"To read the dynamics of production of space in a new way, read *Buildings of Refuge and the Postcoloniality of Asylum Infrastructure*."

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"A sophisticated, scholarly, grounded and humane contribution and one that is well worth making time to read."

Ben Rogaly, University of Sussex

Paolo Novak *is Senior Lecturer in Development Studies and Co-Director of the Centre for Migration and Diaspora Studies at SOAS University of London.*

This book offers a fresh perspective on the European migration crisis, chronicling its everyday realities in a central Italian province. Through vivid ethnographic accounts, it reveals how the forces and relations animating this crisis are reproduced and transformed in the rooms of ordinary buildings converted into shelters for asylum seekers.

Drawing on postcolonial and feminist approaches, the author explores the intersection of global and local histories, migrant stories and bordering processes, providing a timely lens for understanding migration today.

This is an invaluable contribution to debates on EU borders, including their logistical management, their coloniality and the autonomous force of migration that subverts them.

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BUILDINGS OF REFUGE AND THE POSTCOLONIALITY OF ASYLUM INFRASTRUCTURE PAOLO NOVAK

BRISTOL

PAOLO NOVAK

BUILDINGS OF REFUGE AND THE POSTCOLONIALITY OF ASYLUM INFRASTRUCTURE

GLOBAL MIGRATION AND SOCIAL CHANGE

"Refugee studies never fail to surprise us. In this book, buildings requisitioned by the European border machine as extraordinary reception centres for asylum seekers transform into astonishing heterotopic sites – simultaneously spaces of institutional and operational control, shelters for displaced populations, objects of scrutiny from surrounding communities and, not least, birthplaces of stories from those who work in or experience them in various ways. To read the dynamics of production of space in a new way, read *Buildings of Refuge*."

Ranabir Samaddar,
Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group

"Novak's crisp, thick description and novel theoretical project depart from critical border studies as we know it. He shows how borders are reproduced on their own terms at the finest of scales – in buildings where asylum seekers wait. Buildings are the protagonists of this book, which eschews views from nowhere and avoids categorial distinctions between migrant and non-migrant. Informed by critical feminist epistemologies, from Haraway and Blunt to Zaragocin and Lugones, *Buildings of Refuge* is an exquisite carto-ethnography of how the EU border machine can dwell far away from any border."

Jennifer Hyndman, York University

"*Buildings of Refuge* is a beautiful and thoughtfully constructed homage to how place is made through the dialectical interaction of individual stories with wider social forces. Novak artfully renders a multilayered chronicling of a diverse array of buildings used to house asylum seekers in the Macerata province of Italy *as places* at the height of what is often, wrongly, as Novak too insists, seen as *Europe's* migration crisis of the mid- to late 2010s. The book's concluding discussion is highly timely in its call to use a capacious and open conceptualization of place as a resource in the fight against the nationalist right. The road to this conceptualization is tightly argued in respectful and sometimes divergent conversation with Marxist geographers Gillian Hart, Doreen Massey and Milton Santos and a broad array of other scholarship. Novak holds together complexity, insisting as much on proper regard for history and more broadly for time, in the analysis of contemporary places, as on an engagement with how the buildings at the heart of the book are produced by and productive of local social relations, just as they are shot through with the stories of the people whose refuge they became in the first part of the twenty-first century. A sophisticated,

scholarly, grounded and humane contribution and one that is well worth making time to read."

Ben Rogaly, University of Sussex

"Novak walks us through the forged paths and lives of reception centres for asylum seekers in Macerata in an unusually inspiring way. He leaves no stone unturned in their politics, economy and governance, while blowing histories into them as if he were a glass artist. What remains as the strongest aftertaste of this book is Novak's courage and skills in provincializing not only logistics but also postcolonial thought. It has been long overdue."

Ayşe Çağlar, IWM

"A deeply insightful interrogation of borders – not just as lines on a map, but as dynamic sites where power, movement and place-making collide. Conceptually bold and empirically rich, Novak breaks new ground in our understanding of the EU border machine."

Adam Hanieh, University of Exeter

"In *Buildings of Refuge*, Paolo Novak offers a compelling exploration of the shifting dynamics of border crossings and bordering practices in Europe. This work provides an original and timely analysis of the spatio-temporal dimensions of the so-called migration crisis. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork and framed within critical feminist epistemologies as well as decolonial migration studies, *Buildings of Refuge* makes a significant contribution to the understanding of place-making practices and embodied experiences in relation to borders. Novak's work is both engaging and insightful, offering a nuanced perspective on the complexities of migration and the lived realities of those navigating these borders."

Shahram Khosravi, Stockholm University

BUILDINGS OF REFUGE AND THE POSTCOLONIALITY OF ASYLUM INFRASTRUCTURE

Contents

Introduction

Buildings of Refuge is a situated account of the so- called 'European migration crisis'. It studies the tumultuous period that witnessed both the arrival in Europe of millions of what were categorized as first- time asylum seekers, and a proliferation of responses to this phenomenon by governmental authorities. Taking as its object of analysis and investigation 65 reception centres for asylum seekers in the small central Italian province of Macerata, this book records and interprets the reverberations, refractions and deflections engendered by these arrivals and responses.

As convincingly made clear by critical scholars, the 'crisis' witnessed in this period is not to be understood as one of migration, but rather one created by said proliferation of responses. Blocking legal routes of entry into Europe and thus irregularizing almost all forms of European Union (EU) bound migration; multiplying and diffusing points of violent border enforcement within and outside Europe; creating chokepoints at European internal borders and thus engendering informal settlements; introducing legal and administrative innovations that dilute the right to seek asylum; curtailing the entitlements associated with the latter; and other such transformations; are all implicated in fracturing and making more turbulent what otherwise could have been safer and more linear migration routes (see de Vries et al 2016; Ambrosini et al 2019). This is a border crisis, not a migration one (Kasparek 2016), and as such it will be considered throughout this book.

Rephrasing the assertion in this light, then, *Buildings of Refuge* is a situated account of the crisis engendered by what in Chapter 1 will be termed the *EU border interactive machine.* The book records and interprets the ways in which this machine malignantly ingrains itself across the Macerata province, transforming localities in its own image while simultaneously being transformed by the images that these localities project. On one side, the chapters that ensue connect this small province to Libyan detention camps, aerial bombardments across the Afghanistan– Pakistan border and rubber plantations in Nigeria, to cross- border deaths and pushbacks, to racist violence, racialized labour markets, and processes of state abandonment. On the other side, they situate these processes within the social landscape of this tranquil province and its everyday life, stridently juxtaposing socially differentiated perceptions of Macerata's gentle hills, medieval burghs and bright sunflower fields, and being attentive to the racially selective solace of its beautiful coastline and seaside towns. The 'crisis', and in turn the border, are not distant occurrences that happen away from us, but rather processes that spread molecularly across society. As such, this book suggests, they should be chronicled. The primary analytical consequence of a chronicle that focuses on the situated manifestations of the EU border machine is that of destabilizing the analytical units, perspectives and frameworks developed by critical literature to make sense of its crisis. The reception centres of concern to this book are not 'just' cogs of this machine, but also situated markers of social landscapes, which have been part of the everyday lives of Macerata residents for decades and even centuries. They are places of dwelling, where life projects are

pursued. Similarly, personnel working for the organizations managing these centres are not solely 'humanitarian agents', but more broadly societal agents deeply enmeshed in localized markets, politics and processes of discursive creation. Migrants hosted in these facilities too are not just fugitive subjects escaping the border, but part of this province's social life. Much like everyone else around them, albeit of course in much more precarious and subordinate positions, they seek employment, consume food, rest on public benches, wait for hours for the famously erratic public transport, go to church or pray. They are joyful when snowfalls reach the province and fear for their life during the earthquakes that shake the province, just like any other person around them.

What emerges from a narrative that focuses on the situated manifestations of the EU border machine, then, are the ways in which different individuals and social groups residing in Macerata – be they asylum seekers, irregular or settled migrants, humanitarian workers, academic researchers or ordinary residents – encounter the border and its crisis in the everyday. Each unequally seeking to reproduce *our* own life projects in our own terms, we all unevenly reproduce the border in *its* own terms.

Borders in place

At its broadest, the objective of this book is to reorient the study of bordering practices towards an appreciation of the deeply situated cartographies that explain their emergence, entrenchment and transformations, in and across 'places', and to foreground the unevenness of these processes. The book seeks to abstract *in* its conceptualization of the EU border machine, the configurational and compositional dimensions of place, that is, the un-abstractable and molecular processes that uniquely and unevenly define each of the places where this machine intervenes, transforming and destabilizing it.

In so doing, first, the book seeks to obviate what appears as a limitation in accounts of the European border crisis that take as their primary if not exclusive object of analysis and concern the dialectic between bordering processes and migrant mobilities (see Cobarrubias and Novak 2024). These contributions, for example, pitch European containment policies against the turbulent force of migration (Tazzioli 2018), study the problematic relation between humanitarianism and securitization in the management of the EU borders (Vaughan-Williams 2015), underscore the deaths and precarity that this relation produces (Squire 2022), or expose its colonial roots (Davies et al 2021). They debate the extent to which transformations associated with the crisis are engendered by the autonomous force of migration (de Genova 2017), reflect brutal class dynamics under contemporary capitalism (Cross 2020) and/ or actualize colonial legacies (Mayblin 2017). Despite their diverse concerns and constructions, most of these contributions take the relation between bordering processes and migrant mobilities as their primary object of analysis and concern. This is so even in those accounts that study the crisis from the margins (Mainwaring 2019), in context-

specific settings (Martin and Tazzioli 2023), or by seeking to tease out its hidden geographies (Squire 2022).

Building upon this work and yet attempting to obviate such limitation, the following pages foreground instead the deeply situated social landscapes characterizing the localities where the encounter between bordering processes and migrant mobilities is performed. Lest we conceive the crisis as something avulse from the social contexts in which it unfolds, the book suggests, it is crucial to appreciate the ways in which this encounter transforms the various localities in which it *takes place*, while being unevenly transformed by and rendered contingent upon the social landscapes characterizing them. In turn, it is crucial to extend the analysis of this encounter beyond the categorial distinction between migrant and non-migrant, and to account for the difference- inflected ways in which all those that are present in these localities encounter the border, are heterogeneously affected by it, and unevenly respond to, escape and/ or engage with it. Situating borders avoids categorial homogenizations and brings to the fore lines of differentiation and fissures not only *between* those categorized as migrants and those categorized as non- migrants, but also within and across these categories (see Anderson 2013; Yuval- Davis et al 2018; and Chapter 5).

Second, and strictly related, the book works against the grain of contributions concerned with the spatiality and temporality of borders. Spatially, the unprecedented process of virtualization and externalization of EU borders witnessed over the last two decades (De Genova 2017) has been captured through a variety of constructs. These emphasize the institutionalization of macro- regions in EU Neighbourhood policies (Scott et al 2019); update traditional concepts in border studies (for example, borderlands, Andersson 2014) or craft new ones (for example, borderscapes, Brambilla 2015); develop migrant- centred counter-geographies (Tazzioli and Garelli 2019); conceive the EU border in terms of a mobile itinerant assemblage (Casas- Cortes et al 2015a); or alternatively assert the significance of state- centred jurisdictions in processes of migration and migration management (Pallister-Wilkins 2015; Cross 2020). Temporally, these transformations have been conceptualized by reference to the decelerations they impose on migration, disciplining migration practices that cannot be regulated through spatial containment by slowing down their movement (Tazzioli 2018). Waiting, acceleration, split temporalities, from this perspective, have become crucial concepts for understanding policies and practices aimed at migrant containment (Khosravi 2021; Axelsson 2022). In another direction, borders and bordering practices have been set against longer temporal trajectories and exposed in their racially hierarchical worldviews and colonial roots (Mayblin 2017), their symbolic and material manifestations cast as an expression of the deadly afterlife of colonialism (Davies et al 2021).

Building upon this work, discussed at length in Chapter 2, the book nevertheless reinscribes the spatialities and temporalities engendered and reproduced by the EU border machine within a deeply situated cartography, accounting for the multiple histories that are needed to translate bordering tactics and calculations into specific manifestations of the border, and for

the situated social dynamics, projects and entanglements (Deridder et al 2020; Savio Vammen et al 2022; İşleyen and Qadim 2023) that render such manifestations contingent, fluid and unstable. Borders do not operate in an undifferentiated Italian, let alone European, space (Giglioli 2019). Rather, they intervene in unevenly stratified landscapes produced over centuries by multiple interventions on land, property and people (Peano 2021). What follows, thus, entangles the EU border machine with long- term processes of Italian state development, economic crises and business trajectories, and it incarnates it in the dreams, failures, aspirations and compulsions of the entrepreneurs, industrialists, aristocrats, humanitarian workers and asylum seekers that animate them. The Macerata province is not just an empty stage where the encounter between bordering tactics and autonomous mobilities is performed (Gaibazzi et al 2017). Rather, it is a rich social terrain that deflects, deforms, recomposes the border and its infrastructure, making their manifestations uneven, fluid and contingent, and therefore unstable.

Rephrasing the above statement of intent in this light, thus, the objective of this book is to *dis-entangle* the complex spatio-temporalities associated with processes of *border* crossing and border reinforcement *with* the complex spatio- temporalities associated with processes of production and construction of *place*.

Postcolonial gradients

Developing such perspective poses a challenge: undertaking the task of generalization on the basis of singularities, without falling into the trap of positions that stress particularity to the point where the systemic features of borders are dissolved (Samaddar 2020). The book develops the concept of *postcoloniality of infrastructure* to address this challenge. In a nutshell, this concept seeks to capture the dialectical relation between world- making processes and place- making practices that contingently renders concrete the EU border machine, and to cast the consequent unevenness with which this machine manifest itself as a central analytical concern in the study of bordering processes at large. The concept is cumulatively developed in the following pages, but its point of origin is to be found at the following intersection.

First, this concept is driven by an engagement with scholarship concerned with the coloniality of migration and asylum, which has become a central analytical lens within critical borders and migration studies (for example, Lemberg Pedersen et al 2022; and Chapter 4). This scholarship foregrounds the pervasive legacies of colonialism and the ways in which they reverberate in our contemporary world, albeit this is an imperative with many declinations. Some, for example, underscore the deep implication of race, modernity and coloniality in the constitution of dominant modes of knowledge production (Bhambra et al 2014), the imbrication of migration studies with these knowledges (Mayblin and Turner 2021), and the entrenchment of these knowledges in practices of patrolling and migrant interdiction across

the Mediterranean (Cazzato 2016). Other strands of literature establish a more direct connection between colonial epistemologies and racial capitalism. As the blurring of the vocabularies of nationality and race is a founding strategy of the modern nation- state (Mongia 2018), these scholars foreground the links between labour, capitalism and racism, as they play out in the management of migration (Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2018a). Understanding race as a mode of classifying, ordering, creating and destroying people, labour power, land, environment and capital (Tilley and Shilliam 2018), these scholars see immigration and nationality laws, and migration management more broadly, as violent categorizations that maintain the global racial order established by colonialism (El- Enany 2020).

The following pages draw from this scholarship an understanding of coloniality as an ongoing world- making process. Refugees, irregular migrants, citizens, much like sovereignty and nationality, do not indicate already existing, unproblematic, homogeneous analytical units or entities. Rather, these partitions, separations and classifications congeal the colonial moment of fabrication in which they came to be formed (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013), and its contemporary afterlives. At the same time, however, what follows seeks to avoid univocal, totalizing or universalizing analytical frameworks, attending instead to the deeply situated nature of global, world- historical interconnections and articulations (Hawthorne and Lewis 2023: 9) and to the sedimented histories (Distretti 2021; Peano 2021) that shape the uneven forms of appearance of coloniality.

Indeed, second, the concept of 'postcoloniality of asylum infrastructure' is deeply informed by critical feminist epistemologies (see Chapter 2). At their broadest, these epistemologies are concerned with the rejection of processes of knowledge production that 'view from above, from nowhere' their object of study, perspectives that under the guise of neutrality hide very specific positions, universalizing them and cloaking them with a veneer of objectivity (Haraway 1988: 589; see also Castro- Gómez 2005). The perception of any situation is, on the contrary, always a matter of an embodied, located subject and their geographically and historically specific perspective (Antonopoulou 2017). The unavoidable situated-ness of knowledge, that is, the entanglement of identity, experience, location, power and physical bodies, means that *cuerpo* and *territorio* are often seen as inseparable from each other (Zaragocin and Caretta 2020). An attention to the embodied production and experience of territory (Halvorsen 2019), borders (Hyndman 1997; Yuval- Davis 2013) or indeed place, thus, attributes agency to 'local' bodies that constitute borders across multiple scales. It valorizes the 'local' as a powerful scale of thought and practice. A feminist perspective suggests a critical view of global processes, a concern for what passes as the small, and a willingness to stand the existing accounts of such processes on their heads (Banerjee 2010: 129).

The following pages draw from feminist epistemologies a concern with the significance of place, place- making practices and embodied experiences, which complements and nuances the insights that emerge from the coloniality of migration literature discussed earlier. As

Maria Lugones (2010) suggests, coloniality, understood as the categorial, dichotomous, hierarchical logic central to modern, colonial, capitalist thinking about race, gender and sexuality, is always place- dependent (see also Zaragocin and Caretta 2020). Thus, while the recognition of the inseparable connection between migration and colonialism has opened up varieties of innovative knowledge production strategies (Amelina 2021) aimed at the de-migrantization (Dahinden 2016) or de- nationalization (Anderson 2019) of research on borders and migration, or at its reconceptualization from the standpoint of migration (Scheel and Tazzioli 2022), what follows ultimately responds to the injunction to produce knowledge from a situated perspective (Yuval- Davis 2013). Or rather, as developed in Chapter 2, from the *standpoint of place*.

Third, and consequently, the concept of 'postcoloniality of infrastructure' which is developed in the following pages is rooted in geographical ideas and concepts. If 'place' is to be used as a standpoint, it is imperative to offer a rigorous understanding of this concept, and geography provides a fertile disciplinary terrain for this endeavour. Postcolonial geographies, specifically, are deeply concerned with universalism and yet insist on taking particularity seriously, on learning from the margins, on situating difference in geographical and historical problem spaces (Jazeel 2019). At its broadest, what follows is attentive to postcolonial geographers' injunctions to narrate the planetary and its imbrications with the colonial world (Sidaway et al 2014) through imaginative, historical, material, but also current and tangible, geographies (Jazeel 2019); to recover those hidden spaces occupied, and invested with their own meaning, by the underclasses (Crush 1994; italics added); to be attentive not only to connections and flows but also to a politics of location within movement and interchange (Blunt and McEwan 2003). The postcolonial understanding of place traced in this manuscript is thus both concerned with the politics of representation (Jazeel 2019) and engaged with material practices, actual spaces and localized politics (Sidaway et al 2014). More specifically, and as fully developed in Chapter 2, it builds upon a series of debates concerned with the relation between space and place, the distinction between ontology and ontological enquiry, the difference between internal and extroverted understandings of place and the latter's relation to the social totality.

In its more intimate connotation, the understanding of 'place' developed here is premised on my reading of Milton Santos' and Doreen Massey's work. Both heterodox Marxist geographers who share a concern with the study of space, place and simultaneity, with global processes studied from the margins, and with the inextricable relationship between time and space, their combined reading offers a temporalized understanding of place that accounts both for the place- transforming character of world- making processes, and for the world- making nature of place- making practices. Place, as it will be connoted, is a temporary time- space constellation of processes, relations and events (Massey 2005) that contingently and unevenly renders concrete the immense movement of the world (Santos 2021a).

Resting on this understanding of place, the concept of 'postcoloniality of asylum infrastructure' rises from the concrete to the abstract and seeks to disentangle the *postcolonial gradient* of today's world of migrations (Samaddar 2020). It seeks to explicate the situated nature and mediated force of the EU border machine (Çağlar 2021) and to foreground its uneven configurations (Samaddar 2020). From the standpoint of place, the following pages *provincialize* the logistified EU border machine (Chapter 3), *destabilize* the coloniality of asylum (Chapter 4) and *place* the autonomous force of migration (Chapter 5), to foreground the significance as well as the instability of these concepts. From the standpoint of place, any attempt to provide ontological closure is doomed to fail. This is the predicament in the postcolonial age of migration (Samaddar 2020): the necessity not to subject the historical analysis of borders and migration to an a priori theory of knowledge, but to work instead with the instability of pure concepts and categories.

Buildings of refuge

At the height of the 'crisis' (2017), approximately 1,000 asylum seekers were present in the Macerata province. They were accommodated in 65 Centri d'Accoglienza Straordinaria (Extraordinary Reception Centres for asylum seekers, or CAS henceforth), which constitute the ethnographic object of analysis and investigation of this study.

The idea of studying CAS as a way of studying the EU border and its crisis emerged prior to the beginning of my field research. CAS were legally codified in 2015 via a Legislative Decree (D.Lgs 142/ 2015) promulgated by the then Minister of Interior, subsequently incorporated into Italian law. One of the Italian government responses to the 'crisis', CAS emerged as a typology of asylum reception facilities somewhere in between the first- tier structures in places of disembarkation, and what Italian legislation defines as the 'ordinary' asylum reception system (Novak 2019). What makes these centres extraordinary is the fact that they can be instituted without the explicit consent of municipal administrations. According to the Decree, in situations where the ordinary reception system does not have the capacity to absorb the accommodation needs of asylum seekers, local administrations can be bypassed and CAS can be opened by Ministry of Interior fiat, as expressed by its provincial manifestations (Prefetture). This executive power- oriented system transformed CAS into the most important typology of reception facilities in the Italian system: in 2017, they hosted 77.4 per cent of the total number of asylum seekers in Italy (Novak 2019). Deeply connected to the range of governmental responses to the crisis, CAS are an integral component of the EU border machine (Novak 2022), and thus seemed a privileged site of observation for studying the border and its crisis.

The province of Macerata, in turn, seemed to offer a great vantage point for studying CAS. For long, it was considered an example of best practices, which is what drew me there in the first place. Macerata's CAS offered services to asylum seekers which would usually include

‘integration’ elements, such as language courses, some professional training, and, most importantly from the point of view of asylum seekers, the possibility of living in small and autonomous apartments. This type of service, according to the legal frameworks existing at that time, would only be expected in the ‘ordinary’ system. Of course, these provisions were only selectively available (Novak 2021), but they were nevertheless envisaged and to some extent delivered. Studying CAS in Macerata thus seemed to be a good way to study the EU border in one of its most ‘successful’ expressions (Novak 2019).

The validity and significance of this vantage point was confirmed even when Macerata province was transformed into an image of Italy’s (dark) own future by a violent episode of racial hatred. On 3 February 2018, Luca Traini went on a shooting spree in the streets of Macerata wounding, with his 9mm Glock, Wilson Kofi, Omar Fadera, Jennifer Odion, Gideo Azeke, Mahamadou Toure and Festus Omagbon, six persons randomly chosen based on the colour of their skin. He later justified this act stating that he wanted to punish the dealers supplying drugs to a young white Italian woman murdered in gruesome circumstances two weeks earlier. It is not my fault, he said in an interview,1 that all drug dealers in Macerata are black (see further details in all chapters of this volume). The responses of the Macerata authorities to this act led to the closure of most CAS in the province. The few facilities remaining open were larger and more remote, with a higher level of surveillance. The number of CAS across the province diminished from 65 in 2017, the overwhelming majority of which (over 40 of them) were small or very small facilities (below 20 occupants), to just two in 2020. These were larger (accommodating approximately 100 asylum seekers each) and more remote facilities (Novak 2021). Furthermore, the largest non- governmental organizations (NGOs) involved in provincial asylum provisions underwent strict scrutiny by tax authorities, which led to most banks withdrawing their loans to them. Although the allegations of tax fraud were not confirmed in courts of law, some of these NGOs were forced to close their operations. These localized responses anticipated the profound transformations that would shape the entire Italian asylum reception system to this day.

A month after Traini’s shooting spree, in fact, the March 2018 national election brought Mr Salvini to the helm of the Ministry of Interior, and one of his first act was to promulgate a Legislative Decree which, articulating immigration and security dispositions, redefined the reception system. It transformed a unitary reception system open to both asylum seekers and refugees and characterized by different phases (reception, integration), into a dual system whereby provisions would be defined based on the status of each migrant. Asylum seekers were precluded from entering the ‘ordinary’ system and would only be entitled to minimal reception standards. Those whose claim to asylum had been positively assessed would instead be entitled to the wider range of provisions, provided, of course, availability of places (Novak 2019). A report by Openopolis and ActionAid (2022) suggests that the average disbursement per person per day in CAS diminished from 35 euros in 2018 to 25 euros in 2022. The number of CAS across the peninsula diminished by 44 per cent over the same

period. Of the 21,983 CAS places lost as a result, about half are attributed to the closure of smaller facilities. Despite these changes, CAS remain a central cog in the asylum reception system, with the latest available data (Openopolis and ActionAid 2024) suggesting that in 2022 CAS hosted 59.7 per cent of the total number of asylum seekers across Italy. Furthermore, the same newly installed government also delineated measures such as the criminalization of NGOs involved in Search and Rescue activities, or the closure of ports for the purposes of disembarkation of migrants, that continue to characterize the current conjuncture. The securitarian turn of asylum policies, as much as their sovereigntist and virilist character, sprouted during that period (Novak 2019). Studying CAS in Macerata province thus offers a good vantage point for studying the EU border machine and its transformations, even from the perspective of them being a prophetic mirror of these systemic transformations.

The idea of studying CAS as *buildings of refuge*, however, emerged during field research. The latter formally took place in the period 2016 to 2019. After a few informal visits in 2014 and 2015, a one- month bout of research was funded by SOAS in 2016, and this was followed by British Academy- funded (SG162483) stays in 2017 (five months) and in 2018 and 2019 (two months each). I returned to Macerata in 2020 for one further month of self- funded research which was constrained by COVID- 19- related lockdowns, and I continued to visit the province every following summer. I remain in touch with some of those that I met there, the latest phone call from a former asylum seeker taking place just two weeks prior to writing these pages.

During this period, I progressively moved away from my initial understanding of CAS as expressions of the EU border machine, towards their conceptualization as buildings of refuge, that is, as architectural objects unstably and unevenly defined by their *location* within deeper social forces, that are *constructed* by the thrown- togetherness of their multiple inhabitants. This conceptual progression responds to my field research- driven and evolving understanding of the *where* of asylum, that is, of where asylum *takes place*.

The first bouts of research, for example, sought to address one question: how do asylum seekers from Gardeiz, Serrakunda, Sialkot, Bansang, Sunyani, Shyampur, Bafilo, Abengorou, Aboisso or Wazirabad, end up in a CAS in the Macerata province's towns of Loro Piceno, Tolentino, Treia, Pioraco or Morrovalle? This question was defined by three interconnected trains of thought and one empirical concern. First, the question was meant to move my research away from an exercise concerned with 'explaining migration'. Attempting to answer why are these people there is a treacherous exercise that can only be resolved through a priori epistemological choices and would have subjected field research to a functional process of confirmation of an already identified epistemological framework (Novak 2017). Second, I didn't want to investigate migrant journeys *to* Europe, but rather those *in* Europe, that is, those that were developed across and engendered by the EU border machine. It was a question meant to orient the investigation towards an analysis of the regime of forced

mobility which migrants are subjected to by this machine (Tazzioli 2020b), in line with the understanding of 'the crisis' developed earlier. Third, critical scholarship at that time seemed to be mostly concerned with asserting the relative merit of views casting migration as the springboard of social transformation that precedes sovereign control or alternatively casting sovereign power as the sole origin and arbiter of citizens and human subjects (McNevin 2013: 193). Preferring a more *ambivalent* understanding of this relation (McNevin 2013), my concern was operational, so to say. Investigating what happens from the moment an 'irregular migrant' is intercepted at sea, transformed into an asylum seeker by legal fiat, and relocated to Macerata was meant to orient my field research towards an investigation of the concrete operational mechanisms animating the EU border machine.

Most importantly in my thoughts, this question was motivated by the empirical concern with the unevenness characterizing the asylum reception system. For example, a survey of over 300 staff working in asylum reception facilities across Italy, published at that time (Inmigrazione 2017), highlighted how the overwhelming majority of CAS were overcrowded, and lacked private spaces for legal and psychological counselling, as much as public spaces for group activities. And yet, the same report suggested that 33 per cent of respondents reported that the CAS where they were working did not present any major problematic issue. Another report highlighted how in some regions of Italy, many CAS occupied derelict buildings far away from urban centres (Cittadinanzattiva 2016). And yet, in some municipalities, CAS would be run by activists who had been engaged for several years in establishing patterns of positive cohabitation with displaced migrants (Marchetti and Rossi 2016), often accommodating them in flats shared with university students.

Not all CAS are the same, in other words, and being transferred to one or the other facility has significant implications for migrants, let alone for the conceptualization of asylum infrastructure I seek to develop here. This unevenness in accommodation standards is evident even in a small province like Macerata, as the following pages will abundantly make clear. Being accommodated in *one* Macerata CAS, as opposed to any of the other 64 that were operating there in August 2017, let alone in a CAS in the neighbouring Fermo or Perugia provinces or in other regions of Italy, would imply enormous differences in terms of accommodation standards, employment opportunities, the speed with which asylum claims are processed, and more. Thus, how are asylum seekers allocated to one *or* the other CAS? How are asylum seekers dispersed across municipalities? How did the asylum seekers I met in Loro Piceno, Tolentino, Treia, Pioraco *or* Morrovalle end up precisely *there*?

As my understanding of the channels that explain the circulation of asylum seekers within the EU border machine, of their contingencies and their chance events, progressed (see Chapter 3), however, a different set of questions came to preoccupy me. Who was arriving and who was leaving each of the CAS that I would visit almost daily, and under what circumstances? Did Koffi find a job? Has the decision on Younussa's claim arrived? Why did Innocent fight with Ibrahim? Why was Elias expelled from the system and how can I help him out? What

music are you listening to, what food did you buy and can I take you to the supermarket? I was also getting to know the owners of these places. Why did Giorgio rent out rooms in his hotel, and why did the bishop agree to open a CAS in one of the church- owned buildings? Why are aristocratic families so prominent in the social life of the province? And further, why are most migrants who find employment in agricultural fields taken to another province? What is cultivated in Macerata and why? Why is a Pakistani national always mentioned in my conversations about labour contractors?

The more I was delving into the legal and administrative mechanisms transforming CAS into a cog of the EU border interactive machine, in other words, the more the *buildings* occupied by CAS appeared to me as uncontainable within and irreducible to their asylum reception functions. These buildings were not just CAS, but rather markers of social landscapes, places of dwelling, meeting points. As cogs of the EU border machine, CAS appeared imbued with coloniality (Picozza 2021), functioning as sites where asylum seekers are commodified and transformed into a source of profit (Vianelli 2022), or warehouses targeting surplus populations (Bhattacharyya 2018). As situated markers of social landscapes, CAS appeared as deeply connected to the urban contexts (Nettelbladt and Boano 2019) and communities (Al- Sabouni 2017) surrounding them, and possessed their own intriguing historical trajectories (Minca and Ong 2016). As places of dwelling, CAS appeared as intimate spaces differentially experienced by those inhabiting them (Cassidy et al 2018), visible manifestations of group, societal and existential inequalities (Boccagni 2022) alternatively prefiguring political practices that cannot be contained in any given form (Lancione 2020), or engendering incremental practices of resistance against marginalization (Boano and Astolfo 2020).

CAS, as asylum infrastructure, are both things and also a relation between things (Larkin 2013). They are lively (Amin 2014). But if this is the case, *what kind of (after)lives animate CAS*?

Buildings of Refuge is premised on the simple realization that buildings communicate, and that what they communicate can be read and interpreted. This premise is validated in Chapter 1 through a review of literature within and outside architectural studies. Foregrounding what these edifices communicate as built structures which possess meanings and biographies, as part of frontier architectures, as connected to processes of state development and nation-building, as brutal condensations of the totality of social relations, and more, this review serves to conceptualize buildings as architectural objects where multiple vanishing points converge. The chapter casts buildings as the protagonists of this book, suggesting that they communicate a series of unresolved tensions which express their ontologically unstable nature.

Chapter 2 develops a methodology for reading and interpreting what is communicated by buildings. It constructs the temporalized understanding of place used as a standpoint in the subsequent chapters. This understanding emerges from an engagement with critical literature

concerned with studying borders and migration through spatial and temporal lenses, and it is formalized by reference to geographical debates. In particular, and establishing connections with the discussion developed in Chapter 1, the chapter delves into Gillian Hart's rendering of Berten Ollman's internal relations framework to understand the character and nature of the totality that is brutally condensed in buildings, but sets this framework against extraverted, exterior and experiential senses of place, through the works of Massey, McKittrick, Hawthorne, and others. The chapter concludes with a reading of Milton Santos and Doreen Massey that provides an understanding of place premised on two distinct moments: that of production and that of construction. Places are *locations* within the totality of social relations that are *constructed* in the everyday through registers that cannot be fully subsumed within such totality. This unresolved tension does not provide ontological closure, confirming the instability of this book's basic unit of research. Rather, it defines a mode of ontological enquiry concerned with abstracting in its ontological moment the uneven configurations and compositions of place, as opposed to abstracting them out to tease key patterns, relations and processes on which to focus. The following three chapters interrogate critical literature concerned with the study of the EU border machine from the standpoint of place thus defined.

Chapter 3 is concerned with the channels of circulation engendered by this machine to gain control over migrants' movement. Building upon the insights provided by critical logistics scholarship, the chapter empirically demonstrates how the logistical operations of asylum work through difference, produce difference, mobilize and exploit difference to reinforce the governing logic that establishes them in the first place. Yet the chapter provincializes logistic by foregrounding its situated manifestations in the Macerata *province*. The pun indicates a concern with multiplying the histories, spaces, relations and engagements that translate abstract logistical calculations into concrete logistical nodes. Empirically developing some of the points put forward in Chapter 2, the chapter reincorporates the significance of chance, contingency and chaos into the analysis of logistical time- space and attends to the multiple histories and stories that, in the first place, explain the difference to be negotiated by logistical operations. The chapter argues that the uneven forms of appearance of CAS cannot be abstracted out, but rather need to be explained and incorporated into their analysis and conceptualization. The subsequent two chapters seek to develop a better understanding of these forms of appearance.

Chapter 4 is concerned with the coloniality of CAS, that is, the mesh that produces racialized subjectivities and that transforms migrants into subjects to be governed and managed. It builds upon literature concerned with the coloniality of asylum and migration to empirically demonstrate how the imposed condition of *waiting* in a CAS conjures up historical time. The racialized practices of precarization, marginalization and subordination which CAS residents are subjected to by the EU border machine have colonial roots and make their lives expendable and exploitable. Yet the chapter also unearths afterlives that exceed those associated with colonialism, empire and the Middle Passage. Accounting for the spectral

presence of sharecroppers' families that lived in exactly the same rooms occupied a few decades later by asylum seekers, as well as the ghosts of the Italian and foreign Jews and stateless persons that were interned in the same compound by last century's fascist regime, the chapter destabilizes coloniality, attending instead to the deeply situated cartographies that explain its situated manifestations. The uneven forms of appearance of CAS are not misrepresentations of the deeper social relations that constitute them as nodes of the EU border machine. Rather, they are their realization. CAS, from this perspective, are a content-form.

Chapter 5 is concerned with the autonomous force of migration, that is, the un- synthesizable force and incorrigibility that constitutes migrants into a political subject reclaiming the right to escape. The chapter embraces the conceptualization of *migration* as a social movement and an engine of social change, yet it attempts to recuperate the everyday lived experiences of *migrants* into the analysis of autonomy to avoid any categorial abstraction. Drawing a distinction between the standpoint of migration deployed by this literature, and the mode of enquiry associated with the standpoint of place of concern to this book, the chapter entangles autonomous mobilities with place and recalibrates the concept of border struggles. The latter do not unfold in abstract space but are rather to be considered place- making practices. Furthermore, not to deny the contemporaneous presence, in place, of those designated as migrants with those designated as natives/ non- migrants, the chapter also accounts for the place- making practices of variously racialized Italians pursuing their life projects in and through CAS. CAS, from this perspective, are defined by the thrown- togetherness of their multiple inhabitants each struggling to make place in their own terms, albeit of course from materially unequal positions.

In, across and beyond each of the buildings occupied by CAS, those who impose the wait, those who are forced to wait, and others, seek to reproduce their own life projects in their own terms. In so doing, they reproduce the content- form of CAS, defining the latter's multiple, lively, complex and open configurations. CAS are lively. They are temporary time-space constellations of processes, relations and events that contingently and unevenly realizes the immense movement of the world. The concept of postcoloniality of asylum infrastructure developed in this book (Chapter 6) attends to the empirical unevenness, ontological instability and conceptual ambiguity of CAS, and to the implications for border politics that these entail.