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Articles

**Pre- and post-migratory experiences of refugees in Italy:
an interpretative phenomenological analysis**

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Abstract

The present study aimed to explore in-depth meanings and representations that 6 refugees hosted in Italy attributed to their pre-migratory, migratory and post-migratory experiences. We developed and administered semi-structured interviews, analysed accordingly to the principles of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. A total of four superordinate themes emerged: *The past, the case is over*; *The Committee as witness of my truth*; *Italy, Never Land*; *The future between agency and delegation*. The past emerged as a “case over”, which participants tended to avoid talking about, while the Territorial Committee played a fundamental role as witness and legitimiser of their life stories. Positive post-migratory experiences configured a resilience field, which is able to strengthen and empower refugees’ resources as well as to restore the social and community links normally destroyed by severe traumatisation. Implications for research and clinical interventions will be outlined.

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1. Introduction

During 2018, 68 million people were forced to flee their homes or countries due to war, violence and persecution (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2018). The current conflict in Syria, the crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the war in South Sudan and the transfer of thousands of Rohingya refugees from Myanmar to Bangladesh all contributed to the increase of people fleeing (UNHCR, 2017). Out of 68 million people forcibly displaced worldwide, around 26 million are refugees or asylum seekers (UNHCR, 2017).

Europe represented, and still represents, one of the principal destinations for people seeking asylum. The highest record was reached in 2016 when around 2.100.000 asylum seekers entered Europe asking for international protection (UNHCR, 2016).

Italy, due to its strategic geographical position, has assumed a leading role in past and present migratory flows, though there has been a radical change in the way forced migrants are perceived and represented in the Italian mind-set. In contrast to the welcoming attitude towards asylum seekers that was prevalent until 2017, 2018 saw a decrease in the number of arrivals due to a strict anti forced migrants' policy that led to approval of the so-called "Security Decree" and "Security Decree *bis*" (Decree-law no. 113 of 4 October, converted, with amendments, into Law no. 132 of 1 December 2018; Decree-law no. 53 of 14 June converted, with amendments, into Law no. 77 of 8 August 2019). The "Security Decree", among other things, abolished humanitarian protection status, which was the document most commonly awarded to asylum seekers in Italy. In 2017, for example, out of 130.000 applications for international protection submitted, 48% had a positive verdict: 8% achieved asylum status, 8% subsidiary protection, whereas 25% were granted humanitarian protection. The abolition of this status was an explicit sign of the anti-immigrant position adopted by the last government led by the right-wing party *Lega* and the populist and anti-establishment *Five Star Movement*.

Other changes promoted by the "Security Decree" regarded the reorganisation of the ordinary primary and secondary reception system: the SPRAR network, re-named SIPROIMI, which was recognised as the most successful model of reception, now deals only with unaccompanied minors and people who have been awarded international protection; whereas, the Extraordinary Reception Centres, which were set up as an emergency solution to deal with huge numbers of arrivals, are now the official primary reception centres. However, these centres have had their budgets cut, and services to support the asylum seekers' well-being and promote integration, such as the teaching of the Italian language and psychological support, have been axed. We believe that the withdrawal of psychological support services defies the link between mental health and human rights, and pushes psychologists and professionals to assume a clear political, as well as social position, to defend human suffering and promote the right to health.

Further, from our point of view, the increasing number of displaced and suffering people worldwide not only highlights a need to reconsider hospitality and integration practices and policy, but also to review models and approaches for research and clinical practice within the relationship with Cultural Otherness.

In this sense, the forced migratory phenomenon, due to its complexity, requires the adoption of a multilevel approach that takes account of political, social, cultural and psychological factors.

From a psychodynamic perspective, which represents the theoretical perspective through which we explore the forced migratory phenomenon, forced migration is characterised by a potential traumatic meaning, which for the present-day forced migrants is even more real and concrete, as well as a potential rebirth (Grinberg & Grinberg, 1989). In such terms, traumatic and resilient dimensions need to be looked at as multidimensional processes that extend through different intra-psychic and inter-psychic times and spaces (Margherita & Tessitore, 2019). This positioning reflects the need to avoid focusing solely on the so-called refugee trauma which, as stated elsewhere (Tessitore & Margherita, 2017), represents the main focus of the current national and international psychological research on asylum seekers and refugees, and coincides with the concrete phase of violence experienced by forced migrants during the migratory phase. Further, this positioning also reflects the need to avoid reducing asylum seekers and refugees to the predetermined and stereotyped roles of victims and traumatised people (Bumiller, Bereni, Chappe, Lacalmontie, & Corson, 2011; Esposito, Ornelas, Briozzo, & Arcidiacono, 2019; Fassin & Rechtman, 2008).

The study we are going to present is part of a wider field of research that the Dynamic Psychology tenure of the University of Naples Federico II is carrying out in the field of forced migration (Margherita & Tessitore, 2017, 2019; Tessitore & Glovi, 2019; Tessitore & Margherita, 2017, 2018, 2019a, 2019b). In particular, through the present study, we aimed to explore in-depth subjective meanings and feelings that refugees hosted in Italy attributed to their pre-migratory, migratory and post-migratory experiences. We also aimed to shed light on possible risk and protective factors in different temporal phases, taking into account the peculiarities of refugees' experiences who, by virtue of a different social-juridical and identity status, as well as of different needs and requirements, need to be differentiated from asylum seekers.

To achieve our aims, we have chosen to carry out a qualitative investigation through the adoption of narrative interviews which we considered very useful to explore in-depth the subjective experiences (Gargiulo & Margherita, 2019; Margherita, Boursier, Gargiulo, & Nicolò, 2017; Margherita, Troisi, Tessitore, & Gargiulo, 2017).

In terms of methodology, we opted for Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith, 1995, 2011; Smith & Osborn, 2008) because of the importance it places on personal meanings attributed by participants to their experiences, as well as to the individuals' inner personal world.

2. Materials and methods

2.1 The methodology: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

We chose Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith, 1995, 2011; Smith & Osborn, 2008) as our approach. The *ideographic* nature of the IPA method allows participants and their personal view of world to have an active role. The IPA approach is, in fact, a form of research with an idiographic focus on specific details, allowing for the study of individual cases rather than focusing on general principles and norms. Therefore, it follows a double hermeneutic: participants try to give sense to their experiences while the researcher tries to understand the sense given by participants to their experiences. Moreover, the IPA approach considers participants the real experts of the topic being researched, so allows for *phenomenological* research in the attempt to give more importance to the narrative truth than to the objective one. The IPA methodology comprises different steps which define both the phases of implementation of the research design as well as data analysis.

2.2 Participants

Participants were contacted through a Neapolitan Association, with a wide experience in the immigration field, which manages a SPRAR Centre where some male asylum seekers and refugees are hosted.

During a first collective meeting, all the refugees hosted in the SPRAR were met and the aims of the study explained. Participants were asked whether they were interested in taking part in the research. Out of 13 refugees met, 3 declared themselves not available to take part in the research. Considering the idiographic nature of the IPA, a homogeneous group is usually required, based on certain characteristics that reflect the specificities of the research questions. In line with this, we set the following inclusion criteria:

- between 30 and 40 years old;
- received humanitarian protection;
- in Italy for almost two years;
- able to speak Italian.

Some of the inclusion criteria, such as the range of participants' age and the time of arrival in Italy were also chosen because they reflected the main characteristics of refugees hosted in Italy according to the latest Ministry of Interior data (2018).

We also decided not to select participants on the basis of a specific culture of origin, since we considered culture as a dynamic process that is constantly constructed and co-constructed within the relationship (Moro, 1998).

Out of 10 participants who agreed to take part in the study, 6 of them were selected according to the established inclusion criteria. Out of 6 participants (mean age: 33.8), 3 came from Pakistan and 3 from Sub-Saharan Africa (Mali, Nigeria and Burkina Faso). All were Muslim, except the participant from Nigeria who was Christian. All of them left their country of origin due to religious or terrorist persecution and all of them obtained humanitarian protection from the Territorial Committee (Tab. 1).

Table 1. Characteristics of participants

Pseudonym	Age	Country of origin	Civil State	Children	Religion	Time of arrival in Italy	Reason for departure	Social-juridical Status
Mariko	30	Mali	Not married	No	Muslim	24 months	Religious persecution	Humanitarian protection
Dasting	31	Nigeria	Not married	No	Christian	24 months	Terroristic persecution	Humanitarian protection
Kak	30	Pakistan	Not married	No	Muslim	36 months	Religious persecution	Humanitarian protection
Ali	35	Pakistan	Not married	No	Muslim	24 months	Religious persecution	Humanitarian protection
Kamram	37	Pakistan	Not married	No	Muslim	24 months	Religious persecution	Humanitarian protection
Newton	40	Burkina Faso	Not married	No	Muslim	36 months	Political persecution	Humanitarian protection

2.3 Setting and Procedures

All the steps of the present study were approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Naples Federico II and carried out in accordance with the last declaration of Helsinki.

The research was carried out in a room made available by the SPRAR.

A total of two meetings were performed. After the first collective meeting aimed to inform refugees about the study and select participants, one individual meeting was carried out in the presence of the participant and the researcher.

During the individual meeting, first a consent form and a socio-demographic anonymous schedule was given to each participant, then a semi-structured interview in Italian was administered.

2.4 Instruments

The IPA methodology requires the development of a semi-structured interview to guide the researcher during the conversation but, at the same time, to stop him/her being too intrusive. In line with IPA principles, we developed a semi-structured interview which explored three main thematic-temporal areas:

1. the past: pre-migratory meanings and experiences;
2. the escape memory: migratory meanings and experiences;
3. the arrival and post-Committee phase: post-migratory meanings and experiences.

The main questions used to guide the interview were:

1. *Would you like to tell me something about your life in your homeland...*
2. *Would you like to tell me something about your journey...the reasons why you left, the main difficulties...*
3. *Would you like to tell me something about your arrival...your life in Italy...and something about your current life and future perspectives...*

2.5 Data analysis

The data were analysed using the procedure described in the IPA process (Smith, 2011). Therefore, all the interviews were transcribed *verbatim* and analysed individually and the different stages of the analyses were cross-checked at various intervals by the authors. The IPA process of data analysis needs an iterative analysis that provides a strong interaction between the reader/researcher and the text. After transcribing the interviews, the researcher reads the texts several times to familiarise themselves with the participants' narratives: first, each interview has to be paraphrased; then, the researcher writes comments, notes and connections to the text on the basis of his/her interpretation. From this first step of analysis, some *subordinate themes* will emerge. Their number usually reflects the richness of a specific passage in the text. The connection between the subordinate themes, on the basis of their contents, determines the formation of *superordinate themes* which represent a sort of container of the subordinate themes' meanings.

3. Findings

The interviews lasted an average of 35 minutes. From their analysis a total of 4 superordinate themes emerged, each of them characterised by 3 subordinate themes (Tab. 2). Table 2 shows the frequencies of each theme for the different participants. Furthermore, each subordinate theme was named using the words the participants chose in order to respect the idiographic and phenomenological nature of the IPA process (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

Table 2. Superordinate and subordinate themes

Superordinate and subordinate themes	Mariko	Dasting	Kak	Ali	Kamram	Newton
1. The past, the case is over...						
<i>1a If in your country there is the war, you have to leave...</i>	*	*	*	*	*	*
<i>1b You have to be as a photographer: transforming the negatives in positive...</i>			*		*	*
<i>1c I don't want to rewind tape. Forget is the better way to re-start.</i>	*		*		*	*
2. The Committee as witness of my truth						
<i>2a During the evaluation, you are required to remember and it is too difficult...</i>		*	*			
<i>2b The Committee recognised my words were true...</i>	*		*	*	*	*
<i>2c Now I have something...I have a future...</i>			*	*	*	
3. Italy: Never Land						
<i>3a Italy helps the foreigners...</i>	*	*	*	*	*	*
<i>3b Italians respect foreigners...</i>	*	*	*	*	*	*
<i>3c There are a lot of white people in the street...</i>	*				*	
4. The future: between agency and delegation						
<i>4a Next step: find a work!</i>	*	*	*	*	*	*
<i>4b Italy gave me a life, now it is up to me...</i>	*	*	*		*	*
<i>4c I can't imagine or build the future...It is up to God...</i>	*	*	*	*		

1. The past, the case is over...

The first superordinate theme reflected the participants' meanings and feelings about their past which emerged as a "case over", a sort of closed chapter that participants did not want to open again. All participants described their motherlands as dangerous places in which the war made it impossible to plan their future. *1a If in your country there is the war, you have to leave...* is the first subordinate theme through which participants expressed the dangerous situations they lived in their homeland and the fact that their migration was forced:

Terrorists, army. Be there...it was not possible, they attacked people in schools, colleges, bazars, everywhere...So... How can we live there? If you go out...if you are lucky you can come back to home...if not...Who wants to live in this manner? [Ali]

When you go away from your family, is because you are leaving too difficult conditions [...] I have no children, but just think about fathers who decided to leave...This is too difficult...My aim was to finally find peace... [Newton]

From participants' words, the extreme conditions that forced them to flee acted also as empowering factors: *2a You have to be as a photographer: transforming the negatives in positive...* is the way in which most of them described a resilient field connected to those creative and new-born dimensions which, alongside the suffering and the trauma, also characterise migration:

I have known difficulties...Life is a match...no?? [Newton]

But I've always said to myself that in life you should be like the photographer. The photographer who transforms the negative into the positive. [Kamram]

Nevertheless, such capacity to make the *suffering amazing* (Cyrulnik, 1999) seemed to be possible on one condition only: forget the past. *1c I don't want to rewind tape. Forget is the better way to re-start* well described the belief that forgetting is the only way to start a new life:

I mean, if I look Pakistan, there are a lot of things I just want to forget...I just want to forget and re-start a new life. Forget is the better way to re-start. [Kamram]

I have experienced many difficulties and I think it is better to forget them. If you want to move on and start a new life, you have to forget. If the past comes back, you get stuck [Kak]

2. The Committee as witness of my truth

The second superordinate theme described an important turning point in participants' lives: the evaluation made by the Territorial Committee, which is the Italian institution in charge of assessing asylum applications. *2a During the evaluation, you are required to remember and it is too difficult...* is the theme through which participants expressed the feelings they experienced during the interview, in which another "journey" was made, this time, backwards, through the past:

When I was there...oh it was so difficult because I had to remember...[Dasting]

Because when I did the audition... I remembered my whole life, the reason why I left, all the problems...it was terrible. [Kak]

Although the tale of their escape memory emerged as a difficult moment for participants, at the same time the Committee assumed a fundamental role as concrete, as well as symbolic, witness. The "witness issue" emerged as an important theme in participants' words, positioning itself on the borderline between the juridical field and the psychological one: *2b The Committee recognised my words were true...*

The Committee was friendly...it recognised my difficulties...it knew the social and political situation of my country...It helped me a lot... [...] It recognised what I was saying was true. [Kamram]

My escape memory was true...I did not lie...the Committee recognised my words as true!! [Kak]

2c Now I have something...I have a future... described the fact that humanitarian protection represented a turning point in their lives. In participants' words, the humanitarian protection represented not only the point of arrival after a long and painful journey, but also a starting point from which to establish new aims:

Because before, without documents we were nothing. Now I am ready, to start a new life, to find a work, to stay in Italy. [Kak]

You know with the documents I can start a new life. With them I found myself. Now it will be no more difficult. [Kamram]

3. Italy, Never Land

The third superordinate theme described the field of meanings and feelings around Italy, which seemed to be represented as a sort of Never Land, country of peace and tolerance. *3a Italy helps foreigners...* is the shared thought that pushed participants to choose Italy as their destination country.

The belief that Italy helped foreigners, which participants said they had heard from other generalised individuals, seemed to be based on rumours but helped to increase an idealised view of Italy:

I have already heard about Italy when I arrived in Greece. I heard people is helped in Italy. This is a good country. [Kak]

I did not so many things about Italy, but I knew it is a point of reference for peace. Here there is the Vatican which is example of peace. When you live in a war, Italy is your reference for living in peace, everyone knows this thing... [Newton]

The idealised view of Italy found concreteness when participants arrived in the Italian Reception Centres: *3b Italians respect foreigners...* is the way in which participants, making another generalisation, described their relationship with the professionals who worked in the centres and who provided important support:

When I arrived in Lampedusa, many people gave us clothes, shampoo...When I arrived in Naples, the owner of the centre helped me a lot...helped me in achieving documents, in learning Italian, in a lot of things... [Mariko]

When I arrived, it was almost clear to me that in Italy there is a minimum of assistance for immigrants. In the centre they took care of us...we were able to wash ourselves, they made us able to start the Italian school. [Dasting]

Finally, *3c There are a lot of white people in the street...* is the theme through which participants expressed the awareness that also Italy and Italians had different problems, showing the initial collapse of the imagined utopia:

But...I do not know... there are some white people who sleep in the street...they have not a home...why? I have a home...why they not? [Mariko]

I learned that also in Italy there is a lot of economic crisis...I see a lot of homeless in the street... [Kamram]

4. The future: between agency and delegation

The last superordinate theme reflected the way in which participants imagined and perceived their future, divided between the need to delegate everything to God and the need to take control of their own lives. *4a Next step: find a work!* is the theme through which the new challenges are expressed. From participants' words, the possibility to learn Italian emerged as a fundamental aspect in promoting a sense of self-agency.

Simultaneously, the school, intended as a physical place, is also described as a space where processes of individuation and autonomy are fostered:

It is important to learn Italian...if you learn you can understand people and understanding people is fundamental... [Mariko]

Now I am going to school...and I can visit the neighbourhood and speaking Italian...This is very important for me...when I go to school I feel I am not wasting time [Ali]

4b Italy gave me a life, now it is up to me... is the theme through which participants expressed their feelings of gratitude towards Italy and Italians. These aspects also seemed to increase the self-agency of participants who, by virtue of the help they received, were ready to donate and give something back. In this sense, participants implied that the interview with our team was their first opportunity to give something back:

Now you are here, and I am here...Italians helped me and now I am helping you. This is why I am here now...Italy and Italians are wonderful. [Ali]

Well, we didn't know each other before, but you're asking me some questions and I'll answer you...this is to tell you that not having certainties in your life, you have to be helpful and do something for the others. [Kak]

If the previous themes demonstrated the repossession of an agency area, *4c I can't imagine or build the future...It is up to God...* is the way in which participants expressed their powerlessness and delegated everything to God's hands. His saving and providential function needs to be seen also as an expression of a strong cultural element, which participants shared despite their different cultural provenance:

I can't imagine my future...really...it's God...God decides. God is big and he is bearing you...Inch'Allah! [Ali]

No...you can't imagine your future...God builds your future...we are all God sons... [Mariko]

4. Discussion

Analysis of the interviews showed common meanings attributed by participants to their pre-migratory, migratory and post-migratory experiences.

First of all, all participants were more inclined to speak about their present and future, rather than about their past. *The past, the case is over* expresses participants' need to close with that phase of suffering.

In fact, there were very few representations from participants of their country of origin: they either described their motherlands as dangerous places, which failed to guarantee primary and necessary life conditions; or a sort of *nostalgic disorientation* (Papadopoulos, 2002) connected to their loss of home emerged. In this sense, “home”, intended not only as a physical space, but also as the psychic space of affective inscriptions, in which significant relationships and affects were nurtured, represents a very significant issue in refugees’ life stories, because, unlike migrant workers who can return to their homelands at any time, refugees can travel anywhere except to their home. An additional component of the past is the journey, which emerged from the narratives as a *big absence*. When asked to talk about their journey, some participants only mentioned the different stages of their trip, others described the tragic events and life conditions in Libya, participants from Pakistan who arrived in Italy through the Balkan route mentioned the obstacles along the way, but no one developed a narrative about it. In general, what emerged from the participants’ words was that the only possible way to go forward was to forget the past, following a sort of necessary *forgetting to live* (Augé, 1998) which could be read as a form of resistance. In this sense, the tendency to tell stories which are not affectively mentalized, but descriptive and detached, is often common in potentially traumatised individuals, testifying a failure in using symbolic tools to present themselves and give meanings to their own experiences (De Micco, 2017; Fischmann, Jovic, Rosenbaum, & Hau, 2012; Troisi, 2018; Varvin, 2016). In this sense, promoting the symbolic restoration represents a great challenge for researchers and professionals involved in the field of forced migration, especially if we consider that narrative assumes a critical connotation for asylum seekers and refugees, since international protection can be achieved through the so-called escape memory narration, meaning that refugees will be evaluated on their ability to create a coherent narrative about themselves.

The ambivalence which surrounded the “narrative issue” was clearly declined in the theme *The Committee as witness of my truth*, where participants expressed their sense of gratitude towards those who “ratified” their stories, as well as the difficulties experienced in re-actualising their past suffering. Broadly, participants showed a strong investment in the Territorial Committee, which assumed, for them, the fundamental role of witness. This is vital for anyone who has experienced extreme situations; they always need a listener to witness their experience, as an opportunity for restoration of the link with the human (De Rosa, 2016). In this sense, the experience of the deposition with the Territorial Committee emerged as the only moment in which participants’ stories, identities and suffering seemed to be recognised and legitimised. When humanitarian protection was granted, this confirmed this legitimation even more, and represented a fundamental turning point in participants’ lives, embodying a real *re-birth ghost* (Pestre, 2010).

Additionally, *Italy, Never Land* described the participants' post-migratory experiences and meanings. First of all, the favourable hospitality policies that characterised Italy when participants arrived in 2016, in addition to the positive verdict they received from the Territorial Committee, configured Italy as a sort of idealised "good giant". The idealised representation of Italy as hosting country continued in the description of Italians as supportive, helpful and welcoming people, in a sort of automatic association; Italians=social and health professionals who worked at the centre and took care of them. In order to understand these aspects, it is important to stress that participants lived a very positive experience in the SPRAR centre where they stayed and that the interviews were administered in a period, the early months of 2018, in which a *policy of hospitality* was still prevalent in Italy. Nowadays, the different social-political atmosphere and the consequent emotional and affective field would almost certainly lead to more complex feelings and perspectives that should be investigated and explored in-depth.

Finally, the theme *The future between agency and delegation* described the ambivalent representations of future, which appeared suspended between perceiving themselves as individuals with agency yet, at the same time, powerless before God. The only element that seemed to hold things together was the sense of community and belonging, feeling part of the refugee community as well as the Italian one. As highlighted by previous studies (Kellezi, Bowe, Wakefield, McNamara, & Bosworth, 2019; Kellezi & Reicher, 2012), these aspects emerged as important resilient factors in the lives of forced migrants.

The present study is not free from limitations. First of all, for further studies we need to increase the number of participants, which is currently low and provides a small sample for analysis. However, we would also like to highlight the suitability of the adopted methodology, which has already been used in diverse studies on forced migrants, all with small numbers of participants (Timotijevic & Breakwell, 2000; Whittaker, Hardy, Lewis, & Buchan, 2005). Another limitation could concern the choice to carry out the interviews in Italian, which might limit the participants' ability to express themselves, even though each participant was invited to use English or French expressions in their interviews if they preferred. However, carrying out the interviews in Italian, the language of the participants' host country, corresponded to our decision to create a symbolic common space of sharing and hospitality between researcher and participants.

For further studies, we would like to include a cultural consultant because he/she could act as a symbolic cultural bridge between participant and researcher and thus make it easier to create this space. Another limitation could be represented by the fact that participants came from different countries of origin and, therefore, from different cultures.

This aspect might have limited the homogeneity of the group, even though we believe culture needs to be looked at as a dialectic of explicative models that are constantly acted, shared and created within the field of relationship (Bennegadi, 1996).

5. Conclusion

The present exploratory study has tried to consider the experience of forced migration in its complexity through an in-depth analysis of meanings and representations of six refugees' pre-migratory, migratory and post-migratory experiences.

First of all, the narratives showed a tendency on the part of refugees to avoid speaking about the past, which was mainly connected to the participants' belief that, in order to be able to start a new life, they needed to close with their past life experiences. Unlike what happens with asylum seekers (Tessitore & Margherita, 2019a, 2019b), we believe that the refugees' desire to forget emerged as a consequence of the humanitarian protection status they were awarded, which symbolically assumed the value of a "new-born certificate", conferring on them a new socio-juridical, as well as identity, status. In this sense, the Territorial Committee symbolically assumed for participants the fundamental role of *external witness* (Viñar, 2017), so vital for people who have experienced severe traumatisation, offering the opportunity to be listened to, to legitimise their past experiences, recognise their suffering and give them the possibility of a new start. In this sense, results suggested the importance for researchers and professionals to improve and strengthen the development of spaces which, apart from the legal procedures to evaluate their asylum application, acknowledge the forced migrants' identities and stories, giving them the possibility to be listened to and recognised in their suffering and as human beings. These aspects are even more important considering the participants' closure with the past, which might be connected to a necessary but temporary break or, on the contrary, to a permanent fracture that might need to be restored through the promotion of integration processes.

Some additional reflections also needed to be outlined regarding humanitarian protection which was an important turning point for participants that assumed the role of a protective factor for refugees and their well-being, confirming the unavoidable links between human rights and mental health. However, wide and still unexplored questions remain open about the participants' future and, in general, about the future of people who managed to obtain this kind of status and are almost near to its deadline. Results showed that positive post-migratory experiences and positive representations of Italy and Italians could configure a protective field that can strengthen and empower refugees' resources, as well as start to restore the social and community links normally destroyed by severe trauma.

In this sense, the results also showed the protective role assumed by the participants' sense of community and belonging, which not only allowed participants to re-appropriate their agency but also to experiment new and important feelings of solidarity, gratitude and reciprocity.

In conclusion, against the background of the recent anti-immigrant measures adopted by the last Italian government and of a global policy of fear which seems to have produced complex emotional and affective reactions of rejection and closure towards diversity, our results suggested the fundamental protective role of hospitality, intended not only as the totality of practices and policies but also as an emotional, affective and mental disposition able to welcome and host the Other in our minds.

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