugees and migrants entering Europe, such as Italy, often have a weak economy, and have difficulties support the increasing numbers of refugees and migrants entering the country (EU 2016).

Informal changes in policy, such as evaluating asylum requests at the local commission office also contribute to extended waiting periods for refugees to receive official documents, and result in denials for asylum requests. For example, as Lucia claims, the commission office in Siracusa changed their policies about Nigerians as described in Chapter Five. She did not know why they altered the policies, but they began rejecting all Nigerians’ requests for asylum. She explained that the policies were always changing and sometimes the commission office made decisions about refugees that seemed against the law. Thus, many refugees typically must appeal their decision before they are finally granted permission to stay in Italy. If their appeal is denied, most refugees leave centers clandestinely. Therefore, the current system for evaluating asylum
cases further compounds the problems that refugees face by forcing them to become undocumented immigrants.

**The Role of Non-governmental Organizations**

Throughout my research, I observed how the centers and refugees interacted with outside NGOs, and how these NGOs affect the lives of refugees. The two main NGOs that I observed were the Siracusa Centro per i Rifugiati (SCR), which translates to the Siracusa Center for Refugees, and Assistenza Migrazione e Integrazione Interculturale Comunità Aide (AMIICA), which translates to Migration Assistance and Intercultural Community Integration. These two NGOs interacted with the same refugee centers and often partnered together for various events.

**Siracusa Centro per i Rifugiati**

The SCR was founded by Ali, and creates projects to help refugees learn the local culture in Siracusa and improve their socioeconomic mobility. Ali, originally from Tunisia, immigrated to Italy when he was 16. After working for different organizations that assist refugees, he decided to open SCR to help fill in the gaps in services. SCR offers cooking classes, a gardening project, art classes, and provides small employment opportunities. Although Ali’s intentions are good, like other NGOs, Ali often creates projects that do not always benefit refugees. For example, as I described in Chapter Five, Tairu often worked at the local art exhibit that Ali managed. The exhibit featured four artists, one of whom was Ali. Tairu would open the church where the exhibit was located in the mornings, and stay to sell art for five hours. He made 20% commission from anything that he sold, and Ali also placed a donation box for refugees in the
church, which Tairu would take home every day that he worked. Ali also gave other boys this opportunity since they had no other way to make money. However, the boys often complained, and said that Ali was taking advantage of them. Some told me that there were days when Ali did not pay them or underpaid them, or that he did not give them the donations. Tairu also explained that he could not sell any of Ali’s artwork because it was overpriced; once he told someone the price they usually left. One day he told me that he sold two paintings, but Ali only paid him commission for one of them: “Ali told me 20%, but he only paid 10%. He kept me too late today, and wanted me to stay after 8pm, but that is too late because I don’t get home in time to break the fast.”

I asked him why he thought Ali did that, since I knew that Ali was fasting, too. He said, “Well, I’m not sure if he does or not. He says he does, but I don’t think he does.”

Tairu was not the only refugee that I met that did not trust Ali, and he told me, “The other boys don’t like Ali either.” For instance, Abdou, a 17-year-old boy from Gambia, almost never spoke to me, except one day when I was trying to help the boys get ready go to an event with Ali. Abdou looked me straight in the eye, very seriously, and said, “If I did not like you I would just tell you, [that is the reason we don’t want to go,] but I don’t Ali, and that is why we don’t want to go. But we will go and see how it is because you want us to go.” Abdou expressed that they normally avoid Ali’s events entirely because they did not like him. David, a 17-year-old boy from Nigeria told me that he did not want to work with Ali anymore because he would always talk about something, but never do it. He explained that Ali sometimes told him about work, or travel to another city, but he would never complete any of his endeavors.

David, and other boys felt like Ali used them only for publicity when he needed refugees in pictures, which I observed to be true. Any time there was an event sponsored by SCR, or Ali

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8 As I described in Chapter Five, Tairu was practicing Ramadan and fasted until sunset.
brought in a volunteer to visit the centers, everyone would take pictures without asking the
refugees for permission. This was particularly troublesome to me when Ali brought two other
anthropologists from other universities to one of the centers for minors. Before basic
introductions were made, one of the women began taking pictures of everyone without asking; I
was particularly disturbed by this because the boys were all minors, and were not asked for
consent. Further, they did not ask my permission either. Sitting with the boys, I felt like we were
part of an exotic exhibit. If I felt uncomfortable as a white American, I can imagine that many of
the boys felt even more so.

The boys were not the only refugees that did not trust Ali. After two months in Siracusa, I
interviewed Grace, who wanted to talk about Ali. Like others, Grace said that she was unsure
about talking to me because she knew Ali and I were friends. However, one day I saw her
outside The Garden. I had collected donations for the refugees living there, and when Grace saw
this she thought that I might be different than Ali. She appeared shocked when she saw me, and
later said that she was not sure if I would take the bus to The Garden. She told me that after she
saw me talking to the refugees there, and bringing them donations, she decided that I might have
better intentions than how she considered Ali.

Although many refugees dislike and distrust Ali, I do not think that this is entirely based
on facts; refugees’ previous experiences also played a role in their perspective of Ali. Rather,
many of the refugees from sub-Saharan Africa had never seen an Arab African before leaving
their home country. Most refugees were imprisoned, tortured, sexually assaulted, or trafficked
while they were in Libya. During one of our many conversations about the art exhibit, Tairu told
me, “It’s hard to work for Ali [but] I want to trust him. I think that maybe it is because Libya is
all I know of Arab people. I know that they are not all the same, and that Ali is not like the
people in Libya, but it is hard.” Later that week when talking to Ali, I asked him if any of the refugees did not like him because he was Arab. He explained:

   It’s difficult for them sometimes, and I have to try to be patient. Because I want to help them, but sometimes they do not want help from me. I try to offer them many activities and things that will help them here, but sometimes they do not want to talk to me. I don’t blame them though because they are tortured in Libya. They see in me the face of their torturer.

After months of participant observation with Ali and the refugees, I concluded that the problem between SCR and the refugees was not due to the fact that Ali was attempting to take advantage of refugees, as many believed. The trauma and memories of what happened to each individual in Libya colored their opinion of Ali before they gave him a chance.

AMIICA

AMIICA is an international NGO that attempts to alleviate many of the problems that migrants face, and help them to integrate into society. I visited and encountered workers from AMIICA several times, and believe that they are not an organization that provides real assistance for refugees; many of their activities for the boys appear to mainly be for appearance. As mentioned in Chapter Five, the centers for unaccompanied minor refugees took the boys to the World Refugee Day in Siracusa. This was partly organized by AMIICA, and a brief analysis of the event reveals many insights into the treatment of refugees both by AMIICA and Sicilians in general. The event itself was clearly intended for an Italian audience. In fact, the entire two-and-a-half-hour performance was all in Italian; while many refugees are learning Italian, the predominate languages refugees in Siracusa speak are English, French, and Arabic. The event
highlighted Italian musicians, writers, dances, and speeches from Italian individuals that glorified refugees and the Italians that “rescued” them. It did not include refugees in the performance until the last 10 minutes of the event in what looked like an impromptu dance. Further, refugees were told to sit on the side of the stadium, rather in the center seats. Figures 8 and 9 show the seating arrangements in the theatre that were directed by AMIICA. The small section bordered with the red line is where we were told to sit; we were even told to move closer together at one point to make more room for arriving Italians.

Figure 9 The assigned sections in the Greek Theatre on World Refugee Day.
In addition to the focus of the performances, which excluded refugee languages and cultures, the physical placement of refugees in the theatre further demonstrates that Italians were the intended audience for World Refugee Day.

The event for World Refugee Day was not the only time that made me skeptical about AMIICA and their intentions. One day I Ali, who also works with AMIICA, informed me that AMIICA would be holding a protest in Piazza Archimedes, the main piazza in the tourist section of Siracusa, to raise awareness about the long waiting period for refugees to receive official documents to live in Italy. As a person who has attended many protests, I asked if I should bring signs and if we would be marching. Ali told me that it would be more like a sit-in and quiet protest; I have participated in sit-ins before, so I am aware of the general idea behind such events. When I arrived, I saw that it was organized by the same local director of AMIICA, who was 40 minutes late to the “protest.”
It occurred to me that perhaps Ali wanted me there because I am white; I was the only white person there, and everyone always made sure that I was in the photographs taken. The event appeared to be clearly all about publicity. There were no black refugees there, who make up the majority of the refugees in Siracusa, and for whom the protest should be conducted. I asked why they did not invite the refugees, and Ali told me it was because the refugees that he worked with were children, and he did not like to involve them in public events. This completely contradicted a prior event, where Ali was named the “Ambassador of Ortigia,” a title for select community members, for his work with the migrant community. In this case, he lined up approximately 10 refugee minors behind him on stage while he accepted the award, not only exposing them to the public eye, but placing them in a position where their picture could be taken by local newspapers without asking for their consent. Thus, I knew that this was not the real reason why refugees were not at the protest; rather, I think that he did not invite them. I asked him, “What about the adults who are always talking about documents, like the women?” He told me that they did not care to show up to the protest. However, the event was nothing like a protest. Once everyone had gathered at the corner of the piazza, we were all told to line up, and hold the banner with the AMIICA logo, which had no mention of refugees or migrants. The event was clearly not a protest; rather, it was an opportunity to take photographs and receive additional publicity for the organization.

AMIICA represents a different form of exploitation of refugees in Siracusa than the centers. During my field work, I interviewed the regional director and the local director for AMIICA. They both explained that AMIICA works to help refugees and migrants with legal services and community integration. I asked both women how AMIICA achieves their goals, and while they told me that they work within the community and create programs that benefit
migrants, neither could provide specific examples of what they do. The local director was more interested to find out if I was planning to feature her in a news article than discussing the challenges for refugees. While AMIICA does not directly subject refugees to poor living conditions, they use their “refugee-ness” to raise money for the organization, and then take pictures to appear as though they are making an impact in the lives of refugees and migrants in Siracusa. It was unclear why the organization seemed dysfunctional, and whether it was due to corruption or incompetent employees. However, the organization displayed their inability to provide quality assistance to refugees on multiple occasions. During my time in Siracusa, the only observation I made of AMIICA contributing anything to refugees was when they passed out free hats for the boys to wear. However, of course they had AMIICA written across the front and the boys were instructed to pose for a picture wearing their hats.

The Business of Refugees

Participant observation and interviews with NGO workers in Siracusa revealed that many refugee centers treated refugees as a commodity. As anthropologist William Fisher (1997) explains, NGOs are often credited with altruistic motives to ameliorate world issues, but they can also cause harm to the populations they serve. This idea of “harmful” humanitarian aid is evident in the work of anthropologists Mark Schuller and Julie Maldonado (2016:62) who demonstrate “disaster capitalism” as “national and transnational governmental institutions’ instrumental use of catastrophe (both so-called ‘natural’ and human-mediated disasters, including postconflict situations) to promote and empower a range of private, neoliberal capitalist interest.” In Sicily, the business of migration has become quite profitable; the weakened economy and influx of large numbers of refugees allowed this type of disaster capitalism to become embedded in the work of
NGOs that provided humanitarian aid to refugees. My key informant, Ali, explained that centers are “only a business, and the ones who do the best only do 30% of what they could do. The more people that live in the camp, the more money [the center] makes; it is like human parking.” My conversation with Ali confirmed what many of my informants told me about the care that they receive from their respective centers; they felt as though they were only waiting, and being exploited by the centers in which they live. These extended waiting periods, which are reinforced through the local NGO practices, continue to place refugees in a liminal state where they remain in second reception centers. Many refugees claimed that they only wanted to obtain employment and move out of the center. However, when NGOs that assist refugees are structured as a business, these waiting periods for refugees are extended, keeping refugees in a liminal state. Thus, refugees are not only marginalized through improper services; rather, NGOs also marginalize refugees through less visible processes such as liminality.

While many centers function as a business for owners, they also often participate in local systems of corruption that exploit refugees. For example, corruption occurs from the top to the bottom of the immigration system; local governments take much of the money and the centers must wait for financial assistance, while other times the owners of the centers themselves take money provided to the organization. This was discussed by a local business owner who explained that the EU and the Italian government give money for aid, but it disappears and they do not help the refugees. Additionally, Lucia disclosed that her center often did not receive the monthly payments from the municipal government, or, if they did, it was often late and sometimes the incorrect amount. An illustrative example is the allocation of “pocket money,” or small amounts of money that refugees receive from NGOs. The EU and the Italian government send funds for NGOs to regional and local governments that allocate the pocket money to
individual NGOs. However, it is unclear how this money is distributed amongst refugees. This pocket money often disappears as it travels through corrupt levels of bureaucracy. My participant observation at the centers revealed that refugees did not regularly receive pocket money and, when they did, the amount was almost never correct.

*Mafia Involvement*

The profit driven business of immigration in Sicily is especially evident when examining the involvement of the Sicilian Mafia in refugee organizations. Ali explained that the Mafia had begun to take control of the reception centers for refugees and migrants. For example, Kersch and Mishtal (2016) examined the problems with Umberto Primo, a large first reception center on the outskirts of Siracusa. During my research in 2015, this center was fully operating, although inefficiently. However, when I returned in 2016, Ali told me that the center closed two months prior to my arrival. According to Ali, larger and more powerful Mafia groups push out smaller mafia ones, and then build larger camps that they operate, which was the case with Umberto Primo (Kersch and Mishtal 2016). Further, Ali explained that any center that wants to operate in Italy is connected to the Mafia in some manner, or they will not receive the required permits to open a reception center.

It is also important to examine this involvement with unaccompanied minor refugees because the Italian government provides more money for organizations helping children than those who assist adults. Ali explained that while centers for adults receive 45 Euro each day from the national and local government, centers for minors receive 75 Euro each day, making child refugees a more valuable commodity than adult refugees. As I argued in Chapter Four, my unaccompanied minor informants were almost always forced onto the boats to cross the
Mediterranean Sea, rather than paying the thousands of dollars that adults do. When I questioned Ali about this, he said that he had never heard anyone tell him this, but that it did not surprise him because he saw this as a way that the Mafia could make money from child refugees. Based on the difference in the amount of money given to centers for children as opposed to adults, an increase in the number of child refugees and migrants would create a greater profit for the Mafia controlled reception centers. Further, it is not logical that these boys would be forced onto the boats, without paying money, if the smugglers did not have something to gain from their travel to Italy. Based on this limited information, I suspect that Mafia involvement in migration to Italy does not end in Sicily; if more minors are forced onto a boat to travel to Italy, the Mafia will have more children to exploit for profit. The extent of their involvement was unclear, but it seems as though the Mafia has infiltrated the highest levels of the Italian immigration system, and could possibly have ties in Libya. This might explain why children were main targets for forced sea travel. However, I had to stop this line of inquiry since, of course, it is unsafe to investigate Mafia ties with reception centers in Sicily.

La Vita è Bella

After hearing about the poor conditions and ineffective workers at these centers, it was, therefore, surprising to hear refugees at one of the centers talk positively about their experiences. The La Vita è Bella center houses approximately 12 unaccompanied refugee boys. Its name, which translates to “Life is Beautiful,” comes from the Italian movie of the same name about a Jewish father who tries to help his son survive their imprisonment in a concentration camp during World War II (Benigni 1997). The center’s directors, Roberta and Oscar, chose this name to demonstrate the compassion they have for those who are persecuted, which became evident
during an interview with Benjamin, a 16-year-old boy from Ghana. Benjamin fled his home when an armed group (which he did not name) tried to force him to join them. Like most of my informants, Benjamin fled his home, made the difficult journey across the desert, and was rescued in the Mediterranean Sea. However, the difference between Benjamin’s story and other refugees was that he claimed he was happy. He took out his phone to show to me, and I asked him if he bought the phone, as many other refugees must do. He told me that the center gave it to him. He explains:

La Vita è Bella here is good for me because I see everything for my life…Most people when they see you are black they don’t respect us like we are animals, not human beings…But life is good for me because they take care of me…. They changed my life for me and I see everything good in my life… I never go to school until now and I have an English teacher and an Italian teacher, so now I am happy. The workers here they are good because I have many friends and most of them tell me that the workers think about the money and they do not think about the refugees. They want to go to work and just take the money, but this place they are very good. They take good care of us here and take us to the hospital to see what is [our] health… They give us small money to buy things. You can get what you like, so I just save the money. So, I save money so when I need something for myself I can buy it… They give us the same amount every month. They give you everything. We cook for ourselves at night. That is why I love this camp because if you want to do something that you like they will let you, but it is not like that at all of the centers and they will not agree [to let you cook what you choose]. I cook Fufu Banku.
This was completely unexpected given the stories collected and observations made at other centers in Siracusa. Unlike refugees at the other centers, Benjamin receives the proper amount of pocket money, clothes, Italian lessons, and tutoring. This quote demonstrates the ways in which the center contributes to the agency of the boys by allowing them to make decisions that can improve their lives; they have control over their own healthcare, spending money, education, and the food that they eat. Benjamin’s experience at La Vita è Bella was not unique; the other boys at the center also appeared to be happy. All the boys had everything that they wanted – cell phones, new clothes and shoes, books, pocket money, culturally appropriate food, Italian classes, English classes, and even paid membership to a local soccer club. The center was always clean, and the furniture seemed relatively new, unlike other centers where the couches and chairs were falling apart. They ate Italian food for lunch prepared by one of the workers, but ate traditional African food for dinner, which they made themselves.

After their rescue, most of the participants in this research fell victim to the profit driven system of second reception centers that contribute to socioeconomic inequalities and continue to marginalize refugees. However, when this scenario is reversed, as it is with La Vita è Bella, NGOs can work to help refugees overcome the effects of structural violence that they may face after arriving in Italy. While structural violence is produced by the Italian immigration system, its effects are attenuated by the proper social and economic assistance that the boys receive at La Vita è Bella.

“Good Aid”

Fieldwork at La Vita è Bella raised several questions: Why is this center different? Why do the boys receive proper services? Why do they report to be happy? Answering these questions
required “studying up” in order to examine “the culture of power rather than the culture of the powerless” (Nader 1972, 5) and attempt to understand why the boys at La Vita è Bella were so much happier than refugees at other centers. As anthropologist William Fisher (2016) explains, NGOs are often vastly different in their program and structure, thus, they create different effects within society. For example, the refugee program at La Vita è Bella was immensely different in practice and principle than other second reception centers in Siracusa, demonstrating an example of “good aid,” in which refugees benefit socioeconomically from the distribution of humanitarian aid. When confronted with reports of poor conditions elsewhere, one of the La Vita è Bella workers, Federica, was surprised to hear that other centers do not give pocket money to the refugees since the UNHCR and the Italian Ministry of Interior provides each center with financial assistance, part of which should go to refugees living at each center. She explains:

Yes, we pay them money, every month on the 10th. They can go out and buy things like lotion, perfume, anything that they like. We do this because they do not work and we do not want them to work, they need to study. We give them a little money, and a phone and other things that they need. They are in need of nothing. They are all taken care of because the director gives them what they need.

By giving the boys the correct amount of money, the center not only fulfill general legal requirements, but it also provides the boys with the agency needed to make small choices in their everyday lives. While it should be understood that each center follows the mandate from refugee law concerning economic assistance, not all NGOs follow the proper guidelines and maintaining transparency.

Examining the boys’ relationship with the workers at La Vita è Bella led to the center’s directors, Roberta and Oscar. While staff members acknowledged multiple factors contributing
to the boys’ happiness, and the center’s ability to provide “good aid,” they attributed this primarily to Roberta and Oscar. The subjectivity that Oscar and the boys share is important to consider to understand their relationship. This concept of subjectivity, as discussed in Chapter Four, helps elucidate the directors’ compassion toward the boys because Oscar is himself a refugee from the Ivory Coast. His personal experience as a refugee directly affects the way he manages the center. Roberta affirms:

Oscar came from Africa in a boat, he passed through the desert to come here. Even though he had the papers to stay here, he couldn’t find somewhere to stay, so he was homeless for a year, sleeping in a train station in Rome. He sees it in a different way, and he wants to help people because he knows how it feels to be a refugee. He knows what to say to the boys, and what they need to do to succeed. So, it is different for the boys to listen to someone who went through the same thing.

As such, Oscar and the boys have shared refugee subjectivities, which fosters a greater first-hand understanding of the boys’ needs. The concept of a refugee subjectivity, discussed in Chapter Four, not only applies to boys who currently live in second reception centers, but many other refugees like Oscar who shared similar experiences with these boys. Thus, Oscar also understands the ways in which they might react and respond to their new lives in Italy, which enables him to provide higher quality assistance than other second reception centers in Siracusa.

Additionally, Roberta has worked for nearly 30 years in local immigration agencies. This valuable experience informs her understanding of how the immigration system in Siracusa functions, from the local government to the commission office to other refugee centers. She says, “Because of my experience in the commission office, and because we are experts in the field, we can work around problems with the government. Even if the police and municipal don’t
appreciate this, we work together and go against them.” Her expertise enables La Vita è Bella to better navigate immigration policies and understand the ways in which local government ignores national and international refugee policies, particularly the financial assistance that should be provided to NGOs and subsequently refugees. For instance, when the municipal government fails to pay the center on time, Roberta calls various local offices until the center is finally paid. Since Roberta worked in the UNHCR commission office, she knows what interviewers will ask the boys, and what qualifies them for refugee status. As I discussed in Chapter Five, Lucia explained that the local commission office sometimes changes procedures seemingly erratically, and it can be difficult to understand their policies. Therefore, if a boy who lives at La Vita è Bella is denied their request for asylum even though he legally qualifies for protection, Roberta knows this and hires an attorney to help the boy obtain documents. Thus, Roberta mitigates the liminality of refugees by ensuring that the local commission office follows the proper procedures, and that the boys receive their official documents in a timely manner.

Additionally, Roberta has an extensive network of contacts within local government offices and other organizations on whom she can call when a problem arises. Although this specific ability is entirely subjective and impossible to duplicate by another center, Roberta’s tactics illustrate the importance of work experience in providing beneficial humanitarian aid, and successfully integrating refugees into local society. However, this is problematic given the fact that, as more and more refugee centers become for-profit businesses, some directors and workers have limited professional experience working with refugees.

Another contributing factor to the boys’ positive experiences is the organizational structure of La Vita è Bella. The center is organized communally and based on the concept of
family. Roberta and Oscar employ their own family members, and in turn, everyone, including the staff members and the boys, treat each other like family. Federica explains:

Roberta wants what is best for the children and she wants to change their lives.

She understands the problem and wants to change the problem. Also, they are a family, we are a family within a family. It also depends on us and if we work well and respect the boys; if we respect them then they will respect us. They like us and call us mama. They can live in this house and we do everything; it is a community; we teach them and try to teach them well. For all children, it is this way. They are happy because of this and there are no problems with anyone. We treat them like children and others may not. They are like our children, when they are older this may be different, but for children, this is what they need.

When talking about opening the center, Roberta revealed that she and Oscar thought that it was important to structure the center as if everyone was part of the same family. In addition to La Vita è Bella, Roberta and Oscar manage a center for refugee adults and two centers for people with mental disabilities. They organize all of their centers around this idea of providing familial support to residents. She explains:

We chose to involve the people around our family because we thought of the center as a family. The center was born thinking about family. You don’t have to involve just money in the working, you must involve yourself. You should talk to people,

9 Anthropologists and gender scholars have long problematized the concept of “family” as a site of potential support but also forms of oppression. For example, Marxist feminist scholars have shown women’s marginalization in an economically dependent domestic role, while queer theory scholars have argued that LGBTQ individuals and communities have sought to create new kinship ties to form new families beyond families of origin (Benston 1969; Godelier 2011; Weston 1991). In this ethnographic context, the concept of family is taken as a priori positive because of the manner in which it was discussed by informants.
as people educated their children. You just don’t speak to them you have to teach them. So, based on that, when we opened the center we wanted the workers to be like family. When there is a problem with some refugees we go to the center, and we talk to the people we do the work over there, even if it’s hard we do that, we go and talk to the people and do it all together.

This structure allows the center to better serve the boys because it creates a support system for them. While there is tension between the workers and the boys at many other centers, the workers at La Vita è Bella treat the boys as they would their own children, which provides a sense of family that the boys lost when they fled their homes at young ages. This integration of family and humanitarian aid creates a positive environment for refugee minors until they reach adulthood. This type of structure provides the boys with more than just food and shelter; the additional security of feeling as though they are a part of a family enables them to better transition into a “new life” in Italy. For example, because the humanitarian aid provided is combined with this additional familial support network, the boys have more opportunities to learn from the workers, greater emotional support, and a sense of stability in their lives. David and the other boys told me that when they have a problem, they can go to one of the workers for advice because they think of them like their own mother. Their inclusion in a “family” is symbolic of their inclusion in society.

La Vita è Bella stands out as a positive example of how to provide “good aid” for other second reception centers for refugees in Sicily. While this is a study of “what works” in refugee centers in Siracusa, many of the positive aspects of La Vita è Bella could be applied to refugee centers in other geographic regions. In this case, aid that “works” is provided by an organization that lacks corruption, provides economic and social support, possesses knowledge and tactics for
maneuvering in the political system, and provides a communal organizational structure. While it is not possible to duplicate the exact elements that make La Vita è Bella successful, especially for a wide variety of NGOs in numerous geographic regions, it is possible to model programs around certain practices that would increase refugees’ cultural and social capital in the host country.

Creating Capital

When refugees arrive in host countries such as Italy, they often lack the necessary cultural and social capital to thrive. Pierre Bourdieu argues that capital exists in three main forms: cultural capital, which can exist in the form of institutionalized education, cultural material goods, or “dispositions of the mind;” social capital, which consists of social connections and relationships; and economic capital, which is immediately convertible to money, and to which social and cultural capital may be converted (1986, 243). Many participants in this research were not familiar with Italy or Italian culture prior to arriving in Sicily, and none of the newly arrived boys knew anyone in Europe outside of the center. Thus, they had no cultural or social capital that would help enable them to easily navigate Sicilian culture.

Five of the six centers that I visited did not offer assistance with cultural learning. However, La Vita è Bella provides high quality services to increase the boys’ cultural capital, which are often not offered at other centers. These services, which include Italian lessons, cultural orientations, and job preparation services, increase and enhance cultural capital and better prepare the boys for their new life in Italy. When interviewing Roberta, she explained why this is important. She stated that the boys’ cultures are often very different than Italian culture, and that she and Oscar try to help the boys as they transition into Italian life by teaching them
how Italian culture is different than most of their countries of origin. To illustrate this, she picked up a jar of pens from her desk and placed it between us. She said that, in many of the countries and regions that the boys are from in Africa, everyone in their community shares, and if you see this jar, you can take a pen. But, they teach the boys that Italy is different because they must ask permission if they can take a pen: “It’s things like this that have to be taught to the boys so that they understand how to act in the culture here in Siracusa.” She explained that they let the boys cook African food for dinner, but the boys must eat Italian food for lunch. Since they live in Italy now, Roberta wants them to know about Italian food and culture, and said that it was her job to ensure that the boys understood the cultural differences. They even help train them to go on job interviews, and escort them to interviews after they are eligible to work at age 18. Unlike other centers, La Vita è Bella provides services that provide the boys with the necessary skills to integrate into the local society and economy after they leave the center. Therefore, they are more likely to be successful at finding employment and increasing their socioeconomic standing within society than boys that live at other centers.

Symbolic Violence

The concept of symbolic violence is also useful for understanding refugees’ plight, which Bourdieu (1977, 191) describes as the “unrecognizable, socially recognized violence” that allows one social group to dominate another. The immigration system exercises this kind of violence on refugees in part because of their lack of economic, social, and cultural capital in the Sicilian socioeconomic order. Indeed, refugees in Siracusa often lack upward socioeconomic mobility. The effects of this symbolic violence are long-term, and are exacerbated by the inaction of many reception centers. Fieldwork showed that many centers restrict refugees’ social and cultural
capital by not providing them with the services that they need to increase this capital through cultural knowledge. By limiting their cultural and social capital, refugees are kept in a social position that restricts their agency and exposes them to symbolic violence. Thus, these centers perpetuate the hegemonic power structure within Sicilian society that maintains the dominance of “native” Italians over migrants and refugees, keeping refugees in impoverished conditions. However, refugees living at La Vita è Bella do not experience symbolic violence to the same extent as those at other centers because they have acquired greater cultural and social capital through the programs and services offered there.

Knowledge of the variations in humanitarian aid organizations for refugees in Sicily is paramount to ameliorating problems associated with the current “European refugee crisis.” With thousands of refugees arriving in Italy each month, poor humanitarian aid services can create future harm for the growing refugee population. If second reception centers that house refugees do not provide adequate services, conditions for refugees will only worsen after they leave these centers because many refugees do not have the necessary resources to live independently, unless they have social ties in the region. Refugees in Siracusa who are ill-prepared to integrate into the local economy and society are likely to become homeless, or they must move to other cities until they can find substantial employment, which was the case with many of the refugees and migrants interviewed outside of the centers. By limiting the services provided to refugees, second reception centers also restrict their socioeconomic mobility within Italian society.

While it is critical to consider the conditions that exploit and marginalize refugees, it is also necessary to examine cases in which refugees do receive exceptional humanitarian aid at second reception centers. The services provided to boys at La Vita è Bella mitigate the effects of symbolic violence that keeps refugees trapped in cycles of poverty. This center provides refugees
with services that increase their cultural and social capital, which better prepares them to successfully integrate into the local culture in Siracusa, and in turn, increases their socioeconomic mobility.

Understanding how NGOs can increase the cultural and social capital of unaccompanied minor refugees, thereby increasing their economic capital, is valuable for creating programs that assist refugees. Addressing how to acquire cultural and social capital enables NGOs to create effective programs that can potentially create long term benefits for refugees as they adjust to life in Siracusa. The European refugee crisis will not end in the near future, as the conflicts and situations in home countries of most of the refugees have not improved. Thus, local governments and NGOs should prepare to assist refugees and migrants in a manner that best benefits both the refugees and the host country. Through the examination of model NGO practices and structures, such as those of La Vita è Bella, other NGOs can create programs that help refugees in the long-term, rather than simply provide emergency assistance.

In this chapter, I argue that there are many cases of improper treatment of refugees and migrants by NGOs. Refugees are not only exploited by the centers in which they live, but also by NGOs that claim to assist migrants. While it is important to consider the problems associated with refugee centers, anthropologists should also examine what organizations are doing correctly to best serve those in need. In this chapter, I provide a contrast between the negative aspects of refugee resettlement in Italy, and centers that create positive impacts for refugees. By examining the method NGOs use to assist refugees, this chapter provides further information about NGOs that positively impact refugee in Siracusa.
CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

This thesis examines refugees’ journeys from their home countries, their lives after arriving in the province of Siracusa, and how policies and practices affect refugees. This research shows that unaccompanied minor refugees living in Siracusa share a “refugee subjectivity” that based on their shared experiences in their journey to Italy, which reveals the shared inner lives of these boys, and their current interactions with society. By examining the everyday lives of refugees, and their experiences in second reception centers, including their own perception of services, I investigate the true conditions of refugee centers, rather than the limited information revealed to the public. I found that most second reception centers for refugee men, women, and children treat refugees poorly, and do not provide refugees with adequate socioeconomic assistance to “integrate” into the local community. My findings also indicate that international policies and local practices concerning refugees are not structured in a manner that helps refugees. Rather, these policies, such as the Dublin III agreement discussed in Chapter Six, and local NGO practices and the implementation of these policies often create further harm to this vulnerable population by reinforcing systems of structural and symbolic violence that restrict the socioeconomic mobility of refugees after they arrive in Siracusa. This research also reveals unexpected results through the analysis of La Vita è Bella, one of the centers for minors, which provides exceptional services for refugees and properly implements refugee policy, which positively impacts their social and economic capital after their arrival in Siracusa.

Knowledge of the variations in humanitarian aid organizations for refugees in Sicily is paramount to ameliorating problems associated with the current “European refugee crisis.” With thousands of refugees arriving in Italy each month, poor humanitarian aid services can create future harm for the growing refugee population. If second reception centers that house refugees
do not provide adequate services, conditions for refugees will only worsen after they leave these centers because many refugees do not have the necessary resources to live independently, unless they have social ties in the region. Those refugees in Siracusa who are ill-prepared to integrate into the local economy and society are likely to become homeless, or they must move to other cities until they can find substantial employment, which was the case with many of the refugees and migrants I interviewed outside of the centers.

**Contributions to Anthropology**

Although there is a wide variety of anthropological literature concerning refugees, there is a need for further examination of the current problems that refugees encounter after their arrival in host countries. Further, since Sicily is a main entry point for migrants and refugees crossing the Mediterranean Sea, it is critical to examine second reception centers in this specific geopolitical region. My research shows that refugee boys develop a subjectivity due to their shared experiences during their journey from their home countries to Italy. My findings also demonstrate that these second reception centers perpetuate socioeconomic systems of oppression and continue to marginalize refugees. Additionally, since my field sites include six second reception centers, my findings indicate that harmful treatment of refugees exists in centers throughout the province of Siracusa. Therefore, this research deepens the anthropological knowledge of refugees’ experiences living in such centers. The examination of second reception centers is of particular importance due to the extended lengths of time that refugees live in the centers, often for periods of one to three years. Further, these findings contribute to the knowledge about unaccompanied refugee minors in Sicily, of which little information is known due to the secrecy of the centers, as well as the anthropological understanding of unaccompanied
minor refugees in general. As reported by journalist Ashley Gilbertson (2016), journalists are rarely granted permission to enter the centers, stating that “we don’t see what happens to them on dry land, once they are warehoused in camps.” Thus, the aspect of this research that focuses on centers for unaccompanied minors is critical due to the poor understanding and underreported conditions of reception centers for children in Sicily. Centers for minors are a crucial topic in refugee studies in Italy because of the increase in the number of child refugees and migrants in the country, and the secrecy of the NGOs that house them.

Contributions to Other Disciplines

This research also adds to the knowledge of other disciplines in the social sciences by showing how refugees perceive humanitarian aid after their arrival in Italy. My research shows that most humanitarian aid provided to refugees and migrants in Siracusa is ineffective, or even harmful. However, the example provided of La Vita è Bella shows that effective humanitarian aid to refugees in Siracusa is possible, and reveals NGO practices that benefit refugees. These findings thus contribute to disciplines that research NGOs, such as public administration.

Through the examination of refugee law and policy, this research has the potential to inform political science of the impacts of such laws and policies on the lives of refugees. It also asks if the effects from certain policies help facilitate the “integration” of refugees in society or if they perpetuate cycles of marginalization. My analysis shows that the Dublin III agreement restricts the socioeconomic mobility of refugees by preventing them from entering countries that can help support large numbers of refugees.

My research could also benefit practicing NGOs that assist refugees by revealing the positive and negative effects of practices and refugees’ own perception of the services provided.
The juxtaposition of five of the centers with La Vita è Bella, the center for minors I discuss in Chapter Six, reveals how differences in the practices of second reception centers can either restrict or increase the socioeconomic mobility of refugees. Additionally, many of my informants expressed that they wanted people to understand the plight of refugees, and their struggles in Siracusa. My research also has the potential to benefit refugees in Italy by sharing the true nature of their experiences in second reception centers.

Lastly, my research also contributes to the knowledge on structural and symbolic violence not only in anthropology, but also in other social sciences that utilize these theories. By demonstrating how these concepts apply to refugee populations, this research supports and builds upon these theories by demonstrating how they apply to refugee populations, thus contributing to the anthropological conversation concerning structural and symbolic violence.

Future Research

The research and analysis that I completed for this thesis project will help to prepare me for future anthropological research with refugees and migrants in Italy. My fieldwork allowed me to develop extensive contacts and networks of refugees and NGO workers. As I begin my Ph.D. in applied anthropology, I am well prepared to further examine these topics for my dissertation. Due to the dearth of information, both anthropologically and in other disciplines, concerning unaccompanied minors in Sicily, I hope to continue this line of inquiry to expand the knowledge on this topic. I also hope to continue to do fieldwork with women refugees. Since I now have a better understanding of women refugees in Italy, I am better equipped to continue this research for my doctoral program. I plan to return to Italy for my doctoral research in the summer of 2018 to maintain relationships with those at the field sites described in this thesis, as
well as to conduct preliminary research and explore other possible field sites that assist refugees and migrants after they arrive in Italy.
Approval of Human Research

From: UCF Institutional Review Board #1  
FWA00000351, IRB00001138

To: Russell E. Manzano and Co-PI: Joanna Zofia Mishtal

Date: March 03, 2016

Dear Researcher:

On 03/03/2016, the IRB approved the following human participant research until 03/02/2017 inclusive:

Type of Review: UCF Initial Review Submission Form
Project Title: Resettlement and Marginalization: Understanding the Needs of Refugees in Sicily
Investigator: Russell E. Manzano
IRB Number: SBE-16-11973
Funding Agency:
Grant Title:
Research ID: N/A

The scientific merit of the research was considered during the IRB review. The Continuing Review Application must be submitted 30 days prior to the expiration date for studies that were previously expedited, and 60 days prior to the expiration date for research that was previously reviewed at a convened meeting. Do not make changes to the study (i.e., protocol, methodology, consent form, personnel, site, etc.) before obtaining IRB approval. A Modification Form cannot be used to extend the approval period of a study. All forms may be completed and submitted online at https://iris.research.ucf.edu.

If continuing review approval is not granted before the expiration date of 03/02/2017, approval of this research expires on that date. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in IRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

Use of the approved, stamped consent document(s) is required. The new form supersedes all previous versions, which are now invalid for further use. Only approved investigators (or other approved key study personnel) may solicit consent for research participation. Participants or their representatives must receive a copy of the consent form(s).

All data, including signed consent forms if applicable, must be retained and secured per protocol for a minimum of five years (six if HIPAA applies) past the completion of this research. Any links to the identification of participants should be maintained and secured per protocol. Additional requirements may be imposed by your funding agency, your department, or other entities. Access to data is limited to authorized individuals listed as key study personnel.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the Investigator Manual.

On behalf of Sophia Dziegielewski, Ph.D., L.C.S.W., UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

[Signature]

Signature applied by Joanne Munatori on 03/03/2016 01:00:41 PM EST
IRB Manager
APPENDIX B: ADULT REFUGEE INTERVIEW GUIDE
Interview Guide for Research Project:

“Resettlement and Marginalization: Understanding the Resettlement Policies That Affect Refugees’ Experiences in Sicily”

-- Interviews with Key Informants: Refugees --

Location: ____________________

Opening Background Questions:

- Can you tell me a little about yourself and your life in your home country?
  - Where are you from?
  - Where are your other family members?
  - What was your occupation there?
- Why did you flee your country?
- Can you tell me as much as you feel comfortable with about your journey from your country to Sicily?
  - How did you travel?
  - How did you make arrangements for land travel?
  - How did you make arrangements for sea travel?
  - How did you arrive to Italy?
  - How long was the journey?
  - How long have you been in Sicily?
  - How many centers have you lived in?

Research Questions:

[RE: RQ1: What challenges do refugees face after arriving to resettlement centers in Sicily?]

- How long have you been living at this center?
- Do you have family or friends in Europe?
  - Can they help you to find a job and a place to live?
  - Can you live with them?
  - Will any family or friends come to live here with you?
- What has been the hardest for you since you got here?
- Since you arrived, where have you lived in Sicily? Can you describe the conditions?
- Can you describe any of your experiences?
  - Have you lived in more than one center?
    - What are the differences?
    - Can you describe how you have been treated?
  - Did you have any expectations about Italy before coming here? Can you describe them?
    - How did you hear about this?
  - Can you describe how you have been treated by Italians?
- What types of services do you receive?
  - Do you think that you receive good health care in Italy?
- What types of doctors have you seen in Italy? (mental, physical)
- How many times have you been to the doctor in Italy?
  - Were you sick or were the visits to check your health?
- Have there been times when you wanted to go to the doctor and could not? Please explain?
- Do you receive any legal services that help you with your immigration documents?
  - What kind of help?
  - How often?
- Can you explain what you want to do by migrating to Italy?
  - Do you want to stay in Siracusa/Sicily/Italy?
    - What country do you want to move to?
    - What do you need to move?
    - How long do you want to stay before you move?
- Can you describe your experiences so far trying to find employment?
  - What kind of work have you done in Italy?
  - How often do you work?
  - Are you paid well?
  - What kind of work would you like to do?
    - Are there jobs available for this type of work?
- What do people do when they leave the center?
  - Do you still talk to people who have left?
  - How do you think their life has changed since they left?

**[RE: RQ2: How do current migration policies affect newly arriving refugees and asylum seekers?]**

- Are there any rules that the center gives you to follow? Can you describe them?
  - Are some easy to follow, and others difficult to follow?
  - Are there different rules for different people?
  - Do you have to be back at the center by a certain time each day?
  - Are you able to look for work?

- Does the center give you enough help?
  - What else do you need?
  - How much do they give you a month?
  - What kind of clothing do they give you?
  - What kind of food do they feed you?

- Would you have gone to another country instead of Italy? What country?
  - Why would that country be better than Italy?

- Did you change your route to Italy because of any news, communications, or laws?
  - What did you change? Why?

- How has Italy helped you and other refugees?
  - How has Europe assisted you and other refugees?
  - What could they do better?

**Closing Questions:**
- Is there anything else you would like to tell me?
Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you very much for your time. Please don’t hesitate to contact me if there’s anything else that you would like to add that you have not had a chance to say during this interview. Here’s my contact information.
Russell Manzano
001-850-607-1696
Manzano01@ucf.edu
APPENDIX C: MINOR REFUGEE INTERVIEW GUIDE
Interview Guide for Research Project:

“Resettlement and Marginalization: Understanding the Resettlement Policies That Affect Refugees’ Experiences in Sicily”
-- Interviews with Key Informants: Unaccompanied Minor Refugees --

Location: ____________________

Opening Background Questions:

- Can you tell me a little about yourself?
  - How old are you?
  - Where are you from?
  - Where are your other family members?
  - Did you go to school?
- Why did you leave your country?
- Can you tell me as much as you feel comfortable with about your trip to Sicily?
  - How did you travel?
  - How did you make arrangements for land travel?
  - How did you make arrangements for sea travel?
  - How did you arrive to Italy?
  - How long did it take?
  - How long have you been in Sicily?
  - How many centers have you lived in?

Research Questions:

[RE: RQ1: What challenges do refugees face after arriving to reception and resettlement centers in Sicily?]

- Do you have family or friends in Europe?
  - Can you live with them?
  - Will any family or friends come to live here with you?
- Since you arrived in Italy, where have you lived? Can you describe the conditions and your experiences?
  - Have you lived in more than one?
  - Which has been the best/worst place?
  - Can you describe how you have been treated?
  - Did you have any expectations about Italy before coming here? Can you describe them?
    - How did you hear about this?
  - Can you describe how you have been treated by Italians?
- What types of services do you receive?
  - Do you think that you receive good health care in Italy?
  - What was the problem when you went to the doctor?
  - How many times have you been to the doctor in Italy?
    - Were you sick or were the visits to check your health?
  - Have there been times when you wanted to go to the doctor and could not? Please explain?
Do you receive any legal services that help you with your immigration documents?
  • What kind of help?
  • How often?
• Can you explain what you hope to do for your future by coming to Italy?
  o Do you want to stay in Italy?
  o Do you want to go to school?
• How do you like the school here in Sicily?
  o Can you describe how they treat you at the school?
  o Do you understand Italian enough to understand the teacher?
• What do people do when they leave the center?
  o Do you still talk to people who have left?
• How do you think their life has changed since they left?

[RE: RQ2: How do current migration policies affect newly arriving refugees and asylum seekers?]

• Are there any rules that the center gives you to follow? Can you describe them?
  o Are some easy to follow, and others difficult to follow?
  o Are there different rules for different people
• Does the center give you enough help?
  o What else do you need?
  o How much do they give you a month?
  o What kind of clothing do they give you?
  o What kind of food do they feed you?
  o Do they give you school supplies?
• Would you have gone to another country instead of Italy? What country?
  o Why would that country be better than Italy?
• Did you change your route to Italy because of any news, communications, or laws?
  o What did you change? Why?
• How has Italy assisted you and other refugees?
  o How has Europe assisted you and other refugees?
  o What could they do better?

Closing Questions:
• Is there anything else that you would like to tell me?
• Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you very much for your time. Please don’t hesitate to contact me if there’s anything else that you would like to add that you have not had a chance to say during this interview. Here’s my contact information.
Russell Manz
001-850-607-1696
Manzano01@ucf.edu
APPENDIX D: NGO WORKER INTERVIEW GUIDE
Interview Guide for Research Project:

“Resettlement and Marginalization: Understanding the Resettlement Policies That Affect Refugees’ Experiences in Sicily”
-- Interviews with Key Informants: NGO Workers --

Opening Background Questions:

- Can you tell me a little about yourself and your role at the organization?
  - Are you from Italy?
  - Can you describe your experience working with refugees?
  - How did you get involved working with refugees?

Research Questions:

[RE: RQ1: What has been difficult for refugees after arriving to reception and resettlement centers in Sicily?]

- How many refugees live in the center?
- How many refugees does the center assist in a month/year?
- How long do refugees stay in the center?
- What happens when they leave?
- What services does the center provide to refugees?
- Do refugees typically find employment and resettle in Sicily?
  - How does the center help refugees find employment?
  - Do refugees typically find consistent work?

- How does this organization prepare refugees to resettle in Italian society?
  - Services, financial assistance, language classes, cultural orientation, job training
- Do you ever see former clients?
  - How do you think their life changed since leaving the center?
  - What do refugees do when they leave the center?

[RE: RQ2: How do current migration policies affect newly arriving refugees and asylum seekers?]

- How has government policy affected your organization?
  - Do you receive money from the government?
    - How much and how often?
    - Are there ever times when the organization is low on funding? Can you give me an example of when this has happened?
    - Are there any services that you or the organization would like to provide, but cannot due to funding? Can you describe them?
  - Do you think there is enough money for organizations and refugees?
    - Why?
  - What regulations do you have to follow from the Italian government and European Union?
- Do you think that the current immigration policy works well the way that it is?
o Do you think that refugees should be able to travel to other countries to resettle?
o Do you think that there are enough organizations to help refugees?
o Can you tell how you would improve it?
• Do you think that the new law with Greece and Turkey will impact refugees coming to Italy? How?

Closing Questions:
• What do you expect to happen in the coming year?
• Are there any other aspects of this topic that we did not discuss here today but would be important to consider?
• Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you very much for your time. Please don’t hesitate to contact me if there’s anything else that you would like to add that you have not had a chance to say during this interview. Here’s my contact information.
Russell Manzano
001-850-607-1696
Manzano01@ucf.edu
APPENDIX E: AMIICA INTERVIEW GUIDE
Interview Guide for Research Project:

“Resettlement and Marginalization: Understanding the Resettlement Policies That Affect Refugees’ Experiences in Sicily”

-- Interviews with Key Informants: AMIICA NGO Workers --

- Can you tell me a little about yourself and your role at the organization?
  - How did you become involved working with migrants and refugees?

- What are the goals of AMIICA in Siracusa?
  - What does AMIICA do to achieve these goals?

- What do you think are the greatest difficulties for migrants and refugees in Siracusa?
  - What does AMIICA do to address these difficulties?

- The website states that AMIICA tries to combat racism against migrants. Can you explain how the organization does this?

- Ramzi told me that the protest yesterday was about the long wait for documents. How does AMIICA help migrants who wait a long time with documents?

- Does AMIICA have to follow any government policies or regulations?
  - How do these policies affect the organization?

- Do you think that the current immigration policy works well?
  - Does it change often? How does it change?

- Do you think that refugees should be able to travel to other countries to resettle?

- Do you think that there are enough organizations to help refugees? Can you explain?

Closing Questions:

- What do you expect to happen in the coming year?
- Are there any other aspects of this topic that we did not discuss here today but would be important to consider?
- Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you very much for your time. Please don’t hesitate to contact me if there’s anything else that you would like to add that you have not had a chance to say during this interview. Here’s my contact information.

Russell Manzano
001-850-607-1696
Manzano01@ucf.edu
APPENDIX F: RESEARCH FLYER
Volunteers Needed for Research Study on Refugee Resettlement

My name is Russell Manzano and I am a graduate student at the University of Central Florida. You may see me around the center in the next few weeks. I am conducting approved research about refugee resettlement in Sicily and I would like the opportunity to speak to you confidentially about your experience as a refugee. Please let me know if you are interested.

- Research approved by the University of Central Florida, USA
- All research is confidential

001-850-607-1696
Manzano01@knights.ucf.edu
LIST OF REFERENCES


Kersch, Adam and Joanna Mishtal. 2016 Asylum in Crisis: Migrant Policy, Entrapment, and the Role of Non-Governmental Organisations in Siracusa, Italy. Refugee Survey Quarterly 35:97-121


