

The Mobility of the Drop-in Centre: Forced Migrants' Projects of Mobility and the Role of Urban Drop-in Centres

This paper explores the ways in which drop-in centres may function as enablers of the mobility of forced migrants in cities. Based on the extensive ethnographical study of a drop-in centre in Milan, Northern Italy, the paper examines the role that these settings can play in increasing the mobility of their regular guests. Although drop-in centres are usually perceived as welcoming sites of hospitality that focus on mutual relations and care in bounded spaces, through its consideration of the stories of individual forced migrants who found resources of mobility in these centres, the paper aims to add a new dimension to the debate. The paper considers the literature on mobility, particularly Vincent Kaufmann's notion of *motility*, to explicate how drop-in centres may increase forced migrants' capital of mobility. Nevertheless, the findings showed that for some individuals the drop-in centre is not always a resource of mobility. In such cases, the drop-in centre represents only one of the many spaces of charity. The paper concludes by suggesting that drop-in centres can serve as sites where regular guests can be released from the condition of forced migrants.

Keywords: drop-in centres, city of refuge, mobility, forced migration, space of care

1. Introduction

Drop-in centres (service agencies where people can go on an informal basis to get information or help) have become important instruments in the functioning of sanctuary city and similar movements. In cities, they represent a fundamental element of refuge for forced migrants¹. These places have been often thought out and practiced as settings the main feature of which is to accommodate migrant 'guests' in a bounded space of comfort in order to satisfy their desire for permanence and security while they are being integrated

¹ In this paper, I use the notion of *forced migrant*, which was developed by Castels (2003), according to whom the concept encompasses the dichotomy between economic migrants and refugees. It includes asylum-seekers, beneficiaries of international protection, internally displaced persons and generally everyone who is 'forced' to escape, even if it is 'irregular' in the country of arrival. This term suits our case-study because it surmounts the bureaucratic power of governments over the categorization of 'authentic' refugees.

into a new community (Bagelman, 2013). In particular, in resonance with certain interpretations of drop-ins (Conradson, 2003a; 2003b; 2003c; Cloke, Johnsen & May, 2007), the body of work on the city of refuge has focused upon drop-in's relational environment and social relations and showed the positive therapeutic experiences linked to these sites (Darling, 2008; 2011; City of Sanctuary, 2017). Drop-in centres are considered providers of services that meet the needs of migrants to feel secure and protected in a community: settings where the volunteer 'host' should adhere to an ethics of care that 'embraces the guests'.

While these characteristics are relevant, and often necessary in the life of their users, this paper differs from such interpretation and, instead, focuses on how drop-in centres can affect mobility. Indeed, I argue that drop-in centres can provide a space for meetings and activities. Urban drop-ins represent settings where migrants can share their knowledge about where and how to migrate elsewhere, to participate in vocational training and language classes in order to foster their social mobility, and generally, to find activities that divert them from the *constraining conditions* of their everyday lives (see paragraph 3).

Here, I propose to contribute a different understanding of the role of the drop-in centre by expanding the reference literature and relying on extensive fieldwork in the city of Milan. Indeed, this research is based on empirical observations and qualitative interviews at Naga-har, a drop-in centre for forced migrants, where I carried out an ethnographic study over a four-month period. Naga-har is a drop-in centre in Milan, Italy. Milan has not been included in the literature on the city of refuge although it has been crucial in the recent dynamics of forced migration in Europe. Milan historically one of the top destinations of migrants to Italy (Van Aken et al., 2008), during the so-called 'refugee crisis' has seen its position in the migration process significantly increased. Indeed, between 2013 and 2016, more than 130,000 prospective asylum seekers passed through Milan before seeking refuge in Central and Northern Europe (Comune di Milano, internal memorandum, 2017). At the end of 2017, moreover, the city gave assistance to around 6,000 forced migrants in its reception centres, which is probably the highest number in its recent history (Comune di Milano, personal communication, 28 November 2017). The system of reception and assistance was developed through a network of support services that were provided by the municipality and by both Catholic and non-Catholic private organisations, such as Naga-har.

In the next section, I will discuss these points in detail and place my study in the context of the current literature. I will then describe the materials selected from the fieldwork. In

section 3, after a brief description of the methodology used in this study, I will describe and discuss the everyday lives of forced migrants in Milan as affected by a process of non-inclusive constraint. Subsequently, in section 4, I will focus on the desire for mobility as expressed by the interviewed migrant guests. Finally, before concluding the paper, in section 5, based on the data collected in interviews with migrant guests and staff, I will discuss the role played by Naga-har in increasing motility, which is affected by individual positions and characteristics such as legal status, livelihood issues and personality characteristics.

2. Urban drop-in in and migration between old and new readings

Traditionally, drop-ins embody settings wherein an ethics of care can be practised in the context of a home-space (Conradson, 2003b; Cloke, Johnsen & May, 2007): a place that is invested with shared feelings and attachments in which it is possible to negotiate boundaries of privacy and intimacy (Conradson, 2003b). Recently, then, the literature on drop-ins has been enriched by works investigating the nexus between these settings and forced migration (Darling, 2008; 2011). Drop-in centres, indeed, represent a crucial space in current welcoming initiatives toward migrants thanks to the work of movements related to city of refuge. Initiatives such as the European Cities of Refuge, the City of Sanctuary in the UK and the US' Sanctuary Cities (Derrida, 2001; Darling, 2008, 2013; Ridgley, 2008) give a prominent role to drop-in centres. Such practices (and related theorisations) often perpetuate the traditional take on drop-in centres, based on an idea of drop-in as sites of territorialised care and support. Shared by all these initiatives is, indeed, the notion of hospitality as a spatial expression that enables the city to become a 'welcoming infrastructure' that "seek[s] to be inclusive in generating a culture of welcome, involving different sectors such as education, local government, health, sports and arts, as well as refugee organisations" (City of Sanctuary, 2017:3).

This traditional take is, after all, in consonance with Jacques Derrida's appeal for the 'open city'. The well-known French philosopher, one of the sources of inspiration for these movements, indeed, expressed an idea of the relationship between foreigners and native residents based on the relationship of hospitality that should exist between the master of the house and the guest, where the latter "is not only someone to whom you say "come", but "enter," enter without waiting, make a pause in our home without waiting, hurry up and come in, "come inside," "come within me," not only toward me, but within me" (Derrida, 2000:123).

Contrary to this common reading, which focuses on drop-ins' territorialised care, the theoretical purpose of this paper is to illustrate how drop-ins can be critical in shaping the resources and capacity for mobility and movement. Indeed, in the traditional reading, spaces such as drop-in centres risk representing *fixing devices* for mobility, that is a means to ensure some level of comfort for people and thus to discourage them from onward socio-economical and physical mobility. As highlighted by Bagelman (2013), such politics of hospitality in sanctuary initiatives can end up representing *politics of ease*, meaning that, by offering welcoming practices within cities, they renders intractable serious problems regarding urban refuge. They construct a hospitality that involves what Malkki (1992) defined 'sedentarist metaphysics', namely a way of viewing the world through which movement is seen as a by-product of a world that is otherwise arranged through place and spatial order, a pathology the carriers (i.e., mobile people) of which need care.

In order to introduce a novel dimension to the debate, in the next paragraph I bring in and detail the notion of *motility* (Kaufmann, 2002) that, I argue, would contribute to develop this field of study. Indeed, this notion foregrounds different readings of mobility and helps in accounting for the forms of resources developed in these supportive contexts, which may help to shape and develop the capacity for mobility.

2.1 Motility and drop-ins as enablers of mobility

In the last decades, scholars have thoroughly reflected on how mobility represents a central dimension in our society and in people's subjectivity (e.g. Cresswell, 2006; Kellerman, 2006; Urry, 2007; Musselwhite, 2017). In particular, the so-called 'mobility turn' has put mobility on the forefront of social sciences agenda and enriched the concept of mobility of unprecedented meanings. Previously mostly spatial, currently mobility represents a multifaceted social phenomenon that is compromised of various types of movements. In addition to spatiality, mobility is, indeed, progress, freedom, opportunity, deviance and resistance (Kaufmann, Bergman & Joye, 2004; Cresswell, 2006).

One of the aspects that has been affected by this 'turn' are the dimensions of belonging and the feeling of 'home'. Traditional notions of 'home' and 'belonging' take for granted the emotional connections that people establish within their daily environments. However, in recent works, belonging is considered a process that concerns a relational attachment to place, which is fluid, mobile and always in 'becoming'. In this view, 'home' is a symbolic space of comfort and emotional attachment that spans different geographical scales, comprising a complex form of belonging that implies being in multiple places and moving among them (Antonsich, 2010; Savage, Bagnall & Longhurst, 2005) (for a similar account,

see Fernandez & Olson, 2011). Indeed, according to Mallett (2004) and Kabachnik, Regulski & Mitchneck's (2010), 'home is a journey', that is, a continuous process in which the individual is permanently in a process of looking for an ideal future home and belonging. This understanding has consequences for the hospitality in drop-ins. Contrary to the idea, popular in drop-in practices and theorisations, of home as a bounded space of comfort, home is experienced mostly as a 'dream of belonging' (May, 2000) (see section 4). It is a journey that often requires a physical or social mobility (Savage, Bagnall & Longhurst, 2005). It is a trajectory that is "performed in the knowledge of the impossibility of ever really and truly belonging, along with the fear that the stability of belonging and the sanctity of belonging are forever past" (Probyn, 1996:8).

Within this context, the concept of *motility* appears crucial. Developed by Kaufmann and colleagues throughout different works (Kaufmann, 2002; Flamm and Kaufmann, 2004; Kaufmann, Bergman and Joye, 2004; Kaufmann, 2014), motility, a reference to biology, defines both a set of factors and resources and their appropriation for the sake of one's mobility project. Starting from the realisation that mobility is one phenomenon that incorporates social and spatial qualities (Kaufmann, 2014), motility refers to "all of the characteristics of a given actor that allow him/her/it to be mobile (i.e. physical skills, income, aspirations (to move or be sedentary), the social conditions of access to existing transportation and telecommunication systems, and acquired skills (job training, a driver's license, international English for travel, etc.)" (Kaufmann, 2014:7).

In other words, motility refers to all the aspects (social conditions, knowledge and skills, and inclinations) that define the potentiality to be mobile: a potentiality that is, on the one side, inherently situated in and connected to space, and, on the other, relate to an individual ability to appropriate such factors (Flamm and Kaufmann, 2004; Kaufmann, 2014). In motility, indeed, all action takes place in a context that offers a specific *receptiveness* for mobility. It is the so-called *field of possibilities*, a dimension comprising networks, territorial configurations, employment market, and institutions and laws that, in different ways, govern human activity in a territory (Kaufmann, 2014). On the other side, motility is defined also by the *aptitude for movement*. This indicates the individual ability to appropriate these possibilities, or in other words "the way in which an individual or group takes possession of the realm of possibilities for mobility and builds on it to develop personal projects" (Flamm and Kaufmann, 2004:3).

In discussing physical mobility, Kaufmann, Bergman and Joye (2004), compare motility to a form of capital. They suggest that motility is independent of traditional forms of capital

(e.g. income and education). Despite these forms of capital, and the positions of individuals in the social structure, may influence mobility capital, motility is linked to other individual abilities and resources, mostly to aptitudes for movement. Individuals can have little or much of these capitals, and, most importantly, motility seems to be a particularly indispensable resource for compensating for the lack of those. For this reason, mobility may represent a great resource for social inclusion (Kaufmann, 2014)².

In considering motility, the notion of drop-in can be seen in a new light. Although it is clearly possible to represent drop-in centres as spaces of permanence, security and control (Conradson, 2003b; Darling, 2011), I propose to consider those spaces in the context of the struggle for mobility. In a drop-in centre, hospitality concerns more than providing a bounded place of comfort (which is an important and positive element). For example, a centre may offer courses that increase the chances of finding a job and enhancing social mobility. It may represent a space for gathering information on how and where to migrate, or it may provide an environment that encourages aspirations for future projects of mobility or a hiatus for thinking about personal constraining circumstances (see section 5).

Of course, the realisation of motion through motility also depends on the positioning and the characteristics of the individual. In the constrained situation in which they find themselves, forced migrants may find their possibilities to *appropriate mobility* (Kauffman, 2002) are limited and depend on several conditions, such as their status (e.g. asylum seeker, undocumented migrant or beneficiary of protection) and their material and immaterial resources. However, we can also reflect on the fluid dimension that characterises drop-in centres. Similar to a house, which has doors and windows as well as walls and roofs, the drop-in centre may be seen as a place, a fixed setting with walls, a physical boundary and a flexible space that people enter and leave. I argue that this dimension is critical for the migrant guests of drop-in centres. Indeed, theoretically, drop-in centres can facilitate a 'condition of possibility' (Butler, 1997) of mobility. In other words, drop-in centres can represent settings where guests can develop the instruments necessary to realise their mobility.

3. The constraints on forced migrants' daily lives in Milan

Opened in 2001, Naga-har is a drop-in centre for asylum seekers, refugees and victims of torture. The centre is a part of Naga, which is a secular, left-wing association that

² Maksim (2011) showed how low-income individuals develop highly specialized forms of motility to compensate for their economic handicap.

originated in Milan at the end of the 1980s. Its original purpose was providing health assistance to foreigners and Romani. Since then, the number of services provided by the association has expanded to focus on migrants. In particular, Naga-har was set up to provide an environment where forced migrants could meet and interact with volunteers in a safe and pleasing environment based on the idea of offering a 'second home' and 'de-medicalised' aid. For this reason, several activities take place in Naga-har, ranging from résumé editing to music classes. These services are provided mainly by a significant number of volunteers, who undergo training in order to learn how to relate to the migrant guests, cooperating with a small staff of professionals. Aesthetic considerations have been important in designing Naga-har: from the colour chosen to the furniture and decoration, the drop-in centre was conceived as providing a sense of hospitality. Naga-har consists of an open-access area and a series of offices for staff. The open-access area comprises a 'tea and biscuit' sector with a microwave oven, a toilet with showers, a living room with a TV set, two classrooms supplied with computers that are connected to the internet, a games area and a small storeroom. The offices are used as 'help-desks' by the staff to give advice related to administrative problems.

From June to October 2017, I conducted four months of participant observation in Naga-har, where I was allowed to interact with the guests and the staff. My involvement was focused on assisting with the preparation of tea and biscuits and the general orientation of the people who attended the centre, particularly regular guests. Comprised of approximately 20 people, this group included asylum seekers, refugees (i.e., beneficiaries of protection) and 'irregular' migrants, all of whom were men mainly from Western Africa. These guests attended Naga-har more or less daily because of the 'socialising' services provided and the support offered by the help-desk. During my fieldwork, I was particularly interested in three elements: the organisational spaces that emerged through the interactions by the guests with each other and with the environment and the staff, the everyday lives of the guests within and beyond the space of Naga-har, and the role that Naga-har plays for its guests. For this reason, face-to-face ethnographic interviews were conducted with 15 regular guests and six volunteers. The interviews were undertaken mainly in the drop-in centre during its opening hours; three interviews were conducted outside the drop-in centre. The interviewed guests were between 18 and 45 years, and they were all African men as were the majority of the guests. All the interviews were audio-recorded except one interview, which was recorded in writing at the request of the interviewee. The interviews were conducted in Italian, French and English and

subsequently translated and transcribed in English when it was necessary. Moreover, the names of the interviewees were modified in order to safeguard their privacy. In addition to the information generated by the interviews, field-notes were taken with reference to both the interviewees' experiences of Naga-har and the activities that I witnessed outside the drop-in centre (i.e., accompanying guests to social services and around the city).

Hence, I had the opportunity to witness the constraining conditions that affected the lives of the forced migrants in Milan. I argue that in living in similarly precarious conditions, being a forced migrant represents a process that involves material and normative states as well as stigmatising discourses (for a similar account concerning homeless people, see Lancione, 2017). This process results in psychological stress that may lead to physiological decline³, and it is deeply shaped by governmental politics and power. Forced migrants interact with a set of practices and power structures that constrain and restrict the possibilities in their lives. In particular, these practices and power structures concern two intertwining dimensions: bureaucracy and housing conditions.

3.1 The politics of discomfort and the refugee city

As emphasised in the literature on border studies, forced migrants experience a daily life that is shaped by aspects concerning bureaucracy and housing conditions (e.g. Lebuhn, 2013; Fontanari, 2015; 2016). Bureaucracy is double-sided: through the provision of documents, it provides access to services and benefits. However, it also represents the power of the nation-state power to bestow a status in which forced migrants are 'less-than-normal' subjects (e.g., Vacchiano, 2005; Darling, 2013). Moreover, the spatial experience of forced migrants is structured by the lack of accommodation and basic conditions of housing. In this respect, guests' experiences closely relate to the concept of *home unmaking* (Baxter & Brickell, 2014), the process through which material and imaginary components of home are damaged. For asylum seekers, home unmaking means that their reception includes only accommodation, often in substandard living conditions. For those outside the reception system (i.e., irregular migrants or refugees who do not have the right to remain in reception centres), who generally live in dorms, overcrowded flats or squat derelict buildings, the conditions are so poor that any sense of home is disrupted. These conditions represent a politics of discomfort that impedes individuals in feeling welcomed (Darling, 20011). Indeed, one of my informants, Babacar, a 24-year-old man who had in

³ I can't tell how many times drop-in guests addressed to me to say how tired they were for 'thinking too much' about their life situation and how this often brought to the feeling of suffering from an illness.

Italy since 2014 from Senegal, where he worked in a quarry, emphasized this aspect. According to him, the conditions in which he lives have stripped him of his personhood.

Milan doesn't want us to be comfortable, both the Municipality and the police [...] What wears me out [me fatigue] is the lack of documents, jobs, a good place to live [...]. People think s/he's crazy, but s/he's not crazy [...]. [You're yourself] if you live well, you have your private room, eat healthy, otherwise you're another person.

(Babacar, rejected asylum seeker, arrived in Italy in 2014)

The lack of integration because of the unsatisfying condition of accommodation and their uncertain status are only some of the spheres affected by these politics although they are perhaps the most relevant. For forced migrants, the hope of overcoming this condition is represented by employment. In a capitalist economy, economic factors matter because they contribute to the material condition of independence from the welfare benefits. For example, migrants who have regular employment can obtain permanent resident status (Avola, 2013). However, Milan represents a *field of possibilities* with limited receptiveness concerning mobility, in particular in terms of employment market and legal statuses. The current Italian economic situation, including the relatively rich city of Milan, often frustrates mobility efforts (Avola, 2013). Forced migrants are often pushed into taking irregular and precarious jobs that do not guarantee stability or independence from welfare. The result is the dichotomous condition of (dis)placement in which migrants are caught between the need to find resources elsewhere and the constraints of their existing situation. Legal documents provided by the bureaucracy binds them to a specific territory by requiring them to reside in an area where they can access services at the local level, such as accommodation and right to work. At the same time, because of their 'home unmaking' conditions and the job market they aspire to seek better opportunities elsewhere. Therefore, forced migrants feel neither 'accomplished' in their migration nor 'free to journey' (see section 4). Instead, daily lives of the guests and their experience of Milan resembles a loop (see Fontanari [2016]). Indeed, their lives are repetitive in a *refugee city* of precarious accommodation, soup kitchens, help centres and charity organisations. They *get stuck* in it and are unable to escape these conditions both physically and psychologically (May, 2000; Jocoy & Del Casino, 2010; Lancione, 2017). In the interviews, they often expressed a narrative of being entrapped, which was emphasised by two of the participants in Naga-har. This feeling of entrapment was also expressed as being stuck in 'circuits of thoughts' that make people 'sick', which was express by both Babacar, the Senegalese man

I introduced earlier, and Abdou, an 18 year-old regular guest of Naga-har, who was also from Senegal:

When you have 'pain' in your head [...] you think: how can I do this, how can I do that...you get tired, you have many thoughts in your head, you become sick, you can even get crazy

(Babacar, rejected asylum seeker, arrived in Italy in 2014)

My problem is that I sleep rough now and it's too cold, your head moves around, it's not calm. My thoughts go in seeking an accommodation only.

(Abdou, asylum seeker, arrived in Italy in 2017)

4. Aspirations of mobility

Forced migrants are characterised by the loss of their familiar worlds and by the concurrent physical movement toward a new location (Alcalà, 2008; Kabachnik, Regulski & Mitchneck, 2010). As suggested by the notion of 'home as a journey' (Mallett, 2004), indeed, forced migrants experience home as a process of transition from a primary home to an ideal future home. At the core of the experience of forced migration, therefore, there is, according to Bauman (1995), the 'urge to feel at home', namely the need to be familiar with a place (meaning a combination of materiality and relationality) and be comfortable in belonging there. For these individuals, mobility is perceived positively because it represents the opportunity to achieve their aspirations for the ideal future home (Alcalà, 2008).

During my research, aspirations and expectations were common topics of discussion between Naga-har's guests and me and among the guest themselves. Many interviewees expressed the feeling of being prisoners in space, especially within the refugee city, Milan and Italy's national boundaries, to the extent that one interviewee said to me that staying in Milan "is like you are dying, like you don't have feet to walk"⁴.

Given this experience of being forced migrants in Milan (the experience of a threatening life in limbo, occurring in both time and space, see also section 3), aspirations play a strong role for the migrant participants and are linked to the notion of 'home as a journey'. They represented an inner drive that animated the migrants to search for better opportunities and sometimes motivated them to act, such to move on to other places (see section 5).

In many cases, in particular, aspirations are aspirations of mobility. Indeed, they concern a transition to an ideal future of both social and physical mobility. The following excerpts are from the responses of two interviewees who visited Naga-har regularly. In particular, in the

⁴ This excerpt is from an audio-recorded interview with Babacar, a rejected asylum seeker who arrived in Italy in 2014.

first, Cheick expressed the desire for physical mobility. His example elucidated how an attitude to mobility, in the form of curiosity, characterized some guests.

I decided to go to Naples to see if I can do something because here I'm only 'circling' and I don't like: I want to do something! I'm always curious, because I want to do in order to change my life.

(Cheick, refugee, arrived in Italy in 2014)

The second excerpt, selected from an interview with Bamba, shows the desire to exit the disadvantaged condition through social mobility. Indeed, he expressed how his present condition deprived him of the capacity to abide by the law, even in the most trivial situations, such as the use of public transportation.

I want more. I want an apartment, I want to pay the taxes, to have a good job, even the [public transportation] ticket...because...I am always without ticket here, you know...well, we are always without it in Milan.

(Bamba, rejected asylum seeker, arrived in Italy in 2014)

Both responses highlight not only how migrants' aspirations entailed mobility, both physical and social. Their responses demonstrate also how aspirations are linked to mobility and are fundamental motivators in their migration projects.

However, aspirations are an 'urge' as well as 'beneficial'. In particular, for some of Naga-har's guests, aspirations represented a compass throughout which they were able to detach from the problem of the present situation and find motivations for being active. Saydou offered a prime example of this aspect. Saydou had been in Italy since the beginning of 2016. Although he had obtained international protection, he was living in a dormitory for homeless people. A student in his country of origin, he was trying to gain access to as many vocational courses as possible to obtain a job. Saydou offers an example of how aspiration are fundamental to resist the difficult everyday conditions and represent significant drives for the individuals.

Saydou: *I need many things. I need to go to school, for learning how to cook. If I finish this training, I want to find a job that let me be independent.*

[...]

Interviewer: *But don't you think of your life? Are you homesick in this situation?*

Saydou: *This...I never think this. I've always thought: ok, I have to take the status, then the permit of stay, then the training and finally a job that allows me to have my life. That's all.*

(Saydou, refugee, arrived in Italy in 2016)

Saydou's words illustrate this important aspect of aspiration of mobility. As advanced by Lombard, aspirations are important for disadvantaged groups because they provide a compass that helps to develop a vision for the future (Lombard, 2013). An inner drive that animated the migrants to search for better opportunities and sometimes motivated them to act, aspirations appear essential to resist the processes they were subjected to as forced migrants (see section 3). In the next section, we will see how Naga-har locates within this context. In particular, we will see how the migrant participant utilize the material and immaterial resources of Naga-har in order to have a 'compass', build skills and then appropriate opportunities of mobility.

5. Naga-har: Opening or closing mobility?

Sociology and the social sciences have long recognised the resources that disadvantaged groups can draw from particular settings, which is emphasised in the literature on 'free spaces' and analogues (Polletta, 1999). In particular, in migration studies, an emerging central theme has been the conflation of spaces, both virtual and 'material' and migrants' agency in the creation of a so-called *mobile commons* (Papadopoulos & Tsianos, 2013). Mobile commons are 'infrastructures of connectivity' that help migrants move through the myriad of information about possibilities, routes, skills, and migrants themselves (Papadopoulos & Tsianos, 2013). These spaces are rarely conceived of as infrastructures of a mobile commons but are appropriated and 'opened' by the migrants. Indeed, differently from other groups, forced migrants normally do not possess relevant economic resources and a working position that favours mobility. On the contrary, their mobility is always hindered (e.g., Alcalà, 2008). As advanced by Fernandez and Olson (2011), therefore, migrants have to fight 'for the right to *come and go*, [...] fighting for the right of locomotion' (Fernandez and Olson, 2011:415). In this section, I will illustrate how the drop-in centre can provide a space of resources to compensate the lack of some resources of mobility and thereby 'open' a future of mobility. This role of the drop-in centre is clarified by considering the possibility that being mobile is a kind of capital, specifically motility that can be appropriated by individuals. As a form of capital, motility is different from traditional forms of capital (Kaufmann, Bergman & Joye, 2004). Instead, according to Flamm and Kaufmann (2004), people may compensate deficient financial, social or cultural capital by acquiring knowledge and organisational capacity, such as the ability to obtain information and adapt to short-term change. Similarly to what happens with mobile

commons, therefore, migrants utilize the drop-in center to build skills and then appropriate their mobility.

This is possible because Naga-har provides several opportunities of appropriation to its guests. During my fieldwork at this drop-in centre, indeed, I witnessed several such opportunities: vocational training and Italian classes, which are necessary for employment, activities that diverted the guests from the constraints of their daily conditions in order to plan future projects of mobility, and material support for the mobile commons (while being shaped, i.e. ‘opened’, by these same mobile commons). Of course, these offerings do not mean that Naga-har is a decisive resource in all cases. The processes that governs the migrants’ condition strongly affects them. Some migrants, indeed, do not manage to appropriate their mobility, neither physically nor socially. In these cases, the ‘infrastructure of connectivity’ offered by the drop-in centre is ineffective. Indeed, the realisation of mobility depends on dynamics and attributes that go beyond the drop-in centre and take into account the positioning, skills and characteristics of individual migrants and the processes that affect them. In this case, the drop-in centre can represent only one of the many spaces of charity in the refugee city.

In the following sub-sections, three guests of Naga-har and their stories will be discussed in order to illustrate the role that a drop-in centre can play in the (im)mobility of forced migrants. Their stories were gathered through conversations, audio-recorded interviews and field-notes. These stories were selected because they are paradigmatic of the different roles that a drop-in centre, such as Naga-har, can play according to differing personal positions, skills and attitudes (i.e., *aptitude for motility*). The first two stories are stories of ‘successful’ mobility. In the case of Egas, Naga-har helped him find a job and obtain a driving licence. In the case of Babacar, the time he spent in Naga-har enabled his mobility; he was able to realise his desire to cross the border into France. Finally, the third story is about inability to appropriate Naga-har’s opportunity for mobility. It concerns about Omar, an asylum seeker whom, after several years in Italy, experienced the loss of hope in his future. In his case, while his psychological condition deteriorated, Naga-har became the reference point in his daily life but mainly as a place to express his frustration.

Egas

Egas was in his mid-twenties when I met him. He arrived in 2011 in Italy as a minor and lived in Foggia, Apulia until 2012. When he became a legal adult, he decided to move to Milan where a close cousin lived. In Milan, he obtained a residence and work permit. However, when a short-term work contract ended, he decided to leave Italy and look for a

job elsewhere in Europe. He travelled to France, Belgium and Germany but, eventually, in 2016, he returned to Milan because of the regulation concerning the movement of non-EU citizens. Since then, he has lived with his cousin in public housing. Egas' relationship with Naga-har changed over time. When I began my fieldwork, he was regularly visiting the drop-in centre. Indeed, he had two main goals: finding a job and obtaining a driving licence. When he visited Naga-har, which happened at least four times a week, he watched TV, chatted with the other guests and the staff, asked questions about minor administrative problems with his permit of stay, browsed the internet, studied for his driving licence and took vocational training. In particular, he had taken a course in bread-making a few months before I began my fieldwork. He liked to spend time in Naga-har because of his friends and the possibility of receiving help from other guests and the staff. For example, he came to Naga-har and asked me and the volunteers for help with his driving licence test, which we were glad to offer. In October, Egas obtained a job in the bakery of a supermarket, which was linked to the vocational training he took months through Naga-har. Although it was another short-time work contract, this job enabled him to contribute to his house expenses and to renew his permit of stay. Because of the job, his visits to Naga-har decreased to one or two days a week, and then, as I was told, he stopped going to Naga-har. In the meantime, he obtained his driving licence, which pleased him tremendously because of the increased mobility and social position it symbolised⁵. Finally, Egas also expressed happiness because both the job as a baker and the newly achieved driving licence were skills and assets that were transferrable in other contexts and other countries. Indeed, although he was temporarily satisfied with his situation, Egas still had a strong feeling of precariousness and insecurity regarding his life. Therefore, he did not consider himself as having 'arrived'; instead, he was always ready to leave, which he articulated in the following excerpt:

Interviewer: And where do you think you will be in the future? In Milan?

Egas: I cannot say. That depends on the job first, because...you can never say [...] I think that if I find a job in Foggia...and let's say I'm in Milan...I must go for it.

In summary, Egas' story is one of successful social mobility. Naga-har played an important role in obtaining this social mobility, such as by providing vocational training. Nonetheless,

⁵ Such remarks were expressed by Egas to me during casual conversations both within and outside Naga-har.

the findings do not indicate that he felt that he had achieved his aspirations for the future because of the attitude toward mobility expressed in his interview responses.

Babacar

Babacar was regular visitor Naga-har during most of my fieldwork there. However, in October, he left Milan to go to France. In 2014, Babacar reached Sicily by boat, where he asked for asylum. He then sought jobs in Europe, travelling to Spain, Switzerland and Germany. However, his favourite country was France. Nonetheless, he was forced to return to Italy under the Dublin Regulation. He chose Milan because, as he explained, ‘Milan is closer to Europe [...]. Here, you have information. It’s like a frontier’. Babacar’s life in Milan was tough. Sometimes he slept in a friends’ apartment and sometimes on the street or the bus. Because he was a rejected asylum seeker, he was trying to obtain protection. In the meantime, because he was ‘illegal’, he seldom worked and had no right to a bed in reception centres. He used to come to Naga-har every day. For him, it was a space where he could collect information about the routes to other European countries. Between cups of tea and comments on the facts of the day, the guests in the TV room usually talked about the routes they had taken and the ones they were planning to take. While listening to the others, Babacar also shared information, thus contributing to the mobile commons. Information is shared not only with close friends. According to Papadopoulos and Tsianos (2013), the mobile commons exists because of the cooperative contributions of mobile people. These contributions are not related to natural solidarity; instead, they originate in the fact that migration is a “process which relies on a multitude of other persons and things. This extreme dependability can only be managed through reciprocity, and reciprocity between migrants means the multiplication of access to mobility for others” (p. 190). Hence, Naga-har exists because of the migrants’ need for a mobile common. Babacar, like others, was attracted to Naga-har precisely because his network referred him to it:

The first time I came here because of some friends. They kept saying: come to Naga! [...] We the migrants know that Naga-har is good, they work hard, working people are good, they help us, everyone knows it and [...] if we see you’re good, we come, but if some of us says you have acted bad, you don’t see us anymore.

The day before he left, I saw Babacar in Naga-har. He invited me to take a tea with him, and he informed me about his intention to cross the border. I had not seen him for a few days, but what he told me was not surprising because he had been increasingly engaged in collecting information about the best route. The following is an excerpt from my field-

notes about that encounter, which reveals that the act of moving requires preparation and resources:

I met Babacar when I entered the TV room. He was apparently very happy to see me [...]. We took the tea and watched the news. Then after a while he went to the bookcase, took his bag and showed me a paper with his plan [...]. He told me he couldn't bear the situation any longer so he decided to leave for France again [...]. He wasn't here for some days because he made the tour of his friends in Milan, greet them and collect the stuff in the bag. Then he asked some friends to help with the ticket and borrowed some money from them [...] When we said bye, he told me we should stay in touch and visibly excited added: I hope I will have the good chance with me this time!

For Egas, Naga-har was a crucial resource for finding a job, obtaining a driving licence and gaining social mobility. In contrast, Babacar visited the centre to obtain that information that would enable him to be physically mobile.

Omar

However, not all guests found that their engagement with Naga-har facilitated their mobility. Omar's story illustrates an unsuccessful outcome. Omar was an asylum seeker who had visited Naga-har regularly in the previous two years. He was a cultured person in his country of origin, but in Italy he could not find a stable job and the position to which he aspired. I was told that Omar had many friends in Naga-har. Over time, however, this situation changed. During my time in Naga-har, Omar roamed around the centre in anger. He even had emotional outbursts in which he insulted the volunteers and other guests. For many guests, the time spent in Naga-har is a time of relaxation and diversion from daily problems, a hiatus from worrying and a period of leisure and socialising. This dimension, I argue, is crucial because it provides the space to escape temporarily from the anxiety of the present and to think about possible futures. Indeed, in Naga-har, guests can meet, recall times in their country of origin, talk about what they want to achieve, share information and plan for the future. This imaginative mobility (Musselwhite, 2017) counteracts the constraining conditions of their lives and allows them to vent to their frustrations. Thus, the guests are able to maintain a sense of the self while aspiring to a brighter future (Goffman, 1968). However, for Omar and some other guests, this is not the case. Instead, they seemed caught in an eternal present, locked outside the life that they had envisioned and that they saw others enjoying. Even in Naga-har, they were isolated, and they seemed absorbed in thinking about their present condition. Therefore, they developed feelings of

anger and dislocation. The following excerpt is from an interview with Mustapha, a former guest who became a volunteer. He pinpointed the causes of this negative outcome:

There are guests with their 'head outside'...I mean, head outside because...when someone lose his/her mind s/he has the head outside [...]. The problem is the situation: someone is here from 2011 and found nothing, lives on the street, sleeps rough and so gets mad.

In other words, these guests were not able to use Naga-har as a resource of mobility, if not physically or socially at least imaginatively. For these guests, Naga-har was not adequate. Such guests should be redirected to a medical service. For example, Omar was redirected to psychiatric treatment. Anna, a volunteer, clearly expressed these negative consequences:

For me, Naga-har is good if it represents a stepping-stone for one year, a place you come in when you have few references. But if it becomes more than this...it is a symptom of something bigger, because the guests start considering Naga-har as the only point of reference, without looking for something else[...]. The person will live a conflict because we cannot provide for what s/he wants.

In other words, the drop-in centre supposedly alleviates the problem of waiting by offering the possibility of a vision for the future and diversion from the present. However, in my observations of the trajectories of some guests, another dimension of Naga-har was revealed. Indeed, the centre could function to cause the 'closure' of mobility by contributing to fixing certain guests in a permanent state of marginality. If guests do not find a way to use Naga-har to obtain mobility, the centre could represent a point of anchorage, not a point of departure.

6. Conclusion

The paper explored some ways in which an urban drop-in centre for forced migrants may promote their mobility. Based on the findings, it is appropriate to conceive of Naga-har as a setting in which a plurality of experiences co-exist. The stories of Egas and Babacar illustrated some possibilities offered by Naga-har, such as the social mobility achieved by Egas and the physical mobility obtained by Babacar. Nonetheless, Naga-har did not always function as a resource of motility, which was exemplified by Omar's story. When the drop-in space does not succeed in providing social, physical or imaginative mobility, and the guest uses it as an anchorage rather than a point of departure, it can become one of the liminal settings that constitute the refugee city. As described in section 3, the refugee city is comprised of locations (e.g., soup kitchens, dormitories and welfare offices) that constitute the daily lives of the forced migrants in Milan. Despite the good intentions of the providers

of the services in these locations, these settings could tend to suppress the mobility of their users, thus perpetuating their lives on the margins of society.

These findings can be positioned in relation to other studies on drop-in centres and other spaces of hospitality, especially in the debate on the city of refuge. Research by Conradson (2003a; 2003b) on drop-in centres highlighted the drop-in centre as a therapeutic environment, emphasising egalitarian relationships and practices of care between its staff and its guests. This environment is valued as an expression of commitment of and for the local community, and it is best appreciated when the drop-in centre represents a reference point around which guests organise their day. Following Conradson's contribution, Darling (2011) studied the drop-in centre as a crucial space of care for asylum seekers within the city of refuge. Against the backdrop of an unwelcoming city, the drop-in centre is a welcoming site of hospitality that focuses on the relations of mutuality and care developed through physical proximity. As stated by its volunteers, in so doing, the drop-in centre functions to welcome all sorts of people with different problems by providing a of warmth of feeling that 'absorbs' guests so that they feel comfortable (ibid., p. 410).

Nonetheless, the notion of hospitality related to these spaces of care within the city of refuge has been subject of criticism. Bagelman (2013) suggested that this type of hospitality elicits the sense of dependency, uselessness and invisibility. In this respect, the drop-in centre as part of a network of hospitality, although temporary in purpose, can serve to facilitate the guests' 'integrating into destitution or chronic dependency on charity' (ibid., p. 54). Darling (2011) did not spare criticism in warning against the risk that the care provided through drop-in centres will reproduce a system of discrimination and division in which the guests are constructed as non-political subjects and denied agency.

In this paper, I developed a conceptualisation of the drop-in centre as providing conditions that enable mobility. Indeed, such centres represent a resource for increasing *motility*, which is the capital of mobility (Kaufmann, 2002, p. 3). In this interpretation, drop-in centres are spaces that are 'open' to the outside and that can contribute to breaking the cycle of dependency on charity. Albeit part of the charity network composing the *refugee city*, drop-in centres such as Naga-har may accompany and ease migrants' exit from this the cycle of dependency. This is done by providing vocational training and a space in which guests can gather information about how and where to migrate and be diverted from the daily anxiety about their constraining circumstances. Moreover, the fieldwork allowed me to appreciate the role of drop-in centres in the context of the struggle to establish mobility. From the perspective of the migrants who were guests in Naga-har, to migrate meant to react to the

desire for belonging, which was addressed by changing their existence to move socially, physically and/or imaginatively. Most of the forced migrants interviewed in this study were enlivened by their aspirations for the future. For them, Naga-har represented a space that was informed by these aspirations and enabled their future mobility.

Finally, this conceptualisation of the role of the drop-in centre in city of refuge's literature is also important from the point of view of policy. Drop-in centres could be planned to offer resources that enable the release from the subaltern condition of forced migrants. Based on my experience at Naga-har, this dimension is already present in the centre although it was unplanned. However, in the existing literature on the city of refuge and the organisational principles of drop-in centres (e.g. the *City of Sanctuary* movement in the United Kingdom), this dimension is underestimated. This role of the drop-in centre demands an approach that differs from that in the literature. This role demands the focus on the provision of opportunities to empower guests while giving them the space to develop their own 'infrastructure of connectivity'.

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