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This paper was originally submitted as a dissertation in completion of the requirements for the degree Masters in Global Migration. The views expressed in this paper are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of UCL's Migration Research Unit.

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UCL Migration Research Unit Working Papers

No. 2017/5

Safe and Legal Passages to Europe: A Case Study of Faith- Based Humanitarian Corridors to Italy

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Migration Research Unit



**Safe and Legal Passages to Europe:
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Submitted for the MSc in Global Migration at
University College London
2016

Abstract

The international politics of protection are increasingly restrictive and characterised by manoeuvres aimed at *securitising* and *externalising* asylum. This study seeks to offer an insight on how local and faith-based responses might challenge these trends and provide valuable instances of alternative engagements with protection. With this purpose in mind, I have chosen as the case study for my research the humanitarian corridors initiative established by the Italian Federation of Evangelical Churches, the Community of Sant'Egidio and the Waldensian Church, in collaboration with the Italian Ministries of Interior and of Foreign Affairs. I have carried out ten semi-structured interviews with eight FBO members, one governmental official and one activist, in Rome and in other Italian cities. My approach in framing the project and the analysis has been comparative and actor-oriented.

The experiences and practices I came across in my fieldwork were highly heterogeneous, as selection criteria and processes and reception conditions varied significantly between FBOs. Instead, negotiations with the Italian government were carried out jointly. Furthermore, while not all of my interviewees' motivation was guided by faith, a common feature was the desire to extend protection to beneficiaries who would not have access to it otherwise. In particular, the different mobilisations of the concept of 'vulnerability' have proved to be crucial to the understanding of how different actors negotiated their political agency in the 'humanitarian arena' and, in some cases, challenged current hierarchies of deserving. Finally, this project has offered an opportunity to explore the ways in which FBOs activate resources both within their own local and transnational faith communities, as well as in connection with other faith communities, and the wider civil society.

This research, thus, hopes to contribute to debates around protection, humanitarianism and the role of non-state actors, faith-based in particular, within them. In my conclusion, I suggest that further enquiry is needed in order to address the refugees' perspective, further investigate dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, and of negotiation between the different actors involved.

Acknowledgments

It has been a wonderful experience to carry out this piece of research after an adventurous year at UCL. With these few words, I would like to thank all my interviewees and those who supported me throughout my journey. I am very grateful to my supervisor, Dr Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, to my fellow MSc Global Migration students, the lecturers of the modules I attended, and to UCL staff in general. I would also like to express my gratitude to the participants in the conference Escapes in Bari for their feedback on my research project, at that time still undeveloped. My work would have been much harder, if not impossible, without my family's, my friends', and my flatmates' encouragement and advice.

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Acronyms

CIC: Citizenship and Immigration Canada

CEC/KEK: Conference of European Churches

CCME: Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe

CWS: Church World Service

FBO: Faith-Based Organisation

FCEI: Italian Federation of Evangelic Churches

IDP: Internally Displaced Person

IOM: International Organisation for Migration

IR: Islamic Relief

LFC: Local Faith Community

LWF: Lutheran World Federation

MENA: Middle East and North Africa

MSF: Médecins Sans Frontières

NAMC: North African Mediterranean Country

NGO: Non-Governmental Organisation

NSA: Non-State Actor

PRM: US Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration

RSD: Refugee Status Determination

SPRAR: Italian Central Service for the Protection of Asylum Seekers

TV: Tavola Valdese (Waldensian Church)

UAM: Unaccompanied Minor

UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

WCC: World Council of Churches

Introduction

The last two decades have seen a sharp rise in the number of people who embark on extremely perilous journeys in order to reach Europe. A study called ‘15 Years Fortress Europe’ shows how the death toll among them recently reached 32,040, if one starts counting from the beginning of the year 2000 and includes all routes that migrants take in that attempt. European responses have been mostly framed in terms of search and rescue operations (i.e. Mare Nostrum, Triton) and the securitisation of borders, which sometimes meant the construction of walls both at the EU’s internal and external borders, and the suspension of the Schengen agreements guaranteeing free movement of people between EU member states. *Protection*, instead, understood as ‘lifesaving interventions, fair treatment upon reception, compliance with essential humanitarian standards and non-return to a place of prospective persecution (*non-refoulement*)’ (Helton, 2003:26), has increasingly been subject to restrictions. For instance, arrangements have been settled with North African Mediterranean Countries (NAMC) (Cuttitta, 2010) and, recently, Turkey (EC, 2016c; Rais, 2016), in an attempt to *externalise protection* by preventing migrants from crossing the sea (Betts, 2004; Hyndman and Mountz, 2008).

At the same time, the international community provides protection in the form of safe and legal routes to countries in the global North to small numbers of refugees through resettlement schemes (UNHCR, 2011), some of which directed at particular ‘vulnerable’ groups (e.g. UK, 2015). The latest global resettlement figures (UNHCR, 2015) show quite a sharp rise in submissions (134,044 compared to 103,890 in 2014), but a rather limited increase in departures (81,893 compared to 73,330 in 2014). In particular, the number of people who manage to reach refuge in Europe through these schemes remains quite low - around 8,200 between July 2015 and July 2016 (EC, 2016). Moreover, resettlement programmes are only available to those who have already been granted asylum, and thus find themselves in a territory other than their country of origin, where their refugee status has been recognised by the national authority or the UNHCR.

Non-State Actors (NSAs) such as groups of citizens, migrant communities, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs) (Josselin

and Wallace, 2001) in the global North, however, have set up a number of small-scale initiatives to provide further protection. In Italy, the Federation of Protestant Churches (FCEI), the Waldensian Church and the catholic Community of Sant'Egidio, in cooperation with the Ministries of Interior and of Foreign Affairs, have established the 'humanitarian corridors' programme, whose objective is 'to create dedicated channels to obtain visas for humanitarian reasons and to allow arrivals in our country on a regular basis' (Mediterranean Hope, 2016). From a legal point of view, the programme relies on Article 25 of EC Regulation 810/2009, which introduced an exceptional type of visa with limited territorial validity. The costs (transfer, reception, language courses, etc.) are covered through the organisations' own financial resources, and the initiative is set to provide 1,000 humanitarian visas between January 2016 and December 2017.

In my research, I wish to consider how the programme could be regarded as a potential 'alternative model' to secure safe and legal routes to refuge. By 'alternative' I mean different from other safe and legal routes to refuge such as resettlement and private sponsorship programmes (e.g. Canada, 2016b). Furthermore I will look at the ways in which its reception system, of which the FBOs are in charge, differs from the 'regular' Italian Central Service for the Protection of Asylum Seekers (SPRAR). With the use of the term 'model', I refer to the potential replicability of the programme by other actors and in other countries. Furthermore, I am interested in whether and how the programme challenges or reproduces current hierarchies of worthiness of protection (Squire, 2009; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2016), in the ways in which the different actors negotiate their agency, and in the role of faith within the programme's dynamics and in the FBO members' personal experiences. My research question, therefore, can be outlined as follows:

1) How is the 'humanitarian corridors' programme 'an alternative model' of refugee protection?

1a: How is it 'alternative'?

- In the inclusion of different beneficiaries?
- In mobilising different resources?
- In building a parallel reception system?

1b: How is it 'a model'?

- In its potential to be replicated elsewhere and by different actors?

2) How are different actors negotiating their agency through the programme?

3) What role do religious affiliation, gender, health and age play in mechanisms of inclusion/exclusion?

The perspective from which to look at these issues will be that of my interviewees, mostly FBO workers, while these will be integrated by my analysis of primary texts (such as governmental and non-governmental reports and guidelines, and newspaper articles) and analysed through the lens of my review of the relevant academic debates. Throughout the project, I have developed an approach that suits the inherently comparative and actor-oriented nature of my questions, as further discussed in chapter 2, where my choices regarding methodology and analysis are also addressed, as well as the ethical and practical issues I encountered. In chapter 1, I will provide an overview of academic debates around the role of NSAs in the politics of protection, the implications of FBOs' humanitarian engagements, and the categorisations of migrants and refugees, according to their worthiness of protection. In chapter 3, I will present the findings of my empirical research, analysing them through the lens of the literature review, and identifying themes that emerged as essential to the programme. Finally, I will draw some conclusions on its potential strengths and shortcomings, their implications for wider academic debates, and provide some suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER 1: Literature Review

In this chapter I outline three main areas of academic debate that have guided my interest in the topic of this research and that will provide a theoretical framework for the case study analysed in the analysis. First, I will look at the international politics of protection and Non-State Actors (NSAs). Secondly, I will concentrate on the role of faith in humanitarian contexts, both at the personal level and with regards to FBOs. Finally, I will consider how migrants are distinguished from refugees and how refugees are categorised into different groups that deserve (or not) different types of protection. In doing this, I will focus on the concept of 'vulnerability' in resettlement programmes and its role in dynamics of inclusion and exclusion.

1.1 Non-State-Actors and the politics of protection

While the 1951 Geneva Convention and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees (UNHCR 1951, 1967) at least formally remain the cornerstones of the international protection of refugees, countries in the global North that are signatories of those agreements have, in the last decades, put in place increasingly restrictive asylum policies. In what Loescher describes as 'the crisis of refugee protection',

'Western states have introduced an array of measures designed to prevent asylum applications from being lodged in their countries. Although states still profess a commitment to uphold the 1951 Refugee Convention, governments have initiated a series of legal and political manoeuvres that de facto extend their frontiers into refugee-producing countries.' (2001:352)

Such manoeuvres have included the *securitization of asylum*, meaning 'a shift from a paradigm of refugee protection to prioritizing the protection of national security interests' (Hyndman and Mountz, 2008:251), and the use of discourses and policies of *externalisation of protection*, i.e. 'aimed at de-territorializing the provision of protection to refugees in such a way that temporary protection and the processing of asylum claims take place outside of the given nation-state' (Betts, 2004:59).

Moreover, refugees have been increasingly identified as *illegal migrants* and targeted by policies of dissuasion and deterrence like visa restrictions, 'safe third country' rules,

and the marginalisation and detention of asylum seekers (Sheel and Squire, 2014:195). In the European Union, ‘a sustained, coordinated, and comprehensive set of policies to externalize asylum’ (Hyndman and Mountz, 2008:263) has culminated in readmission agreements with third-country partners ‘to cooperate over the return of illegal residents to their country of origin or transit (EC, 2005), and the recent EU-Turkey Joint Statement (EC, 2016c), criticised by many (e.g. Reis, 2016:45) as *de facto* radically eroding the principle of *non-refoulement*, the ‘prohibition of expulsion or return’ according to the 1951 Geneva Convention’s Article 33(1).

At the same time, Western governments run initiatives such as the UNHCR-coordinated resettlement programme (UNHCR, 2011), offering protection to refugees by relocating them from a country where they have already been granted asylum to a safe third country of settlement. Despite this being a way for states to show their ‘contribution to international solidarity and continued fulfilment of the fundamental principles of protection’ (Goodwin-Gill, 2014:43), it, once more, is in line with the externalisation of asylum claims processing discussed above. Furthermore, ‘of the 14.4 million refugees of concern to UNHCR around the world, less than one per cent is submitted for resettlement’ (UNHCR 2016). The limited capacity of resettlement, as highlighted by a number of scholars, is not surprising, ‘given the continuing relevance of the sovereign competence and the challenges of translating the principle of international cooperation into effective action’ (e.g. Goodwin-Gill, 2014:43), as ‘security concerns, for example, limit the ability of traditional resettlement countries to resettle groups or even individuals of certain nationalities’ (Betts and Durieux, 2007:527).

It is, however, important to consider that national governments do not operate in a vacuum: other agencies are involved in the framing and implementation of protection. In these regards, Hilhorst and Jansen rightly state that

‘the humanitarian arena is not ‘out there’. It is discursively created by agencies, media and other stakeholders [...] Humanitarian situations are not blank slates to be occupied by lone agencies, but are shaped by social negotiations over inclusion and exclusion’ (2010:1133).

While aspects and criteria of access, inclusion and exclusion, particularly relevant with regards to relocation programmes, will be further explored in the third part of this chapter, the rest of this section will concentrate on the impact of NSAs’ participation in the humanitarian politics of protection. According to Josselin and Wallace’s definition,

NSAs 'are at least in principle autonomous from the structure and machinery of the state, and of the governmental and intergovernmental bodies below and above the formally-sovereign state' (2001:3). The category includes a wide range of organisations such as NGOs, FBOs and corporations as well as more informal groups of individuals like diasporas or professional think-tanks (ibid:4).

NSAs play a crucial role in establishing and implementing precisely resettlement programmes. In the US, the country with the largest resettlement programme in the world by far, NGOs are 'responsible for providing a wide range of resettlement services to refugees overseas and across the US' (UNHCR, 2016b). Eby *et al.* have also highlighted that without the Church World Service's and other community organisations' contributions, 'the public-private partnership for refugee resettlement in the US would be impossible on the scale that exists today' (2014:587). As the study suggests, though, they 'are not merely implementing partners, but have been and continue to be key actors who advocate for particular approaches to resettlement as a tool of humanitarian protection for refugees' (ibid, 2014:590). In fact, as discussed in the following paragraphs, NSAs can be seen as 'fostering 'global consciousness', with major consequences for domestic politics and policies' (Josselin and Wallace, 2001:12).

Another way in which refugees can reach safety legally is through private sponsorship programmes, perhaps the most explicit, and least studied (Treviranus and Casola, 2003:199), example of how NSAs can directly engage in policies and practices of protection. Canada, the country with the longest tradition in this type of initiatives, established its first private sponsorship programme in 1978 and has, since then, provided protection and resettlement through this scheme to more than 200,000 people (Canada, 2016). While FBOs initiated it, local NGOs, ethno-cultural groups and private citizens followed, sponsoring, over the decades, refugees from Indochina, Afghanistan, Kosovo, Sierra Leone (Treviranus and Casola, 2003:185-192) and, more recently, Syria (Canada, 2016b).

NSAs' engagement in these programmes could, thus, be seen as part of 'the increasing diversification of actors in the 'burden'-sharing domain' (Gottwald, 2014:535). In these regards, just as for the larger-scale distribution of international protection of refugees, there is a risk of the principle of 'burden sharing' being used as 'burden *shifting*' instead (ibid:533), i.e. a mechanism of transferring of costs from the state to NSAs. However, their participation has also influenced the government's attitude towards protection, in

terms of diversification of beneficiaries, as well as the number of places available (Treviranus and Casola, 2003; Krivenko, 2012).

1.2 Faith and humanitarian engagement

In this section, I am going to discuss the potential assets and challenges presented by faith-based engagements in humanitarian contexts. It is convenient for the purposes of this study to consider faith in relation to humanitarian engagement both at the personal level and within FBOs, understood as ‘any organization that derives inspiration and guidance for its activities from the teachings and principles of the faith or from a particular interpretation or school of thought within the faith’ (Clarke and Jennings, 2008:6). The category is by nature highly heterogeneous, encompassing a wide range of actors, to the point that the differences within it could be greater than between FBOs and secular organisations (Ferris, 2011:610).

Historically, faith has been deeply intertwined with humanitarian engagement (Ferris, 2005; Barnett and Stein, 2012). However, the Northern-centric understanding of ‘humanitarianism’ as inherently secular (Ager and Ager, 2011) ‘has failed to consider responses to displacement emanating from sources that do not necessarily share the Northern liberal tradition’ (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Pacitto, 2016), and created barriers between religious engagements and the wider humanitarian response (Ager and Ager, 2015). As a consequence, this nexus has only become the object of a lively academic debate very recently (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2011), and, as acknowledged by several scholars, well deserves further contributions (Hollenbach, 2014; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Pacitto, 2016).

Recent contributions have highlighted the importance of FBOs’ and Local Faith Communities’ (LFCs’) - understood as ‘groupings of religious actors bonded through shared allegiance to institutions, beliefs, history or identity’ (Samuels *et al.* 2010) - awareness of displaced people’s spiritual needs both in contexts of refugee camps (Kidwai *et al.*, 2014) and after relocation to safe countries (Wilson, 2011). Ager and Ager have shown evidence of how LFCs play an important role in mental health and psychosocial support for refugees through ‘the mobilisation of physical and human resources’, ‘the positive impact of religious coping in adversities’ and through ‘religious practices’ (2015:37; see also Zoma, 2014). In general, the ability of LFCs and FBOs to

mobilise additional, tangible as well as 'intangible' (Eby *et al.*, 2011:593) resources has been acknowledged regarding disaster risk reduction, emergency response and in facilitating transitional and durable solutions (Ager *et al.*, 2015).

Moreover, some FBOs have sought to encourage inter-faith dialogue and cooperation within humanitarianism. Besides formal partnerships like the one between IR and LWF with joint projects in Kenya and Jordan (Gano, 2014), Eby *et al.* have pointed out that

'Churches who request to co-sponsor Muslim refugee cases have sometimes explained that they are doing so in order to help build inter-faith understanding, or to counteract other churches in their community who are demonstrating hatred towards Muslims' (2011:594).

Such strategies adopted by FBOs are not only aimed at influencing their own faith community, but also project them as important actors of the wider civil society and of the public sphere in general. More in general, it has been argued that FBOs play a 'moral role' in the context of the wider society, promoting and extending solidarity to different marginalised groups (Eby *et al.*, 2011; Ehrkamp and Nagel, 2014). However, as suggested by Fiddian-Qasmiyeh with regards to the American Evangelical groups active in the MENA Region, and in the Sahrawi camps in particular, claims of inter-faith dialogue and cooperation by FBOs and other actors not always correspond to the actual inclusion of communities of another (or no) faith (2011b and 2012).

Furthermore, some FBOs can combine humanitarian assistance with attempts to proselytise. For instance, in the Kenyan context, 'IDP camps also became important sites for proselytising, as different FBOs were prominent not just in relief efforts, psychological and emotional counselling, but also in preaching and attempting to convert IDPs to their faith' (Parsitau, 2011:497). Such ethically problematic humanitarian engagements of some organisations can also produce a backlash effect on FBOs' general reputation and activities (Ferris, 2005:323). In general, 'the possible relationship between religion and faith on the one hand, and power and control on the other' (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Pacitto, 2016:289), resulting in mechanisms of exclusion of certain groups (Barnett, 2012:171) according to their religious beliefs (Ferris, 2012) or their gender (Ager *et al.*, 2015) demands an adequately critical approach.

From the point of view of accountability, professionalism and funding, if, on the one hand, FBOs can be considered as more independent from the state than secular organisations by virtue of 'their built-in source - the faithful' (Barnett, 2012:172), on the

other hand 'most of the work of faith-based organizations is not quantified or recorded anywhere', making 'estimating the scale of humanitarian and development assistance provided through faith-based organizations' extremely challenging (Ferris, 2011:610). Several FBOs, however, currently adopt a professional framework more intelligible to the wider humanitarian community, in that they 'employ secular professionals, adhere to high professional standards, and rigorously distance themselves from anything that can be considered to be missionary activity' (ibid:614). While this allows them to navigate the humanitarian context more easily, almost becoming indistinguishable from secular organisations (Ager, 2014), it has been argued that there is a need for a more pluralistic understanding of humanitarian work that takes faith into account as well as different approaches towards professionalism, without renouncing to the fundamental principles of impartiality, independence and neutrality (ibid:17-18).

This should also take into account the role of faith in the personal experiences of both aid workers and beneficiaries alike. As regards the former, Wilson has noted that Christian FBO workers' humanitarian engagements in Australia were explicitly made 'in the image of God, as well as seeking to emulate the life of Christ' (2011:553). While a transcendent motivation for humanitarian activities has been emphasized as an inherent feature of FBO workers' experiences (Snyder, 2011:574), this is not only a prerogative of FBOs, as illustrated by Barnett and Stein's analysis of MSF's self-narratives 'as the defender of the "transcendent global civic religion" symbolized by humanitarian space' (2012:225-6). Furthermore, there are increasing instances of FBOs hiring personnel that do not belong to their (or to any) faith community (ibid:168). This, again, poses challenges in terms of identifying a distinctive trait to FBO workers' mobilisation of faith, and calls for a more complex and contextualised understanding of the issue.

Parallel considerations can be drawn about refugees' mobilisation of faith. Displaced people 'variously negotiate interactions with faith-based aid providers in contexts of widespread power inequalities' (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2011:437). For instance, 'female IDPs rely on faith as a tool for personal and communal survival and empowerment' (Parsitau, 2011:509) in their interaction with Christian Charismatic Churches in Kenyan refugee camps. However, as Zaman has suggested, a 'holistic approach' is needed when looking at refugees' experiences of faith and displacement: in his view, 'the mobilisation of religious traditions cannot be considered in isolation' (2016:77), but is instead to be looked at in connection with education, sociocultural dynamics and kin networks'

(ibid:45). Moreover, it ought not be overlooked that refugees can themselves be providers of faith-based humanitarian work, as in the case of Karen refugee-evangelists on the Thailand–Myanmar Border and Muslim FBOs in the context of the Syrian war (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Pacitto, 2016).

1.3 Hierarchies of deserving

Sheer and Squire have highlighted that ‘dominant figures of migration function as interpretative grids for all migration processes, thereby organizing the epistemological and political terrain of both migration and migration policies’ (2014:193). In this section, I will look at how categorisations according to different understandings of ‘deserving’ influence access to protection.

In her book *The Exclusionary Politics of Asylum*, Squire illustrates how, since the post-war period, asylum ‘has been constructed as a ‘problem’ or ‘threat’ that necessitates intensified controls’ (2009:9). As Hyndman and Mountz succinctly explain, ‘in the conflation of public discourse about terrorists, refugees, economic migrants, human smuggling and others on the move, people are stripped of their identities as individuals and re-subjectified as groups’ (2008:258). If, on the one-hand side, the archetypal refugee has been progressively imagined as ‘the passive object of humanitarian intervention’ (Malkki, 1996: 390), those who deviated from this paradigm (or were perceived to do so) have been confined to less- or un-deserving categories. In particular, ‘the ‘bogus asylum seeker’ is conceived as imbued with dangerous or excessive agency based on the suspected ‘abuse’ of the asylum system’ (Sheel and Squire, 2014:194).

A general distinction is, thus, made between ‘real’ and ‘bogus’ refugees on the basis of their use of political agency (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2016b:2-3). The second category is often conflated with that of ‘economic migrants’ (Squire, 2009; Hyndman and Mountz, 2008), considered as voluntary migrants who do not need, nor deserve, protection. However, as DeLorey points out,

‘The legitimacy of the “voluntary migration” concept should be called into question for people facing severe economic deprivation, the symbiotic relationship between economic inequalities and protracted conflicts, and emerging impacts of climate change and environmental degradation’ (2010:232).

Moreover, as suggested by a coalition of NGOs operating on the Spanish-Moroccan border in a joint report, the current paradigm applied in Ceuta and Melilla does not only distinguish between (economic) 'bad migrants' and 'good refugees', but also, among 'good refugees', between sub-categories that do or do not deserve protection (AMDH Nador *et al.* 2015:56).

In these regards, Fiddian-Qasmiyeh has suggested that 'specific refugee populations have been constituted as either 'good' or 'bad refugees' for different reasons at diverse historical junctures' (2016b:3). As highlighted by several studies, these processes correspond to their hyper- or hypo-visibility in the media discourse of the global North (e.g. El Jack, 2010; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2016:458-9, but not always, see *ibid*:467-8) and result in hierarchies of refugee-ness, from the unworthy of protection to the 'ideal' refugees.

Given that a higher 'status' in refugee-ness hierarchy can lead to a higher likelihood of survival and/or access to services and protection, refugees may exert their agency by presenting themselves as members of the chosen group or by emphasizing or downplaying some of their identity markers (*ibid*:461). A dynamic of this sort has been described by Hilhorst and Jansen regarding access to resettlement programmes in the Kakuma protracted refugee camp in Nigeria. There, refugees, individually and through the community leaderships who acted as gatekeepers for resettlement cases, 'learned to employ a rights language to claim vulnerability on the basis of ethnic identity' (2010:1125), exposing how 'being able to play the game is more decisive than the actual vulnerability' (*ibid*:1127).

'Vulnerability' is, in fact, one of the most common terms to be found in resettlement frameworks and guidelines (e.g. UNHCR, 2011; UK, 2015), as a criterion for access to this durable solution. This, however, raises a number of issues. Firstly, as Fine points out, sometimes the criteria used in selection processes 'are in theory based on vulnerability but are in practice linked to political as well as humanitarian rationales' (2014: 53), as in the case of the US prioritising Iranian religious minorities on the basis of foreign policy interests (*ibid*). Secondly, while some categories of refugees might formally be recognised, as we will see in the following paragraphs, as particularly vulnerable, the implementation of resettlement selection processes does not always succeed in allowing access and securing protection precisely to those groups (e.g. Fiddian, 2006). Finally, the

link between vulnerability and worthiness of protection once again reinforces the figure of the most deserving refugee as an agency-less victim:

'It is only by highlighting the trauma and suffering experienced prior to arriving in the country of asylum, and by inscribing oneself in the publically legible script of psychological and physical vulnerability, that one is able to become a 'good refugee' in the eyes of non-refugee observers and decision-makers.' (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2016:3)

As briefly mentioned above, the concept of 'vulnerability' is often associated to specific categories of refugees. If, in general, attempting to reach safety through perilous journeys, seeking asylum, and meeting requirements for resettlement naturally prioritize individuals in good health conditions, the progressive inclusion of mental and physical disability as criteria of vulnerability has partially increased the chances for refugees in significant need of healthcare to access relocation to a safe country (Ager, 2014b). However, this has also led to instances of refugees deliberately acting to worsen their health conditions in order to enhance their likelihood of being selected, as in the case of the male refugee in Cairo illustrated by Fiddian (2006: 314-5). Moreover, relocation can have negative implications for refugees' well-being as, 'while refugees may not reflect the positive initial health profile associated with the 'healthy migrant' effect, they are clearly at risk to the drivers of *declining* health associated with settlement' (Ager, 2014b:439, emphasis in original).

While several specific resettlement programmes identify women, or *womenandchildren* (Enloe, 1991) as especially vulnerable groups (UNHCR, 1995; Australia, 2015; UK, 2015), access to those channels of protection can *involve* gendered stigmatisation and violence (Hyndman, 2000). Moreover, women can find themselves in a position of equal or even greater vulnerability once in the country of settlement (Manderson *et al.*, 1998; Rees and Peas, 2007). In sum, privileged protection channels can be part of, instead of breaking, the 'gendered continuum of violence' (Cockburn, 1999).

The family is instead often considered as a guarantee for the absence of risk and the wellbeing of children (UN, 1989). However, the equation between family and safety 'erases the extent to which domestic violence within refugee families may exist, with the risks faced by refugee women at times accentuated by state policies' (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2016b:6). Moreover, it has been argued that the same notion of 'family' can correspond

to very different structures in different settings (Ager, 2006:44), and that, in contexts of conflict, 'families may pose some of the greatest risks to children' (ibid:50).

Further criteria often found in resettlement programmes are merit and adaptability to the host society. For instance, the granting of scholarships on the basis of merit, mediated by implementing agencies such as the Jesuit Refugee Service, was one way to access relocation for refugees in Kenyan camps (Hilhorst and Jansen, 2010:1042). Although Nagel and Ehrkamp's analysis concerns Christian faith communities and migrants in the US South, the arbitrary use of notions of 'merit' and 'adaptability to the host country' is equally contestable with regards to resettlement selection processes, in that it 'is a diffuse process that reflects and reinforces the privileged position of non-immigrants' (2016: 1044).

CHAPTER 2: Methodology

After outlining my general approach towards this research project, in this chapter I explain my choices of methodology, how I analysed and contextualised my empirical data, and some of the practical and ethical issues I encountered.

2.1 General approach

My interest in the topic of refugee protection and faith-based engagements derives from a work experience I had in Berlin in 2014, at a centre for asylum seekers run by the local Lutheran Church. Since then, the so-called ‘refugee crisis’ has dominated the news and certainly had an impact on my experience as a Global Migration student. The purpose of this research being to explore what role civil society’s initiatives for the protection of refugees (faith-based in particular) play in the current ‘humanitarian arena’ (Hilhorst and Jansen, 2010), I was aware that

‘the realities and outcomes of aid depend on how actors along and around the aid chain — donor representatives, headquarters, field staff, aid recipients and surrounding actors — interpret the context, the needs, their own role and each other’ (ibid.:1120).

While this actor-oriented approach has guided me throughout my fieldwork and analysis, my original plan of including as many different actors’ perspectives as possible has been subject to changes (2.3), as have been my choice of methodologies and my research questions (2.4).

I realised early on that the case study needed to be integrated by primary text analysis to contextualise the empirical data, as humanitarian corridors are an experimental initiative on which, to my knowledge, close to no academic literature is available. However, I was aware of the existence of programmes both in Italy and in other countries that share some of its features (resettlement, private sponsorship programmes). It was, therefore, appropriate for me to adopt a comparative approach. Although the scope of this research did not allow for a thorough cross-national analysis, my approach was informed by sociological comparative methodology (Øyen, 1990) and

relied on online resources such as UNHCR's, governmental and NSAs' documents, including reports and guidelines, and newspaper articles.

2.2. Methodology

During the early stages of my theoretical review, I became aware that my interest was at least two-fold: I wanted to know how the programme *worked* and how it *was lived* by the individuals who take part in it. In other words, my aim was to 'understand lived experience and to reflect on and interpret the understandings and shared meanings of people's everyday social worlds and realities' (Dwyer and Limb, 2011:6). In order to do this, I originally planned to use participant observation as a way to gain in-depth experience of the programme's day-to-day activities, and semi-structured interviews to address specific questions and obtain information about the different actors' perspectives. However, due to the structure of the programme, organised by three different FBOs in collaboration with the Italian authorities, and the geographical dispersion of the beneficiaries in various Italian cities where the FBOs are based, it was logistically impossible to use both methods. I therefore chose to use semi-structured interviews of as many officials from the different FBOs involved as possible, in order to gain an insight of their experiences, and to integrate their accounts of the programme with my primary text analysis.

In different locations and over the course of almost one month, I interviewed eight members of FBOs, one government official working at the central office of the Italian Service for the Protection of Asylum Seekers, and one activist who volunteered in Lebanon for an organisation whose name I was asked not to disclose (figure 1). Interviewees 6a and 6b were interviewed together, hence the different denomination. I structured my interviews in a flexible way, preparing a list of the issues I wanted to address, but allowing the flow of the conversation to guide the order and the formulation of the questions, and my respondent 'to expand, or digress, or even go off the particular topic and introduce their own concerns' (Davis, 2008:106). All participants were given an information sheet with a description of the project and my contact details, and asked to sign a consent form. I also asked them for permission to record the interviews for the sake of accuracy, which interviewees 7, 8 and 9 refused to grant. When recording was allowed, I was able to interact more with the participants, as

I was not concentrating on taking notes. The interviews were carried out in Italian, my mother tongue, and translated by myself into English for quotation purposes.

Interviewee	Affiliation to organisation	Place and date of the interview
1	FCEI Central Office	Rome, 22 June 2016
2	FCEI	Bari, 24 June 2016
3	Sant'Egidio Central Office	Rome, 4 July 2016
4	SPRAR Central Office	Rome, 5 July 2016
5	Sant'Egidio	Genoa, 7 July 2016
6a	Sant'Egidio	Genoa, 14 July 2016
6b	Sant'Egidio	Genoa, 14 July 2016
7	Undisclosed	Genoa, 17 July 2016
8	Tavola Valdese	Turin, 19 July 2016
9	Tavola Vadese	Turin, 19 July 2016

Figure 1 - List of interviewees, their affiliations, and interview details

2.3 Ethical and practical issues

As previously mentioned, my initial plan was to interview FBO workers and state officials as well as beneficiaries of the programme. However, this was not possible due to two main reasons. Firstly, access to the beneficiaries had to be obtained through the FBOs, as there is no public space where I could have approached them knowing who they were. This had implications, as I first had to gain access to FBO members, and this did not necessarily mean that they would arrange for me to meet the beneficiaries in time. The second logistical reason was that I had to travel to different cities in order to reach members of all three FBOs, which prevented me from spending more time in each place. Moreover, one the beneficiaries who were hosted by Sant'Egidio in Genoa was hospitalised to undergo a special therapy during the week when we had planned to meet. This led me to withdraw my invitation out of delicacy and of the impossibility to develop a strategy to overcome the barriers to their participation (Harris and Roberts, 2003).

The impossibility to interview beneficiaries of the programme led me to reflect on the challenges faced by research focusing on the provision of protection in including the voice of the refugees - 'speechless emissaries', as defined by Mallki (1996). In my opinion, such a project would require a much longer engagement with their experiences, not mediated by the organisations. Finally, my fieldwork partly confirmed and partly

challenged the assumption that 'local staff operating at intermediate levels in the aid distribution hierarchy have a stake in 'safeguarding' their reputation for doing good work on the ground' (Harrell-Bond and Voutira, 2007: 284). Some of them openly shared their views on the programme's shortcomings, while it was harder for me to break others' barriers.

2.4 Analysis

In order to analyse my empirical data, I listened to the recordings several times, which was important, 'for those nuances of emphasis, hesitation and inflection that may not have been noted on the transcript' (Jackson, 2001:203). I then transcribed them and identified themes manually. I integrated these with the information gathered through primary text sources and connected them to the literature I had been reading in preparation to fieldwork. However, the emergence of new themes from the interviews led me both to rethink the theoretical framework and the conceptual focus of the project, confirming how 'one of the strengths of qualitative research is its ability to refine the research questions during and after data collection and analysis' (Oxford, 2012:417). Accordingly, when writing my analysis, I adopted a receptive approach, letting the original material guide my engagement with wider academic debates.

CHAPTER 3: Analysis

In this chapter, I discuss to what extent the programme of humanitarian corridors can be considered as an 'alternative model' for the protection of refugees (3.1) and how it operates in challenging or reproducing hierarchies of deservedness, and as a possible space for the exercise of political agency through the mobilisation of the concept of 'vulnerability' (3.2). In order to do this, I will analyse the data gathered through interviews and primary text analysis, linking them to wider academic discussions.

3.1 An 'alternative model' of protection?

In December 2015, the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and the Ministry of the Interior signed a protocol for the establishment of humanitarian corridors to Italy with the Community of Sant'Egidio, the Federation of Evangelical Churches (FCEI) and the Tavola Valdese of the Waldensian Church, granting 1,000 visas over a two-year period to refugees 'in particularly vulnerable conditions' to be transferred to Italy from Lebanon and Morocco (Italy, 2016). The protocol is thus a cooperation agreement between the Italian authorities and three FBOs. The Community of Sant'Egidio is a Catholic organisation that was founded in Rome in 1968, following the Second Vatican Council. Its activities focus on prayer, communicating the gospel, friendship with the poor, service to peace and fostering a community without borders or walls (Community of Sant'Egidio, 2012). FCEI is the federation of Protestant Churches in Italy. Founded in 1967, it includes the Italian Evangelic Lutheran Church, Waldensian Church, Methodist Church, Salvation Army International, Christian Evangelical Baptist Union, Apostolic Church and St. Andrew's Church of Scotland in Rome (FCEI, 2016). The Waldensian Church is a Christian Protestant Church whose central administrative committee is called 'Tavola Valdese' (Waldensian Church, 2005 and 2016). FCEI's and the Waldensian Church's participation in the 'humanitarian corridors' project is part of a wider framework of joint initiatives regarding the protection and reception of migrants called 'Mediterranean Hope'. To the present day, around 300 beneficiaries have been transferred from Lebanon to Italy by the FBOs in cooperation with the government, in what they unanimously define as a 'legal and safe alternative' to deadly sea routes,

smuggling and human trafficking (e.g. Italy, 2016; Mediterranean Hope, 2016; FCEI, 2016; Community of Sant'Egidio, 2016).

3.1.1 A 'legal and safe alternative'

As shown by the project '15 Years Fortress Europe', providing an account of the deaths since the year 2000 and their geographical distribution, the so-called Central Mediterranean Route, connecting North Africa (Libya and Egypt in particular) to Italy, has been the most deadly (figure 2). In the first half of 2016, 2,505 of the 2,933 people who died trying to reach Europe had taken that route (IOM, 2016).

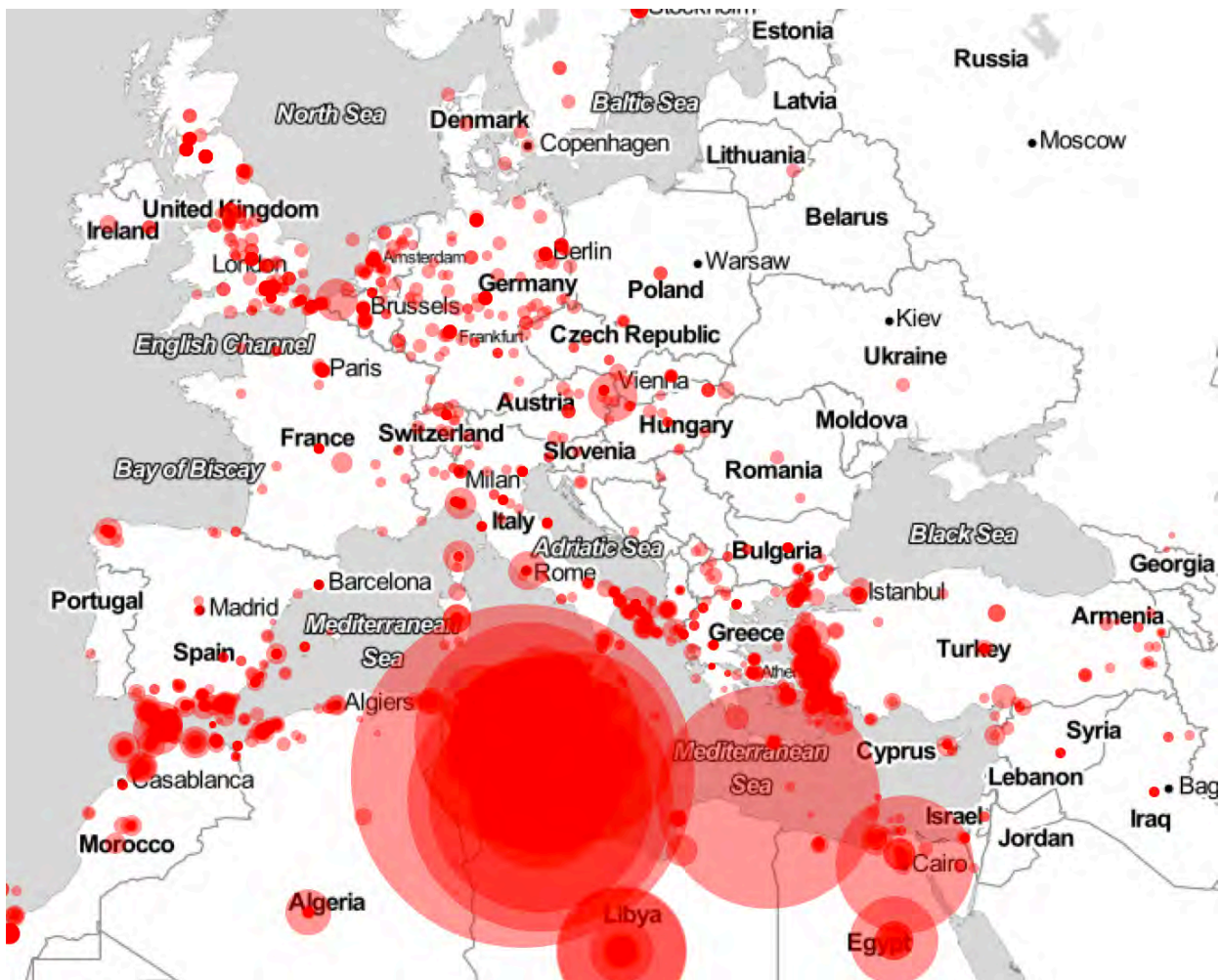


Figure 2 (Source: 15 Years Fortress Europe)

While they certainly constitutes an alternative to highly dangerous routes like the Central Mediterranean in that they provide *safe* passages to the beneficiaries, the sense in which humanitarian corridors constitute 'a *legal* alternative' is perhaps more manifold, and surely offers an opportunity to discuss some aspects of the programme.

Its legal basis is Article 25 of the European Commission's Regulation No 810/2009, which allows the issuing of visas with limited territorial validity (Italy in this case) 'on humanitarian grounds' (EC 2009). The beneficiaries are transferred from Lebanon or Morocco to Rome on regular airline services. One of my interviewees, a member of FCEI working on humanitarian corridors but also on the island of Lampedusa (one of the most common destinations of the Central Mediterranean Route), described the different circumstances of *legal* and *illegal* passages as follows:

'The fact that they carry a luggage when they arrive is interesting from a symbolic perspective, as they carry with it their dignity, stories, objects... In Lampedusa they arrive barefoot, after a traumatising trip, after having suffered all sorts of abuses in Libya, with no luggage, nothing, completely reborn within an emergency process that objectifies and inferiorises them' (interview 2).

According to him, this difference exemplifies the approach of the programme, challenging the figure of the archetypal refugee as a passive individual (Malkki, 1996; Hyndman, 2008; Sheel and Squire, 2014) who needs salvation - 'salvation is degrading, because you have to completely leave yourself to the mercy of someone else' (interview 2). Moreover, in his view, it would counter the restrictive trend of current asylum policies (Loescher, 2001), re-constructing the element of refugees' rights as opposed to emergency measures and the securitisation of asylum (Hyndman and Mountz, 2011). However, regarding the latter, it has to be noted that the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs' website describes humanitarian corridors as 'a way of also meeting our need of security' (Italy, 2016), highlighting how security screenings are carried out by the Italian the Ministry of the Interior and by the he Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation prior to departure (ibid).

3.1.2 A different target?

Apart from being a 'safe and legal alternative' to perilous migration routes, humanitarian corridors could be seen as 'alternative' in other ways. As stated in the previous paragraph, security controls are carried out on potential beneficiaries by the Italian authorities, through the Italian Consulates of the countries where the selection process takes place. The asylum application is then filed in Italy, after arrival. This aspect is essential in understanding the difference between humanitarian corridors and resettlement. In fact, 'determination as a refugee under UNHCR's mandate, with very few exceptions, is a precondition for resettlement consideration' (UNHCR, 2011). Thus, as underlined by interviewees 2, 3 and 7, several of the beneficiaries who arrived from Lebanon so far would not have had access to resettlement programmes, since 'the UNHCR suspended registration in May 2015 upon a request from the Government of Lebanon' (UNHCR, 2016c). This particular feature of the programme has been negotiated by the FBOs with the Italian authorities as following:

'At the beginning, the government wanted them to be UNHCR- recognised refugees, so we said "but then that's resettlement, what is the difference? Why should we do it? Italy does it already"' (interview 3).

Thus, the inclusion of individuals who are excluded from other forms of protection is, in this sense, intentional and explicit.

Moreover, the programme's target differs from recent special governmental (e.g. UK, 2015; Germany, 2015) and government-supported and privately sponsored (Canada, 2016c) resettlement initiatives, aimed at Syrian refugees only. In fact, besides 600 Syrians who should be transferred from Lebanon by the end of the duration of the programme, the FBOs plan to secure 400 visas for refugees from Sub-Saharan and the Horn of Africa, to be transferred from Morocco and Ethiopia (interviews 1, 2 and 3). This plan, however, has presented challenges during negotiations with the Italian government, and still does, as regards the recognition of refugee status (RSD) once in Italy. According to interviewee 1,

'In the negotiating phase it was hard...We feel that the real challenge is not this one, but the next one. So far all Syrians have been granted refugee status, but I am much more curious - and maybe also scared - about

whether beneficiaries from Sub-Saharan Africa will successfully undergo RSD procedures.'

In fact, the Italian FBOs involved have a long-term experience of working with refugees who have and have not been granted international protection, and are, thus, well aware to be challenging hierarchies of deservedness operating in the current 'refugee crisis' (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2016b). In particular, interviewee 8, who coordinates a regular reception centre for asylum seekers mostly from Sub-Saharan countries as well as one for humanitarian corridors' beneficiaries in Turin (so far only Syrians), has noted how the rate of successful asylum applications was much higher for the latter than for the former, exposing a sort of 'privileged channel', as discussed in the following section.

Moreover, primary text analysis has revealed that the governmental (Italy, 2016) and the Community of Sant'Egidio's (2016) do not yet mention Ethiopia as a third country of selection of beneficiaries apart from Lebanon and Morocco while FCEI's (2016b) and TV's (2016c) do, as did interviewees 1 and 2, affiliated to the latter two FBOs, as opposed to interviewee 3, affiliated to the first one. According to UNHCR data, in 2015 'refugees in Morocco were from 36 countries, primarily the Syrian Arab Republic' (2016e), while Ethiopia had the highest number of registered refugees in the continent, whose most common nationalities were South Sudanese, Somali, Eritrean and Sudanese (2016d). The Italian government has historically been involved in policies at best described as *externalisation of protection* (Betts, 2004), at worst as instances of *refoulement* (UNHCR, 1951), such as readmission agreements (Cuttitta, 2010), push-back operations on the high seas (ibid.), and, the recent deportations from Ventimiglia to Sudan (Il Fatto Quotidiano, 24 August 2016). Although it is yet to be seen whether refugees from Sub-Sahara or from the Horn of Africa will be selected for humanitarian corridors in Morocco and Ethiopia, it seems very likely that the Italian government seeks to retain as much decisional power as possible on the matter.

Finally, the criteria for selection of the beneficiaries, as outlined on the governmental and FBOs' webpages (Italy, 2016, FCEI, 2016), show substantial similarities with the UNHCR's (2011) and other resettlement programmes (e.g. UK, 2015). However, as discussed further in this chapter (3.2), a certain degree of flexibility has been granted by the Italian authorities to the FBOs, who are in charge of the selection process. Although beneficiaries are selected 'independently from their ethnic or religious belonging' (FCEI, 2016), as confirmed by interviewees 1, 2, 3 and 7, this process takes place mainly

through the FBOs' religious transnational networks and partner organisations operating on site, with the Catholic Sant'Egidio in particular relying more on local Churches' recommendations, according to interviewee 1. However, while the role of transnational religious networks in mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion (Ferris, 2012; Fine, 2014; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Pacitto, 2016) are undoubtedly worth further investigation, this would require fieldwork in the countries where the selection process takes place, as well as access to refugees not to be mediated by FBOs themselves and is, thus, beyond the scope of this research, as suggested in the methodology section (2.3).

3.1.3 Creating a privileged channel?

In this section, I am going to consider to what extent humanitarian corridors create a privileged channel of protection through their 'alternative' structure. The issue has been raised by some of my interviewees themselves, when discussing both RSD procedures and reception. As regards RSD, they have reported that appointments at the local police headquarters to file the asylum application were given with much more alacrity than usual (interview 1) and refugee status granted in a much shorter time (interviews 1, 8). This is partly due to security controls having been carried out by the Italian authorities beforehand (see 3.1.2) and the local police having been given notice of the arrivals, but also to FBOs' ability to fast-track the procedures by soliciting the Ministry of Interior in Rome (interview 3).

As regards reception, interviewee 4, an employee of SPRAR, the Italian Central Service for the Protection of Asylum Seekers, noted that beneficiaries of humanitarian corridors might be provided with accommodation and support for longer than regular asylum seekers. As will be further discussed in the following section, FBOs are in charge of their reception for the first period of permanence in Italy, from the point of view of its costs as well as the accommodation and services provided. If the length of the FBOs-led reception of the beneficiaries is not clear - 'over the time needed to file an application for international protection' according to the Italian authorities (Italy, 2016), six to nine months according to interviewee 1 - it is surely the case that FBOs are negotiating with the state to obtain an extension of reception either in the FBOs' or in the SPRAR systems (interview 1, 4). In this case, the beneficiaries would be granted up to double the length of normal reception (interview 4). Furthermore, although, as previously mentioned

regarding selection, FBOs have significantly diverse approaches to reception, the quality of the services provided by FCEI and TV has been described as 'higher' compared to SPRAR (interview 1).

However, it is important to acknowledge that privileged channels might also be seen as creating opportunities for lobbying:

'I ask myself why, if it is so easy to get an appointment at the police headquarters to file an application, the same is not possible for everyone. *We will certainly raise the issue with the Ministry*, at the moment it makes me feel pretty embarrassed, after accompanying migrants for years, who have been denied the right to access protection' (interview 1, emphasis added).

As to say, if the fact that the humanitarian corridors might *per se* be seen as 'alternative' in the sense of creating privileged channels, and thus further discriminations between asylum seekers, they could at the same time, at least potentially, function as a trigger for the improvement of the wider Italian asylum system.

3.1.4 Mobilising resources, building a parallel reception system

As previously mentioned, stated on the programme's websites and confirmed by all interviewees, the costs of the programmes are entirely covered by the FBOs. In particular, the funds are raised by the Waldensian Church through the 'otto per mille' (2016b) and 'the Community of Sant'Egidio through the 'cinque per mille' (2016b), two schemes allowing Italian taxpayers to donate a small percentage of their income tax return to an organisation of their choice. Moreover, further economic resources come from donations of private citizens and secular organisations (interviews 1 and 3), local authorities like the Province of Trento (interview 3), the FBOs' transnational network (American and German Churches, interview 1), as well as special fundraising events such as Tennis with Stars, organised by the Community of Sant'Egidio (2016c). In this sense, humanitarian corridors could be seen as facilitating the inclusion of various NSAs in contributing to 'sharing the burden' of international protection of refugees (Gottwald, 2014). However, the involvement of local authorities through economic support and the provision of healthcare and schooling to the beneficiaries indicate that there already is an element of cooperation and partnership with other state and para-state actors. This

would be even more the case if SPRAR would take over reception after the initial period (3.1.3), as envisaged by interviewee 3:

‘We could slowly start to integrate them in the state’s reception system. That’s how Canadian sponsorships programmes work as well: they last one year, then the refugees enter regular governmental programmes’

In this domain, it is interesting to compare the programme to other current or past resettlement and sponsorship schemes, and the role of FBOs within them. For instance, Eby *et al.* have analysed the role of the Church World Service (CWS) and other FBOs in resettlement programmes to the US both historically and in the present. While after the Second World War, ‘the model for refugee resettlement required sponsoring congregations and communities to assume 100 per cent of the cost of resettling refugees’ (2014: 589), in 2010 faith-based agencies resettled 70 per cent of the total refugee caseload through a cooperative agreement with the US Department of State’s Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) (ibid: 591). In the case of Canada’s sponsorship programmes, FBOs were the first groups to sign the ‘Master Agreements’ with the Canadian government after the establishment of Private Sponsorship Programmes in 1978 (Treviranus and Casasola, 2003: 184).

On the contrary, the cooperation between the Italian state and the FBOs in charge of the humanitarian corridors with regards to reception and the provision of services is far from being as formalised, and the lack of communication is apparent. Interviewee 4, working at the SPRAR’s central office, stated that ‘we know very little about the reception conditions [...] we have pointed out that it would have been helpful to establish a connection’. Apart from being less formalised than elsewhere, the FBOs’ current and possibly future cooperation with the state provides further elements for reflection. In particular, in negotiating a form of cooperation or ‘burden sharing’ of reception with the government, this could restrict their ‘freedom to carry out activities that are not funded by governmental donors’ (Ferris, 2011: 617) and, ultimately, compromise ‘the luxury of not having to be overly attentive to the interests and agendas of the state’ (Barnett, 2012: 172). An interesting comparison in this sense could be drawn with Australian FBOs supporting asylum seekers, which refused to be granted state funds ‘because it would mean a restriction on their ability to criticize government policy’ (Wilson, 2011:555).

So far, however, the FBOs are in charge of reception outside of the state's structures, creating a *de facto* parallel system. If all three organisations see this parallel system as a participatory process that involves different NSAs and civil society in general, its actual conditions differ significantly among them. In particular, TV (who have previous experience of running centres for asylum seekers within the SPRAR system) and FCEI implement reception in a more 'secular' way (Ferris, 2011; Ager, 2014), mainly in small centres, and hiring paid personnel, among which cultural-linguistic mediators (interviews 1 and 8). The Community of Sant'Egidio's system is, instead, rather based on voluntary work and the mobilisation of resources within its faith community. The beneficiaries are accommodated mainly in properties belonging to the Churches and, at least in the case of the family hosted in Genoa, cultural and linguistic mediation is provided by volunteers, some of which have been supported by the Community in their migratory background (interviews 3, 5, 6a and 6b).

This, on the one hand, highlights the difficulty in estimating and evaluating the reception standards of this parallel system (Ferris, 2011), and poses questions regarding its monitoring and accountability, especially in the case of Sant'Egidio's, as, in the words of interviewee 1, 'there is no guarantee that the refugees hosted by them are provided with all services that they are entitled to'. On the other hand, it also invites to a reconsideration of the concept of 'professionalism' and its implications as, for instance, interviewee 6a, a doctor in his professional life, has volunteered as an Italian teacher for Sant'Egidio's language school for migrants for around 30 years. Moreover, the FBOs showed sensitivity to the beneficiaries' spiritual needs (e.g. Wilson, 2011) by connecting them to Local Faith Communities (LFCs). For instance, Sant'Egidio facilitated the choice of a mosque in the host city for the Muslim family as soon as they arrived, during Ramadan (interviewee 5 and 6a). In doing this, they showed not only how LFCs 'are able to transcend the typical client-provider dynamic found in most organisations (including faith-based ones) allowing friendship and spiritual support to develop in the context of a community' (Barneche and 'Joe', 2014:9), but also their ability to act in an *inter-faith* dimension (Eby *et al.*, 2011). Furthermore, the Muslim LFC collaborated with Sant'Egidio towards the inclusion of the family, the child in particular, in various social activities, and they contributed as cultural-linguistic mediators (interviews 5, 6a, 6b). These practices could, in fact, be considered as a testimony of the need for 'a more sustained acknowledgement of the importance of local religious practice and belief in

shaping humanitarian strategy' (Ager and Ager, 2011:469), and as a much needed, although partial, insight into 'the added value of working with LFCs, including the use of social capital in community-based responses' (Ager *et al.*, 2015:216).

3.1.5 Replicability

Both the Italian government and the FBOs indicate the potential for 'replicability' as one of the programme's essential features (Italy, 2016; FCEI, 2016b; Waldensian Church, 2016c; Community of Sant'Egidio, 2016d). Legally based on art.25 of EC Regulation 810/2009, the programme, at least in theory, shows 'that it is possible to guarantee regular entries through legislative instruments already made available by the European Union' (Italy, 2016). In order to encourage the involvement of other actors, the FBOs have been lobbying at European (Mediterranean Hope, 2016b) and UN level (ANSA, 22 June 2016), and through their own transnational networks. In particular, Sant'Egidio, a transnational organisation present in 73 countries around the world (2012), has been working with Catholic archbishops based in different countries. FCEI, as part of different transnational networks such as the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME), the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Conference of European Churches (CEC/KEK) (FCEI, 2016) is, in turn, in close relationship with the German and other Protestant Churches (interview 3). The first signs of the programme's potential replication have been the Republic of San Marino hosting a refugee family, negotiations taking place in Poland between the government and the Episcopal Conference (ANSA, 22 June 2016), and a parliamentary motion recently presented to the Swiss parliament (Mediterranean Hope, 2016c). However, it is still unclear whether other European states would replicate the programme as it is in Italy, or could take part in it by hosting some of the current or prospective beneficiaries who have been or will be granted humanitarian visas by the Italian government (interviews 2, 3).

What is clear is that, to a certain extent, replicability 'is up to the governments' (interviewee 3), as highlighted by the case of the Spanish cities of Madrid and Barcelona, which showed interest in replicating the programme at local level, but encountered difficulties in gaining support at national level (interview 2). The centrality of lobbying activities at national level is, therefore, evident. In this sense, Catholic groups in Italy

have historically played a significant role in immigration legislation, both through both through direct lobbying of political parties and the mobilisation of the public. As a result of their intervention, for instance, in the 'Bossi-Fini' Law No. 189/2002, 'a regularisation programme for domestic and care workers was introduced and, after the bill became law, it was massively extended to all the other categories of workers' (Polese, 2013:215). However, the same bill removed the possibility of private sponsorship that had been introduced by the previous 'Turco-Napolitano' law (Immigration Act 40/1998), despite pressure from Catholic associations (ibid:211). My point here is that NSAs' ability to mobilise the public and lobby the government in the different European countries is crucial, but not sufficient, to achieve the 'replication of the model' in this case, and change in migration legislation and policies more in general.

However, it has to be noted that, in the case of humanitarian corridors, there is no change in legislation needed in order to allow replicability, at least as regards European countries. As interviewee 3 claims, the FBOs' aim in implementing the programme is to 'deconstruct the impossibility', i.e. to show the authorities, despite their initial reluctance, that such a humanitarian initiative was indeed possible *within the existing legal and operational framework*, as also highlighted by interviewees 2 and 5). It is interesting to observe how 'replicability' could, thus, also be understood as the possibility for other, non-faith-based NSAs to reproduce the initiative and to exercise their power towards 'fostering 'global consciousness', with major consequences for domestic politics and policies' (Josselin and Wallace, 2001). In particular, groups of individuals who are not affiliated to any FBO have shown interest in taking a more active role in the humanitarian corridors programme in Italy, such as a doctors of 'Gaslini' hospital in Genoa, a group of professionals from Como, and some families from Turin (interviews 3 and 6a), envisaging a scheme similar to private sponsorship programmes (e.g. Canada, 2016; Flüchtlingspaten Syrien, 2016).

3.2 Navigating 'vulnerability', negotiating political agency

Throughout the analysis of the interviews and of primary texts, the mobilisation of 'vulnerability' emerged as a key element. In this section, I am going to explore how the concept is understood in this context and its relationship with the exercise of political agency, in connection with personal motivation, including faith.

3.2.1 Defining 'vulnerability' within humanitarian corridors

According to the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'humanitarian corridors are an Italian reception programme for migrants in *particularly vulnerable conditions*. These include single women with children, victims of human trafficking, elderly people and disable or sick people' (Italy, 2016, emphasis added). Interviewee 3 of the Community of Sant'Egidio, however, names the four vulnerable categories as follows: 'women with children, families with children, people with serious health problems, elderly people'. Thus, the two understandings of 'vulnerability' already show a discrepancy, in that 'victims of human trafficking' is replaced by 'families with children'. Moreover, the same interviewee added that 'there are some instances of family reunion, as it is otherwise almost impossible to obtain'. Interviewee 2 of FCEI added the category of 'extreme poverty' to the ones mentioned above, while interviewees 7, who volunteered for a partner organisation in Lebanon, and interviewee 8 of TV suggested that some beneficiaries were chosen for their potential to integrate in Italian society. This was confirmed by the case of a twenty-year-old woman with no health issues who was selected because she wanted to study and wouldn't have had the chance to do so in Lebanon (interview 1). Finally, it has been suggested that some beneficiaries had been included on request of the Italian government, as they contributed to an operation that rescued Italian hostages in Syria (interview 3). It is therefore clear that a certain degree of flexibility is applied to the concept in this context, and that different actors interpret it in different ways, according to their own motivations and aims, as will be discussed in the following section.

3.2.2 Mobilising 'vulnerability', exerting political agency

According to interview, negotiations between the FBOs and the Italian government have led to the exclusion of UAM from the categories of vulnerability included in the programme, due to the legal and bureaucratic implications it would have implied. However, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs agreed to the use of a quite 'elastic' understanding of 'vulnerability' by FBOs in selection processes (interview 2). This means that the FBOs - and in particular their members who take part in the selection process - have a certain degree of freedom in mobilising the concept. For instance, interviewee 2 of FCEI, a former activist for the rights of migrants working in southern Italy in almost slavery conditions (see e.g. Reuters, 22 March 2016), expressed his own motivation during a public presentation of the programme as follows:

'We have the chance to take the offensive on rights. It means not only sticking to the Geneva Convention, and thus focusing only on people who flee wars, but also on *new categories of vulnerability* that take into account the new phase of migration, the anthropological change that has taken place (we call it "migration 2.0"): *it is not possible to distinguish between the refugee and the economic migrant*' (emphasis added).

Thus, he sees the programme as an opportunity for 'the concept of vulnerability to expand so as to consider *the poor as vulnerable*' (interview 2, emphasis added), challenging the current equation between 'bogus refugees' and 'economic migrants' (Squire, 2009; Hyndman, 2008), as advocated by DeLorey (2010) and by a recent sentence of the Tribunal of Milan (La Stampa, 7 June 2016).

In this sense, it could be argued that the mobilisation of 'vulnerability' allows for the exercise of political agency by members of the FBOs within the 'humanitarian arena' (Hilhorst and Jansen, 2010). This is true also for interviewee 3 of Sant'Egidio's experience both in her account of when she took part in the selection of the 12 refugees taken by Pope Francis to the Vatican (La Repubblica, 16 April 2016), and as a facilitator of other members of the Community's participation in protecting the vulnerable:

'For us a family with small children represents a 'vulnerability' in any case. [...] Someone has to take the responsibility to say 'this one yes, this one no' [...] There is always a partiality, and I am not afraid of it. [...] There are so many parishes that felt they wanted to take action after Pope Francis' call

for each one to host a refugee family. We need to help them put this desire into practice.'

A further example of how the concept is playing a crucial role in the interviewees' engagement can be found in the words of interviewee 6a of Sant'Egidio: 'if, through humanitarian corridors, we are able to create a discourse within our society in favour of helping the most vulnerable, then that's an *everyday humanitarian corridor*'. In his, as in interviewee 5's, view, the programme and its focus on vulnerability entail a potential for changing their own society's approach to marginalised groups such as the local elderly, for whom they organise activities together with refugees and migrants supported by the Community. This could suggest that initiatives of refugee protection might have repercussions on the wider local society, not only in terms of fostering inter-faith dialogue (see 3.1.4), but more in general towards the inclusion of local marginalised groups and 'in articulating the moral conduct of public life beyond church walls' (Ehrkamp and Nagel, 2014). Finally, it is important here to stress how 'vulnerability' lends itself to different interpretations and tensions towards the inclusion of *different* groups (economic migrants, refugee families, local marginalised groups).

Furthermore, it is interesting to highlight the discrepancies between, and the complexity of, the different levels of political agency. In fact, while negotiations with the government were conducted jointly by FCEI, Sant'Egidio and TV, it is the case, as highlighted throughout the analysis and confirmed by my interviewees, that the FBOs showed diverging, sometimes contrasting, approaches both in selection and reception strategies (e.g. in hosting refugees in a more or less professionalised environment, see 3.1.4). Moreover, within the FBOs, not all of the interviewees were motivated by faith. The ones who self-identified as atheists explained their motivation as 'feeling injustice, feeling the desire for everyone to enjoy the same rights' (interview 1), and as acting 'from a political rather than an moral point of view' (interview 2). While showing the complexity of the FBOs' spectrum and their personnel (Barnett, 2012; Ager, 2014), this also calls for a much more nuanced analysis of the interplay between faith, motivation and political agency.

3.2.3 *Whose vulnerability, whose agency?*

Although the purpose of this research is not to encompass both the FBO members' and the beneficiaries' perspective, it is nevertheless essential to the analysis to consider that 'there is an inherent power differential between a provider and a beneficiary of a service' (Eby et al., 2011: 595). While undoubtedly aimed at providing protection and support to individuals and groups who would otherwise have very limited or no access to it, the different understandings and mobilisations of 'vulnerability' by FBO members outlined in the previous sections might at the same time fail to hinder further exposure to it. In particular, the emphasis posed on *the family* as being both a synonym of vulnerability (interview 3), and a safe haven for children and women, does not necessarily take into account the risks that might be faced by men, women (e.g. Manderson *et al.*, 1998) and children (Ager, 2006) within it. Moreover, the priority given to *family* and *womenandchildren* (Enloe, 1991) replicates a heteronormative framework and potentially reinforces the stereotype of lone male refugees as a threat to the host society (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2016b), as in the case of Canada's resettlement programme for Syrians, from which they were excluded (The Guardian, 23 November 2015).

A reading of the programme as a possible space for the exercise of NSAs' political agency should also not overlook that 'refugees should not be viewed as passive and vulnerable recipients of assistance in these interactions' (Eby *et al.*, see also Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2011). In these regards, it is interesting to note how interviewee 1's self-criticism on the issue of humanitarian corridors creating privileged channels and privileged reception conditions, was connected to refugees' motivation. In her words,

'I see a risk in this modality, on the side of the authorities but also regarding a reception of the asylum seeker that is so complete, so all-encompassing, in that it does not allow for the person's potential to activate, precisely because every door is open and everything seems easy.'

Similar concerns have been voiced by interviewees 8 and 9 with regards to beneficiaries hosted in TV's centre in Turin. Interviewee 1 also suggested that this issue could reflect a need for better monitoring of their motivation during the selection process, as well as providing them with all instruments to understand whether humanitarian corridors are in fact the most suitable solution for them. Interviewee 8 suggested that the beneficiaries' motivation might be affected by the hardship of having had to make a

second choice (Lebanon, Morocco or Ethiopia already being their first country of refuge, even if not formalised). On this issue, however, it should be taken into account that other factors than having fast-tracked and better access to services and the RSD process might affect the beneficiaries' wellbeing in Italy. For instance, Ager (2014b) has highlighted the risk of health (including mental health) decline *following* relocation.

As regards negotiations prior to the transfer to Italy and their dynamics, it is unfortunately out of the scope of this research to assess how to what degree the various actors exert their agency, as previously mentioned regarding the role of religious networks in the selection process. However, it is worth mentioning that interviewees 1, 2 and 8, all three of FCEI, have emphasised the importance of informing potential beneficiaries about the reception conditions (including possibly sharing accommodation with members of another faith/social/political group) and legal implications of the programme (in particular, the restriction to mobility to other European countries). It has also been suggested that beneficiaries might be asked to sign a contract when selected for the programme (interview 2). This, while surely constituting an attempt to recognise a certain degree of agency to the refugees, should be carefully prevented from resulting in a one-time and one-sided monitoring exercise.

Conclusion

Although, in the last fifteen years, academics have increasingly addressed the nexus between faith and responses to forced migration (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2011), further enquiry is undoubtedly needed, as it 'could surely help both faith-based and secular agencies alike respond more effectively to the needs of displaced people' (Hollenbach, 2014: 457). Furthermore, a critical understanding of how local communities engage in protection and mobilise resources according to their traditions, beliefs and motivations is fundamental to the 'the conceptualization, and implementation, of a more authentic and truthful, a more human (to reflect that key humanitarian principle) humanitarianism' (Ager, 2011:469-470). Such understanding should carefully examine how these engagements result in dynamics of inclusion and exclusion (Ager *et al.*, 2015) and look at the ways in which different actors negotiate their influence. In particular, Josselin and Wallace have highlighted the importance of looking at NSAs' relationship with the state and with other non-governmental actors (2001:14).

This research has sought to address some of these issues through a case study of the humanitarian corridors initiative established by three Italian FBOs in collaboration with the Italian Ministries of Interior and of Foreign Affairs. In the first part of my analysis (3.1), I have argued that the programme constitutes a 'legal and safe alternative' in that it counteracts the current trends of *securitisation* and *externalisation* of asylum (Betts, 2004; Hyndman and Mountz, 2011). The faith-based initiative also includes and seeks to include refugees that would otherwise very unlikely be able to access protection, respectively unregistered asylum seekers in Lebanon and refugees from Sub-Saharan and the Horn of Africa in Morocco and Ethiopia.

However, I have also noted how the Italian government, while allowing the FBOs to be in charge of the selection process, transfers and reception, retains a certain degree of power, e.g. in determining how many visas will be issued for each nationality. I, then, have considered how humanitarian corridors create a privileged channel in terms of the duration and quality of their reception, noting that, apart from constituting a disparity of treatment, this could also represent an opportunity for lobbying. I have also pointed out that the FBOs and LFCs mobilise tangible and 'intangible' (Eby *et al.*, 2011:593)

resources, including inter-faith initiatives, the support of migrant communities, and funding from their own community, their transnational networks and other NSAs. Finally, I have highlighted how replicability by other state and non-state actors, and thus the definition of the programme as 'a model', is mainly dependent on the governments' 'political will', at the same time giving an account of the numerous actors who have shown interest in participating.

In the second part of my analysis (3.2), I have turned to look at the different understandings of 'vulnerability' I have encountered within the programme, and explored their relationships with the FBO members' faith- and non-faith-related motivations. In doing this, I have identified ways in which they exert their political agency in the humanitarian arena (Hilhorst and Jansen, 2010) with the aim of extending protection, both jointly as a group of FBOs and at individual level. Moreover, I have suggested that the different mobilisations of 'vulnerability' and its categorisations may also result in mechanisms of exclusion from protection, inadequate consideration of the beneficiaries' experiences prior, during and post-relocation according to their age, gender and health conditions, and of their own agency.

A limitation of this study certainly is its one-sided perspective from the point of view of FBOs members, as time and logistical constraints have hindered the possibility to have access to (potential) beneficiaries' accounts of their experiences without the mediation of the FBOs themselves. Moreover, the fact that the programme is in its first stages of implementation has meant that not all information was verifiable, and there was no certainty as to how it would evolve. Further explorations of this initiative could address these shortcomings. They would, moreover, be much needed not only in order to reconsider and redefine humanitarianism taking into account faith-based practices of protection (Ager, 2011), but also to better understand the dynamics between local faith- and non-faith-based engagements, and their potential.

To conclude, I have considered humanitarian corridors as an alternative model that might offer a framework in which NSAs can exert their political agency to extend protection, mobilise resources, negotiate power with the state, and build inter-faith relationships, as well as relationships between faith- and non-faith-based engagements. Despite lacking clear standards and monitoring, and being very heterogeneous in terms of selection and reception, the programme well deserves further attention.

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Appendix 1: Sample Interview Schedule

INTERVIEW 1 with a person working at Mediterranean Hope's headquarters in Rome.

THE PROJECT/THEIR WORK:

- How would you describe your involvement with the project *Mediterranean Hope*?
 - How and why did you start being involved?
 - Were you affiliated to one (or more) of the partner organisations before? Which one(s)?
 - What position do you currently hold?
 - Is your work paid or voluntary?
 - Do you work in a team? How big is it and what does it do? With what other teams does it work/coordinate?
 - Do you work with other organisations?
 - Does your work involve contact with refugees? How? For what purpose?
 - Have you worked with refugees in the past? How? In what capacity?
 - What is your experience of working with migrants or migration issues in general (if you have any)?

RELIGION:

- In your opinion, how does the religious nature of the organisations influence the project, if at all?
- Does the ecumenical nature of the programme pose any challenge or further opportunities to the project itself?
- What role, if any, does religion play in the way *you* take part in the project?
- What do you think of the role of religious organisations in Italian (and international) civil society and, in particular, in humanitarian intervention/responding to forced migration?

RELATIONSHIP WITH STATE / OTHER ORGANISATIONS / DONORS:

- In what ways do you think this project differs from other projects for refugees?
- Do you think this project could influence other organisations/ the state as regards their interventions towards potential refugees/ their responses to the 'migration crisis'?
- How have state(s)/ other organisations/ the media/ the general public responded to Mediterranean Hope?
- The project has an announced target of bringing 1,000 refugees to Italy in the first 24 months. Do you think this is a correct/too low/too high estimate?
- What is the relationship between donors and Mediterranean Hope as a project?
- What kind of information do the donors receive regarding Mediterranean Hope's activities?
- What are the main challenges and opportunities arising in the Mediterranean Hope project?