

Francesco Della Puppa & Giuliana Sanò (eds.), *Stuck and Exploited. Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Italy Between Exclusion, Discrimination and Struggles*

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At a time when the guarantees that international protection seemed to offer are being constantly undermined across the Global North, *Stuck and Exploited* offers a comprehensive approach to the current processes of retrenchment of reception rights and the dismantlement of reception structures through an in-depth analysis of the Italian case. With a strong ethnographic lens, Della Puppa and Sanò's edited volume compiles 16 contributions of academics, activists, and practitioners working in the field of asylum to examine the processes of exclusion and discrimination of asylum seekers in their passage through an asylum reception system marked by arbitrariness, neglect, and opacity. Divided into two parts, the first part of the volume examines the national developments and characteristics of the Italian asylum reception system in its insertion within wider tendencies of migration governance through reception in the Global North. However, it does not fail to deepen in the particularities of different Italian regions and municipalities, highlighting how the implementation of national and EU policy is interpreted and reinterpreted at the local level and how, within this context, the discretion of "street-level bureaucrats," as described by Lipsky, and other intermediaries, as well as the actions of social movements or the civil society can become a tool for "debordering" or yet another strategy of further control over migrants' lives. In this sense, one of the main contributions of this book is that it offers a perspective of migration governance from the ground, including the voices of activists, practitioners, and academics alike, and proposes a strong ethnographic lens that captures the intimacy and experience of refugee reception. It complicates and nuances the field beyond essentializing narratives and discourses over refugee reception that plague the public discourse and, sometimes, academic work, which present public reception structures either as activist defenders of migrant rights or solely as complicit tools of state power over migrant subjects. Instead, *Stuck and Exploited* explores the complex relations (and lack thereof) between migrants and the state through a number of intermediaries, showing how both reception and migration control are enacted through the voices of the very protagonists of the implementation of reception policies, who embody the tension between humanitarianism and control. Within this, the volume opens a particularly engaging discussion as it points to evidence that reveals the intersections between the experiences of the precarity of migrants and the struggles of the Italian citizenry for the protection of fundamental rights, particularly regarding the labor market (see the chapters by Storato; Sanò and Della Puppa; Marabello and Parisi; and Pascualetto and Perocco). While these questions escape the scope of this book, they would certainly make a case for a further publication.

In this in-depth exploration of the Italian reception system, it becomes clear that processes of externalization to the third sector exacerbate the opacity and arbitrariness of the system, if merely by increasing its complexity, but mainly due to structural lacks and policies of abandonment through the underfunding and reduction of costs of the system. Within this context of lack of resources, hierarchical categories of desirability and deservingness become central to the experience of asylum-seeking even among those already deemed “undesirable and undeserving” and excluded from the mainstream reception system. Between these narrow labels, the complex migration paths of people on the move highlight the precariousness of the different statuses forced onto people seeking asylum—or regularization or a livelihood. If something is missing from the volume, it could be to know more about how this comes to be, how the organizational socialization, the institutionalization of social interactions, and professional habitus within reception reinforce racialized, gendered, ableist, and nationalist discourses and narratives among reception workers that contribute to the give-and-take of migration statuses and what are their intersections with the humanitarian and humanist understandings of care that most organizations in reception hold.

The second part of the book focuses on the consequences of the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic among the migrant population in their journeys through Italy. Although the two parts of the book can appear somewhat disconnected, the focus on the pandemic and its consequences for migrants provides a very necessary picture of how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the right to asylum and reception conditions. Far from being a contingent event, the pandemic has had a profound impact on life in Europe, with substantial consequences on the rights of citizens and non-citizens alike. As shown by the six chapters in this part, asylum reception systems force mobility and immobility among migrants, experiences that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated. The “emergency” narrative has led to “emergency” responses that have not hesitated to curtail the few existing mobility rights for asylum seekers and refugees and have had dire consequences on their reception conditions and the possibilities to access the right of asylum. Beyond that, sanitary measures have often had reverse effects on the asylum population as measures to prevent illness have become the source of insalubrity and malaise, particularly for those in situations of encampment or living in the street, thus exacerbating their processes of exclusion through reception. As Perocco notes in his chapter, the pandemic has become a litmus test—exposing the structural problems of contemporary societies—but also a “social accelerator” and “detonator” pushing forward existing societal trends and exacerbating existing hardships and inequalities. Thus, these chapters confirm worrying tendencies over the retrenchment of the right of asylum, where the few guarantees that still seemed to hold dissipate “emergency” after “emergency” and “crisis” after “crisis”.

The collection of papers in *Stuck and Exploited* thus shows how, despite posing as “citizenship technologies”—to use a construct created by Jonathan Xavier

Inda—aiming to reinsert those excluded, the fundamental structural deficiencies of the reception system make that “integration” measures such as the promotion of labor market incorporation, actually pave the way for exclusion and precariousness, effectively becoming “anti-citizenship technologies,” that seek to control and contain excluded citizens. This tendency has become more evident by the shift in the Italian reception model from the SPRAR system, which, while far from being ideal, relied on facilitating asylum seekers’ processes of incorporation by offering “integration” services and possibilities of community engagement with the current model that excludes asylum seekers from the ordinary reception system and favors “emergency” solutions, often based on the encampment and large centers that preclude processes of incorporation (see the chapters by Ferrero and Roverso; Dal Zotto, Lo Cascio, and Piro; and Caroselli and Semprebon). Similarly, the role of reception workers also seems to mimic this trend as control duties take over humanitarian and “integration” tasks (see the chapter by Ferrero and Roverso). However, despite the heightened control, or perhaps because of the heightened control, the slippages of the system become as revealing of its underlying rationale as its efforts for incorporation. All through the book (see the chapters by Caroselli and Semprebon; and Pontiggia), the lack of statistical data on people on the move through Italian territory, particularly those that are in the most vulnerable situations and those excluded from reception, becomes yet another testament of how neglect is used as a strategy for the governance of mobility.

In short, this is a very rich book, which provides the most extensive look at the Italian reception system to date, and opens crucial discussions over the governance of migration within European democracies.

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