Migrants or Citizens? From Exclusion to Activism

A reflection on citizenship in the age of human rights

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MSc Cultural Anthropology: Sustainable Citizenship

Year 2019-2020

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"Every day and every night, with different means of transport, young men, women and children reach the informal camp of Baobab Experience in Rome. They come from Lampedusa, from invisible landings, from the Balkans, through more and more desperate routes. But they come. Always.

They come to leave. They are passing by. They are transiting. They go through Italy as the last part of a trip lasted for months or years and they stop for few days in our community, just the time to recover, heal the wounds of interminable walks, regain strength with a warm meal, changing clothes eroded by the wind, the sand, the salt, and relax in one of the few stops where they are welcomed by a friendly hug instead of the extortion of a passeur.

Since the end of the lockdown from Covid-19, more than 200 people transited through the informal camp of Baobab Experience. In 5 years, we met 85 thousand new faces, while Italian politics played "battleship" and screamed at the invasion. […] in the meantime thousands of feet crossed our country and thousands abandoned it and nobody seems to be aware of it, let alone able to question why does it happens."

(Baobab Experience, 2020)

Prologue

I get out of the *Stazione Tiburtina* and soon I see a large group of African people standing in *Piazzale Spadolini*. As I move closer, I see on the sides of the walking path big trash bags stacked on each other. I don't see what is inside but I know they are filled with the necessary things to sleep outside. Clothes and blankets are packed by the migrants during the day to clear the informal camp and unpacked at night to set up their sleeping spots. As I reach the group of people, Abdul, a pretty excited guy, comes close to me and starts talking. He is clearly drunk and loud. G., my fellow volunteer, sees I am slightly uncomfortable and she comes to support me. Abdul, not happy about it, sends G away with a sentence: "Go away, I want to talk alone with him". While talking, I pull some stuff out of my pocket to roll myself a cigarette and get out my wallet. Abdul notices straight away the money inside and starts focusing on that asking for something to buy alcohol or weed. G. comes back again and manages to get me away.

Once the migrants start to queue for food, I get some further explanations about the camp. G. tells me that the informal camps of Baobab have been cleared up around 30 times by the police. Apparently, the Italian institutions are not cooperative. However, it is supported by international NGOs, local organizations and individual citizens who voluntarily provide food, clothes and blankets, supplying and distributing them at the *Stazione Tiburtina*.

As I am getting my introductive explanation, Abdul comes back and brings me away to ask again for some money. To avoid saying no, I try to distract him by asking questions. He tells me he speaks a bunch of languages, including English, French, Italian, German, Ethiopian and Somali. He tells me that he is from Somalia and he lived in Germany for a while. Then he starts again to ask me for money and I cannot distract him anymore. I keep saying I can't, and he starts to get angry. Eventually, another shy African guy passes behind us while preparing his "bed" for the night, and Abdul turns at him aggressively telling him to stop looking. In a shy and polite way, the guy replies he wasn't looking and goes back to prepare his bed. Still in front of Abdul I take my tobacco to offer another guy a cigarette and Abdul takes it from my hand and goes away saying: "if you don't want to give me the money, well I take this and I don't give it back". I talk to a couple more people but as soon as my peer G. goes away I feel slightly awkward as I

don't know anyone. Yet, after a few minutes I talk to some of the other migrants. S., from Guinea Bissau, seems like a cool guy, he is very chill and well known, probably he has been around here for a while. A., from Gambia, a very smiley guy, we speak in English and he keeps making jokes about me being tall compared to usual Italians. I go away satisfied but a bit worried as I expected my work to be more clear and organized.

The field and Baobab Experience

Reflecting on the first day I stepped into the informal camp of migrants at *Tiburtina* train station, the main characteristics of the place and the people part of the Baobab's activities are clear. Firstly, the context in which the NGO Baobab Experience operates is a very informal one, the street. No beds, no toilets, no water and no cooking facilities. Everything is organized through the few resources made available by the donations of citizens who deliberately decide to contribute for the assistance of the homeless migrants in Rome. Secondly, the migrants are many and with different origins and stories. Everyday around 60 migrants eat and sleep at *Tiburtina*, with a constant flow of people arriving and leaving. The guests of the camp are mostly men, rejected from the reception centers where instead women and children are mostly welcomed. The nationalities are many and the cultural diversity is incredibly vibrant. A vast majority of people from sub-Saharan Africa (e.g. Gambia, Senegal, Nigeria, Guinea Bissau) mix with north Africans, Sudanese, Somalians, Afghanis, Pakistanis and many others, giving birth to a real melting pot of people and a community based on diversity and inclusivity. Thirdly, the individual situations are diverse and complex. The life condition in which most of the migrants live and have lived, are very harsh and unjust and everyone reacts differently to it. As shown in the prologue, there are some people who highly suffer from their situation, and, not able to react to it, fall among others into depression, psychosis, drug use or illegal activities. Others instead, luckily the vast majority, keep a positive and strong attitude towards their condition and constantly work on its improvement. This last point brings me to the fourth and last aspect represented by the vignette above: the presence of the volunteers, on which my research focuses on. The functioning of the informal camp of *Tiburtina* is predominantly supported by the constant presence of the volunteers, who interact daily and assist the migrants, providing them with the resources to solve their struggles and fight exclusion. As G. helped me during my first day at the camp, the volunteers in general are a point of reference and source of security for everyone: the migrants, citizens and organizations. Volunteers provide the migrants with basic needs such as food and shelter, medical and legal assistance or simply

standing by their sides. They practice recognize these individuals as people subjected to societal invisibility due to their formal exclusion and isolation.

The migrants

After months or even years of inhumane journeys through deserts, camps, jails and boats, the migrants coming from the African continent manage to arrive in Europe, mostly entering the old continent through Mediterranean countries such as Italy. In the country of entrance, they are identified and registered. Consequently, in the same country, in conformity with the Dublin Treaty, the migrants have to go through a complex bureaucratic process to obtain a recognized formal status. In the case of Italy, the formal assistance is organized on two different levels but it lacks a comprehensive and integrated system that function effectively over the whole territory (Belloni 2016). Firstly, upon arrival, there are "hotspots" for first assistance where migrants are identified, photo-signaled and provided with basic goods and medical care. Then at a later stage, the projects of personal reception, assistance and integration are managed by the Italian local authorities and financed by the ministry of internal affairs (Ministry of Internal Affairs, 2020). After this first identification, while waiting for a response on their formal protection requests, many people are rejected from local reception centers (Accorinti & Wislocki 2016). Consequently, they become "invisible" individuals abandoned to live legally on the Italian territory without any form of institutional assistance.

Most of the migrants from the Baobab community are people living in a legal grey area and cannot be considered "undocumented" but should be instead defined as "identified non-citizens" seeking asylum. They often end up in this situation while waiting to renew their permits or awaiting a response from the authorities on their eligibility to protection or residency permits. Among these people, many have even been living in Europe for years, in fact, as shown by the prologue, often they speak several European languages. However, when their permits expire, they have to go back to the first country of identification and in the case of Italy they become stuck again and excluded from the circuits of assistance. I met people that came back from other European countries expecting to stay a couple of days to renew their documents and ended up living on the streets for months.

The perception arising from my personal relation with the migrants is that they live an absurd condition of confusion, unable to understand how they got in their situation and how to get out of it. The long waiting times and the poor organization of the Italian immigration offices are often exhausting for the migrants, who often lose hope and fall into despair. A friend from

Gambia who slept for 3 months at the station while waiting for his documents to be renewed often told me that he could not sleep at night and all he could think of was his documents. Four months after his request was submitted he had not received any answer yet and thus he was stuck at the train station without a home or a job. Rarely heard and supported by state institutions, "invisible" migrants are deprived of basic human rights and often their exclusion can lead to complete isolation. Belonging to a community is a fundamental characteristic of citizenship and a necessary condition for the recognition of human rights (Arendt 1951). Without the solidarity from the community of Baobab many of the migrants would not be able to improve their social condition of struggle.

Introduction

Why migration?

Since the large increase of migrants reaching Europe by sea began in 2014, the influx has never stopped. Italy, which is the main European receiver of migrants crossing the Mediterranean Sea after Greece, had to face several challenges in developing appropriate reception policies to guarantee the respect of human rights of people seeking refugee from situations of conflict, war, crisis or persecution (UNHCR 2015). The topic of migration generated a large political debate and migrants became regularly used in political rhetoric to gain consensus. After 3 years of high numbers of landings in Italy from 2014 to 2016, in 2017 the Italian government led by a left-wing coalition signed the Memorandum of Agreement with the government of National Accord led by al-Sarraj in Libya, aiming to reduce the influx of illegal migrants. Libya, where most migrants depart from to reach Europe, was financed by Italy and the European Union to develop refugee camps and strengthen the coast guards' activities, in order to limit the people moving towards Europe. The agreement resulted in the decrease of migrants entering Europe from an annual average of 170 thousand between 2014 and 2016, to 117 thousand in 2017 and 23 thousand in 2018 (Villa 2020). However, the memorandum also led to serious human rights violations in Libya, suffered by migrants and refugees at the hands of the state, armed groups, smugglers and traffickers (UNHCR 2018). Then in 2018, the populist Italian government approved the so called *Decreti Sicurezza*, which reduced public investments for the official reception system in Italy and complicated the process to gain a legal protective status. Data show a correlation between the implementation of the decrees in 2018 and the reduction of newcomers in 2019, which amounted of 11471 migrants (Villa 2020). However, the implementation of the *Decreti Sicurezza* also correlates with an increase of irregular migrants on the Italian territory. Today it is estimated that more than 600 thousand irregular migrants reside in Italy, only 90 thousand are assisted by the official reception systems and around 7 thousand per year are expatriated to their country of origin (Villa 2020).

As documented by the quote at the beginning, most of the migrants that come to Italy do not want to stay. Italy is not a safe country for them to build a new life, it is just a stage of their long journey which often ends in France, Germany or elsewhere in northern Europe. In Italy access to assistance is complicated, getting documents requires extended periods of complicated bureaucracy and the chances to get a job with a contract are low. Consequently,

migrants don't want to stay and those who stay are often labeled as "invisibles", as they are abandoned by the state institutions which should protect them. Many people who have the legal right to access social assistance and protection are denied permits to live regularly in the country of residence and, being excluded and isolated, have little chances to legally integrate in the community in which they live. Therefore, to survive, they often end up in circuits of illegality, living in a condition of constant uncertainty. This contributes to bolster all the negative and misleading conceptions surrounding the debate on migration.

In spite of the outlined failure of the institutions, an alternative to illegality exists for the migrants, represented by a wide network of informal institutions which engage with them (Accorinti & Wislocki 2016). Citizens and organizations work together to "catch" those people that are forgotten by the state system and would otherwise fall into illegality or desperation. This informal network is also commonly defined as the "third sector" which is made of citizens who, mostly voluntarily and unpaid, provide help to the migrant community. Among these organized citizens, Baobab Experience is a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) that operates in Rome and supports migrants living at the informal camp outside the *Tiburtina* train station. Baobab provides them with food and blankets, legal and medical support and the support of a community which recognizes them as people. Baobab gives migrants the chance to maintain the right physical and mental conditions to deal with their difficult situation, to not despair and to maintain alive their hope for a better future. The daily presence of volunteers, promotes a constant interaction between citizens and non-citizens which reduces the migrants' feeling of abandonment and fosters the development of a new community.

Why citizenship?

Whatever interpretation we might give to current global migration, it will always challenge the status quo, as the newcomers become part of the political community in which they enter and start living. Isin (2009) citing Ossman (2007) states that "the unnamed figure [migrant] is unsettling because it belies the modern figure of the citizen with singular loyalty, identity and belonging. […] It is impossible to capture all its appearances in a single word but all challenge citizenship. We still only dimly understand their consequences for the ways in which these unsettling people develop their identifications and subjectivities". Therefore, migration inevitably challenges the traditional idea of citizenship intended as political belonging arising from the relationship between state, citizens and territory, and it stimulates alternative conceptualizations (McNevin 2006). Constant influxes of new people should force us to

abandon citizenship as a static, *de-jure* status, to reinterpret it as a dynamic, *de-facto* process. Through close observations and participation in the activities of Baobab Experience, this research shines a light on the importance of the solidary interaction between migrants and citizens in the process of citizenship making, aiming to answer the following question: *How is Italian citizenship transformed in practice through the cooperative interaction between the formal citizens volunteering for the NGO Baobab Experience and the migrants excluded from the formal recognition of their citizenship?*

During the fieldwork conducted in Rome I analyzed citizenship as a process and practice, therefore focusing on *de-facto* citizenship rather than de jure. The research analyzes the development of an alternative form of citizenship within the Baobab community made by citizens and non-citizens (volunteers and migrants) by focusing on their "collective acts of citizenship". These are acts cooperatively enacted by the whole community of Baobab to create a rupture with a status quo which marginalizes the migrants. The concept of "collective acts of citizenship" builds and expands on Isin's theory on citizenship, and specifically on his concepts of "acts of citizenship" and "activist citizens". He defines acts of citizenship as it follows: "strategies and technologies of citizenship enacted by subjects willing to question the dominant status quo and create "new scenes"" (Isin 2009). In this research I will argue that all the activities of which Baobab is a means to the end of including migrants within the Italian political community, are to be considered as collective acts of citizenship setting citizenship in motion. I give particular attention to the "collective acts of citizenship" as they are the result of the cooperation between two apparently different and opposed societal and political groups. Two groups that, according to the *de-jure* context in which they live and that represents them, should be different and separated, but *de-facto,* act as equal human beings, everyone entitled to the same rights and duties under the name of Baobab Experience and the slogan "NO BORDERS!".

Research must shift from individual acts of citizenship by either citizens or non-citizens to collective acts of citizenship by citizens and non-citizens, who cooperate in the creation of new cultural practices and values of belonging. Too often the narrative of citizenship is constructed upon the contraposition of the two categories of citizens and non-citizens, therein contributing to the dialectical distinction between included and excluded, privileges and marginalization, which constrains the transformative nature of citizenship. Therefore, this research argues that there is a need to abandon the study of citizenship based solely on the categorization of who is in and who is out from the community, which risks to reproduce and strengthen the barriers to integration. Alternatively, it acknowledges the dynamism of

citizenship and aims at studying the collective processes of citizenship expansion that involves citizens and non-citizens, producing new cultural practices and values of belonging in a process that was defined by Putnam (2000) as "bridging social capital" rather than "bonding social capital". By doing so, the research aims to give more importance and strength to virtuous cases such as the one of Baobab as an example of functioning integration and enacted solidarity.

The chapters

In the first chapter I focus on the concept of citizenship as the chance to challenge the hegemonic power relations that confine a certain group of people to a specific social location (Arendt 1951). I argue that individuals with the right to free movement without legal repercussions, cannot be deprived of their agency, in particular political agency, within the nation-state in which they live. Therefore, the migrants of Baobab cannot be considered isolated in "bare life" nor excluded in a "state of exception" (Agamben 1995), because sovereignty does not only reside in the state (Giddens 1991; Lemke 2010; Butler & Athanasiu 2013; Rose & Miller 1992). I analyze the interaction between marginalized migrants and citizens sharing their struggles to live in Rome, as a site and source of political empowerment. Through collective acts of citizenship, migrants can re-appropriate themselves of their agency and challenge those power relations forcing them into exclusion (Isin 2009). I thus define the condition of migrants as an "exception of the nation-state" instead of a "state of exception" (Agamben 1995).

In the second chapter, I further analyze the collective acts of citizenship by focusing on its "How" components. Here I analyze the process through which the activities of the community of Baobab are transformed into collective acts of citizenship. Therefore, I argue how the interaction between citizens and non-citizens enables the practice of de facto citizenship for those who have been denied the formal recognition of de jure citizenship.

Finally, in the third and final chapter, I argue that the community of Baobab is the practiced representation of the "citizenship" claimed through the collective acts of citizenship enacted by the community. Here I describe the process of integration and negotiation of values of belonging as practiced daily within the community. Therefore, I analyze the Baobab community as an example of a dynamic conceptualization of citizenship, based on mutual exchange of cultural values.

To conclude, in addition to its academic relevance, this research wants to remind the readers that in Europe there are people deprived of their rights and dignity and confined to a life of struggles on the streets, who need to be helped, now. Baobab is the proof that there are ways to help these people, that integration is possible and that we don't have to be afraid of the "others" but we should learn from them and improve ourselves. The story of Baobab is a story of despair and struggle, of hope and achievements; of people improving their lives and people who ruined them. Baobab is a story of people and cultures, of friendships and love. It is a story made of thousands of different stories travelling around the world. But most importantly, Baobab is a story of human rights that must be told. It is a story that reminds us that overall we are all people and as such we should be treated equally.

Photo 1: Tiburtina informal camp, February 2020

Methodology

Before starting the fieldwork in Rome I established contact with the NGO Baobab Experience. After establishing contact with G., the volunteer coordinator of the organization, I understood the characteristics of Baobab Experience and what kind of activities it was engaging with. When I moved to Rome I contacted G., who immediately invited me to join the informal camp at *Piazzale Spadolini*, on the east side of *Tiburtina* train station. Thus, I easily accessed the fieldwork site encouraged by the volunteers of Baobab. From the beginning of my time in Rome I participated in the activities of Baobab Experience and I was included in the community, meeting several people every day, both migrants and volunteers. Although I did not need any gatekeeper or a "fairy godmother to help [me] the forlorn ethnographer" (Rock 2001: 34), G., the volunteer, and E., A and S., two migrants from Gambia and one from Guinea Bissau, really supported me to become familiar with the community. Also thanks to them I immediately had full access to my research group, to which the only real potential impediment was myself.

Within the Baobab community, especially during my initial integration process, I always introduced myself as a researcher, making clear to the research participants my position and my role in the field. Thus, the fieldwork experience was based on overt research, which is important to build trust and avoid ethical issues (O'Reilly 2012). However, my position in the community developed with the fieldwork experience and eventually, through total participation, I became a full-time volunteer involved in most of the activities of Baobab. This meant that my participant observation became very close to the "natives' point of view" as Malinowski puts it. People soon became used to my presence and acted naturally around me from the beginning (O'Reilly 2012). Consequently, I was easily accepted into the community and I built strong relations with many people, who in addition to research participants then also became friends. This made me become a full member of Baobab and therefore, I was influenced by its perspective. Although I always tried to be objective and reflect critically on my observations, my close relation with the Baobab community potentially created some biases, especially regarding my opinion on Italian migration policies. The topic of migration and citizenship is very highly politically charged and in this piece the readers should expect to find some parts expressing a tendency towards certain political positions. This should be understood

as the outcome of a deep engagement with the research participants, on which I reflected and analyzed objectively as much as possible. However, it was not possible to completely avoid reporting this slight bias as it is an expression of the field in which I conducted a research "with" people rather than "on" people (Crang & Cook 2007). Therefore, I am aware of it, I critically reflect and I warn the reader to take this into consideration.

Participant observation was the main method of inquiry with which I approached my research. Every day I would engage with the community in multiple ways, always observing and noting all relevant information I encountered whilst immersing myself in the role of the volunteer. Although I had planned to conduct semi-structured interviews, my participant observation was always and only coupled with informal interviews, made of unstructured questions, informal conversations, group conversations and listening. O'Reilly (2012) would define my method of inquiry as opportunistic, "directing questions towards somebody on the spur of the moment that they may or may not answer in ways you had not expected". I did not engage in formal interviews for three reasons.

Firstly, because some of my research participants, the migrants, live in a condition of struggle which makes them very vulnerable and sensitive to questions and reportage. This was shown during the fieldwork when, after I asked questions about delicate matters, the migrants showed discomfort and rejection. Furthermore, the migrants never liked to be recorded nor filmed or photographed due to their position. When journalists came to the camp, even when reporting to support them, the migrants always opposed them stating: "we live here, we are not animals and we don't want to be treated as if this was zoo". Therefore, I concluded that interviewing would not be an adequate method of inquiry, especially as it can create stress and discomfort for the interlocutors. The second reason to not conduct interviews is the potential production of biases. The context of the interview would have created a dynamic of power imbalance strengthened by my position as the white, wealthy and Italian interviewer compared to the position of struggle in which the interviewees, the migrants, lived (Ribbens 1989). This would have certainly affected the outcome of the interviews and maybe my position as a researcher and volunteer within the community (O'Reilly 2012). The third and last reason to not conduct interviews is that my research wanted to focus on the collectivity of Baobab and on the interaction between migrants and volunteers. Therefore, observation was a more appropriate method to study the explicit and tacit aspects of everyday life, interactions and community dynamics (De Walt & De Walt 2002). Furthermore, as I had decided to not interview migrants, it would have then not been fair both ethically and for the purpose of my research, to only interview volunteers. Therefore, I focused my research on intense participant

observation by getting involved in many activities, relationships and conversations, which resulted in intense note taking. Observing social life being lived gave me many more insights about the community rather than gathering information reported by informants (Boccagni & Schrooten 2018) The information was always shared with my research participant and discussed on the basis of informal conversations. This allowed me to critically analyze my observations and to remind my research participants of my role as a researcher.

During the first period of research, the observations were plenty and it was difficult to assess their relevance for the sake of my research (O'Reilly 2012; Becker 2008). To overcome this problem, I engaged with an intense note taking process, writing down and recording myself with the phone describing every interesting and potentially relevant information noticed (O'Reilly 2012). This process decreased as I got to know the field better and I started to record more specific and relevant observations. The result was a mix of audio files, written notes on my phone, vignettes and a note book which I used in the process of analyzing my findings and writing the thesis. Within the written thesis, I also directly reported some of the vignettes written during the fieldwork and I included some quotes from the official publications Baobab Experience posted on its social medias. I used these quotes because social media are the main interfaces with which Baobab communicates with the public. The social media posts of Baobab are discussed within the community and are representative of the community perspective. Some pictures from the fieldwork were also added in order to given the readers a better perception of the observations and the field. People's faces on the pictures were blurred in order to ensure their privacy and anonymity. For the same reason, I also used pseudonyms throughout the research when referring to the research participants.

All the data was collected during a three-month period of fieldwork in Rome between February and May 2020. This period was characterized by a first month of intense contact and activities related to Baobab Experience and other organizations working with migrants excluded from the formal network of reception and social assistance. However, after the breakout of the COVID-19 pandemic, many organizations were forced to quit temporarily or reduce their activities and therefore I also reduced my contacts and I started working solely with Baobab. Thus, from March until the end of May, I conducted my research as a full-time volunteer for Baobab, and although with there were many limitations due to the virus, I managed to keep volunteering and collecting data for my research.

Prelude

The fundamental deprivation of human rights is manifested first and above all in the deprivation of a place in the world which makes opinions significant and actions effective. Something much more fundamental than freedom and justice, which are rights of citizens, is at stake when belonging to the community into which one is born is no longer a matter of course and not belonging no longer a matter of choice, or when one is placed in a situation where, unless he commits a crime, his treatment by others does not depend on what he does or does not do. This extremity, and nothing else, is the situation of people deprived of human rights. They are deprived, not of the right to freedom, but of the right to action; not of the right to think whatever they please, but of the right to opinion. […] Not the loss of specific rights, then, but the loss of a community willing and able to guarantee any rights whatsoever, has been the calamity which has befallen ever-increasing numbers of people. […] Only the loss of a polity itself expels him from humanity.

(From "The Origins of Totalitarism" by Hannah Arendt 1951)

Chapter 1

On Citizenship

1.1 What is citizenship?

Much of the academic debate on citizenship has focused on the differences between liberal and republican or communitarian theories (Avineri & de-Shalit 1992; Markate Daly 1993; Oldfield 1990). In the traditional sense of the term, citizenship is defined as a status people are endowed with. It is the rights and obligations that arise from the relationship between state, citizens and territory (Marshal 1987). For the liberals, the relationship between the individual and the state is reciprocal. On the other hand, for the republicans the citizens must preserve and promote the nation to which they belong (Lister & Campling 2017). Communitarian theories go even further than the republicans, understanding citizens as products of the political community (Yuval-Devis 2006).

According to these conceptualizations, the migrants object of my study are people excluded from citizenship and thus from the political community, the nation, in which they live. However, although formally excluded from the Italian nation, their belonging to the community of Baobab produces an alternative form of *de-facto* citizenship based on performative acts of citizenship, which challenges the static *de-jure* idea of citizenship. Therefore, although the traditional academic debates on citizenship focus on the formal aspects of citizenship, this research analyzes the practice of *de-facto* citizenship.

Anthropologists and political theorists consider citizenship to be much more than a mere legal status providing rights and responsibilities. Therefore, they focus on the *processes* and *practices* that make someone a citizen, shifting from *de-jure* to *de-facto* citizenship approach (Lazar & Nuijten 2013). Among these, Isin (2002) defines citizenship not only as a formal membership of a nation-state but also as any form of inclusion to a political community which implies the simultaneous and necessary exclusion of others from the same group. The inclusion/exclusion duality is also mentioned by Stack (2012), who argues that citizenship cannot refer only to the juridical order of the state, but it must be negotiated with society, producing citizenship as civil sociality. These conceptualizations of citizenship, allow for the

conception of "alternate forms of membership and alternative bases for claim-making upon a political community" (McNevin 2006). These forms of membership are often constructed by the excluded who challenge the status quo and long for inclusion. Baobab Experience is a good example of this process, however it differs as it constructs citizenship through the collaboration between the excluded and the included.

From a formal perspective, the exclusion of migrants reinforces the definition of who the Italian citizen is, who is allowed to live on Italian territory under the rule of the Italian state. However, formal exclusion does not mean total exclusion. The migrants, although prevented from gaining formal recognition, do not disappear from the Italian political community but keep living in Italy in a condition of invisibility. They interact with Italian sovereign citizens who recognize them politically and with them they build alternative forms of *de-facto* citizenship. The volunteers of Baobab for instance are constantly present in the everyday life of the migrants of the community and through their political recognition refuse the exclusionary conception of citizenship by practicing an alternative one. The constant engagement of the volunteers with the migrants and vice versa allows the community of Baobab to develop new values of political belonging, especially building relationships that go well beyond mere assistance. Every evening the Baobab community gathers for few hours at *Tiburtina*'s informal camp for the distribution of dinner. These are always hectic hours because they represent the main moment of physical contact between migrants and volunteers. It is a time of exchange, of talks, of questions, of arguments, of appointments and much more. It is a community coming together. The formally excluded migrants suddenly do not feel isolated and invisible anymore, but they are part of a community who listens to them and with whom they can share their struggles. As a volunteer during the evening meetings I met many new people, learned about languages and countries I had never heard about before. I have translated documents and provided suggestions. I shared cigarettes, food, football games and many talks. I exchanged numbers and scheduled meetings. I argued with some people and laughed with others. I could probably go on and on describing what happens when the volunteers meet with the migrants, but the most important aspect is that through these daily meetings a new community develops and suddenly formally excluded people find "a place in the world which makes [their] opinions significant and [their] actions effective" using Arendt's words (1951).

The development of a community is the most important step for the migrants to regain the human dignity from which they are daily deprived (Arendt 1951). Through the community of Baobab migrants practice *de-facto* citizenship that empowers them politically, and as such makes them able to act politically and to challenge the hegemonic powers oppressing them.

Therefore, the role of the sovereign citizens within the Baobab community is fundamental in the re-subjectification of the excluded within the nation-state in which they live. On the 5th of June, Baobab gathered at *Tiburtina* for a citizen assembly of the community (photo 2) in order to talk and organize a demonstration in front of the municipality of Rome (photo 3). From the assembly 2 requests arose: accommodation and protection for every migrant holding the right to it and the institution of an info-point and first assistance hub for migrants in transit through Rome (photo 4). This is an example of a collectivity enacting *de-facto* citizenship, which resonates with the definition of citizenship provided by Isin (2009). He recognizes citizenship in any kind of identity and practice of belonging, rather than in the possession of rights. Isin also argues that citizenship is a dynamic concept that is based on the constant production of privileges and marginalization, which produces clear distinction between citizens and non-citizens within a given political community. Citizens and non-citizens are formally defined by the power relations which decide who can enjoy rights and who can't. However, in practice any subject who has the political power to change these power relations can be defined as a citizen (Nietzche 1881; Arendt 1951). As such, the new migrants' subjectification allows them to practice political agency as actors empowered by the collectivity of Baobab, which recognizes them as human beings. The community of Baobab gives the migrants a place in society. It involves and connects them to the network of third sector organizations that are active in Rome. It gives them a voice through their media power and resonance. It allows the migrants to legally contest their condition thanks to work of the voluntary lawyers. It provides them with food and blankets, clothes and medicines. Therefore, in addition to providing a community that listens, supports and shares the struggle of the migrants, Baobab provides also resources to enable them to actively challenge their condition.

Citizenship here arises also from a cultural negotiation which produces a tension between processes of self-making and being made (Ong, 1996). Therefore, subjectification of individuals develops from their agency to construct a new community with new values (self-making), which, however, need to be negotiated with other actors within society (being made). From the migrants-citizens' collaboration the community of Baobab constantly develops, reproducing an alternative practice of belonging with new negotiated values. Consequently, in this case the political distinction between citizens and non-citizens is blurred. If de-jure citizenship is a clear figurative line defining who is in and who is out of the community, *de-facto* this line is in constant transformation, negotiated by citizens and non-citizens to define the values of belonging to the community. The activities of the migrants living at *Tiburtina* train station demonstrates their possession of a *de-facto* citizenship gained through the

interaction with *de-jure* citizens. However, how does this condition of *de-facto* citizenship relate to the migrants' exclusion from the *de-jure* citizenship imposed by the sovereign state?

Photo 2: Citizens Assembly of Baobab at the Tiburtina informal camp

Photo 3: "indivisible beyond borders". Baobab Experience's sit-in in front of Rome Municipality

Photo 4: "The street is your choice". Flyer with demands for the sit-in in front of Rome Municipality

1.2 The state and the migrants

Within the self-making and being made subjectification process of individuals, the formal approach of the state seems to be quite clear in defining the terms of exclusion. From the perspective of the state's control over the biological and political lives of its subjects, the non-citizen migrants part of my research represent the category of people excluded from the political community represented by the Italian nation-state. In this section, I expand the academic debate on Agamben's theory of bare life and I redefine the state of exclusion in which the migrants are relegated by the sovereign state. I argue that although the state's agencies tend to exclude some categories of individuals, within society sovereign subjects practice alternative forms of politics of belonging. For instance, in the case of Baobab this allows the excluded migrants to be recognized political agents, able to act and challenge the hegemonic power relation oppressing them.

From the state's perspective the migrants are confined to a formal state of exclusion that allows them to be legally on the Italian territory, but does not give them the basic needs necessary to actively become part of the Italian community and start a process of integration. In fact, after rejection or during waiting time to gain formal political recognition, many migrants are forced to live in a precarious grey zone between legality and illegality. The condition of asylum seekers is a status in which people should be safeguarded by the receiving state, as the state holds agency on their precarious condition. However, in the case of the population of my research, not only the state is the reason of the precarious condition of asylum seekers, but it also forces these people to live on the streets, without guaranteeing their rights and safety. Therefore, the Italian state, in the eyes of the migrants, often turns from potential protector to oppressor, influencing also their perception of the Italian nation that the state represents. After one night of food distribution one of the migrants referring to me started to scream: "fuck you, fuck Italy and all Italians! How is it possible to abandon people to live in such inhumane conditions of deprivation?" This kind of narrative is repeated by some of the migrants especially in times of tension, when they can become quite verbally aggressive also towards the volunteers as Italians. The migrants do acknowledge and appreciate the importance of the work done by the volunteers. However, at times of desperation, stress and tension, they vent their emotions and struggles on the volunteers who become the "others" representing the oppressing Italian state.

These are isolated episodes that do not represent a norm, however the "conflicts" between the migrants and volunteers are taken by the community as part of the dialectical process of community building. The clashes are very important moments to understand each other's positions and to confront different perspectives. One evening the migrants started complaining about the quality of food. Many refused to eat what the volunteers provided and yelled that they were not animals, despite living in the streets. When the situation was tempered and everyone calmed down, the volunteers and the migrants talked together to find a better solution for the coming days. The conflict helped the volunteers to understand the needs of the migrants and the migrants to express their needs for better assistance. The same happened when some journalists came to report the situation at the camp invited by the volunteers. The migrants became very angry and aggressive, showing discomfort in being filmed and recorded. Consequently, after a heated discussion, the volunteers understood the point of view of the migrants and vice versa. The following times journalists came, the volunteers made sure that everyone at camp knew that they were coming. The volunteers asked to the migrants who wanted to be filmed and interviewed and when the journalists arrived they only filmed those individuals who gave consensus. These are the moments in which the migrants' condition of struggle can lead them to associate the volunteers to be citizens of an oppressive state. However, the community approach to these conflicts is also a way to reinforce the production of a *de-facto* citizenship, alternative from the state one.

The negative perception of Italy by the migrants is constantly reinforced by the state's law enforcement on the territory. Not holding adequate documentation to gain residence and find a job and due to the legal grey zone in which they live, the migrants are victims of constant and random controls in the streets by the police. Their skin color and diversity is usually the first reason for controls, which can cause the migrants temporary detentions by the state. In Rome, I have witnessed multiple random arrests of migrants for identification, after which they are typically released without any consequences. Thus, the migrants live in constant fear and uncertainty related to their legal condition, which is reinforced daily by the acts of control carried out by police forces.

The 3-month period of lockdown due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) was very demonstrative of the state-migrants' dynamics that have been described previously. While in the whole country the slogan "stay at home" was promoted everywhere, Baobab remained active at *Tiburtina* (photo 5). During the lockdown the people living at the informal camp doubled, from 50/60 to 120 individuals and the volunteers presented multiple petitions to the state institutions to find appropriate solutions. The response was very weak: in 3 months 20

people were allocated in official reception centers and the police came twice to distribute face masks, both times with media presence to document the "good and caring" operation of the municipality. After 3 months of this institutional absence and the hard work of volunteering citizens, during the week of release from the lockdown, the police came 4 days in a row, from Monday to Thursday, to clear out the informal camp, arrest migrants and bring them to the police headquarters to be identified (photo 6). The authorities wanted the informal camp, result of the state's default on immigration policies, to be dismantled without offering any alternative solution, as if believing the migrants could suddenly disappear. I saw migrants crying getting on the police's bus, migrants arrested after showing documents considered "not enough" and people arrested and released for 3 days in a row despite holding the certificate of previous identifications. On Tuesday morning it took 1 hour for the police to arrest A., a refugee with documents from Libya. Crying and holding on to anything he could, he was refusing to get on the police bus, afraid of being arrested. To convince him to go I joined him in the police car and we were brought to the police station. After 30 minutes of identification A. was released with no consequences. He later told me he had been to prison in Libya and he was terrified that something similar could happen again. In a social media post, Baobab Experience reported on the management of the immigration office of Rome as follows:

> "An historic impasse, of uncontrolled mob and human beings who, hoping to access [immigration] services [at the immigration offices], are forced to queue starting from the night before, for multiple days, subjected to constant delays and postponements, with the embarrassment of the citizenry and the historic indifference, of the Institutions, culminated with the acknowledgment of the courthouse of Rome – in 2018 and again in 2020 – of the lack in the offices of the Capital of "measures to allow a less uncomfortable approach to the office desks and to avoid that the weakest among the aspirants are overpowered and overstepped by the others".
>
> An ordinary management based on group assemblage and therefore, incompatible with the duty of a civil country to guarantee the fundamental human rights and, today, also with the social distancing criteria imposed by the Covid-19 emergency."

Due to their isolation and deprivation of political body, the migrants could be defined, using Agamben's argument developed in *Homo Sacer* (1995) as people relegated to "bare life". Agamben defines bare life as individuals subjugated to the hegemonic powers of the sovereign state, only recognized by their biological bodies and deprived of agency in the political community in which they live. The migrants of Baobab are embedded within the juridical order of the state and legally reside in Rome. However, rejected by the circuits of assistance and not formally recognized, they can be considered to be in a state of exception because they are

unable to act to improve their social condition due to their exclusion.

The migrants' inability to act independently and their passive approach to their condition was shown on the field by observations and several informal conversations. Many migrants, especially the new-comers, are completely ignorant about Italian legal matters concerning their condition and, not understanding Italian, they are unable to understand the documents institutions provide them. Without the help of citizens, they often miss important appointments at the immigration offices concerning their legal status because they are not aware about them or because they are not able to reach the locations of the appointments. The lack of economic resources leaves them powerless towards their condition unable to afford food, accommodation or means of transport. Constantly seeking help and support, the migrants are often scammed by people who take advantage of their desperate situations. Even the immigration office can become a place of potential risks and misunderstandings, for instance due to officers' misbehaviors, unreasoned rejections or language and cultural barriers reported by the volunteers' personal experiences.

Therefore, the field experience made it clear how in isolation the migrants could be considered as living in a state of exception of bare life. However, unless confined into camps or jails, the phenomenon of Baobab Experience, shows that migrants are never fully isolated from the nation-state in which they live. Instead, they are in constant interaction with it and its sovereign citizens. Despite their formal exclusion, the physical freedom they maintain allows the migrants of Baobab to partly be involved in the civic sociality of Rome and connect to its community. Therefore, I argue that it is the interaction to the city and its sovereign citizens that empowers excluded migrants as political agents. According to my field observations, for all individuals politically excluded from a democratic nation-state in which they keep living and socially interacting, there is always a chance to avoid the condition of bare life described by Agamben. This is because sovereignty does not only reside in formal and legal politics and state agencies but also in citizens (Giddens 1991; Lemke 2010; Butler & Athanasiu 2013; Rose & Miller 1992).

Photo 5: "#ISTAYHOME". Ironic photo taken for a post on Baobab's social media during COVID-19 lockdown

6: Police at the camp. One of the four evictions the carried out the week after the end of the lockdown

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1.3 The exception of the nation-state

Although secluded to a grey legal zone the migrants cannot be considered as relegated to absolute "bare life". Thanks to their interaction to the city, the citizens and volunteers they are never fully isolated and are often surrounded by an informal network of people that supports them. For instance, the grey legal zone in which the migrants live allows them to access the Italian public health services. However, without the support of citizens such as the volunteers of Baobab, these services would be hardly accessible for them. As volunteers, we often booked medical appointments for migrants, connected them with the third sector medical organizations, brought them to and picked them up from the hospital, assisted them in understanding their medical issues, bought medicines and made sure they took them. One guy from Ethiopia recently injured himself and independently went to the hospital. A nurse from the hospital emailed Baobab saying: "in my department there was a guy from Ethiopia admitted without documents called R. At the moment he only remembers the name of the coordinator of Baobab. He doesn't have any clothes. If he is someone you know, please contact me and come to the hospital". As shown by this episode, the migrants are never completely excluded and isolated. In this case, the sanitary service, a nurse taking the initiative to contact Baobab and the volunteers of Baobab are a fundamental source of security for a person that would otherwise be invisible. Furthermore, this case shows the important role that the volunteers of Baobab play in the lives of excluded migrants as a point of social reference.

The construction of the Baobab community through strong long lasting relationships between migrants and volunteers, is thus a form of political recognition. The migrants soon lose the definition of "migrants" in the discourse of the Baobab community, but they become "*i ragazzi*", "the guys", and each of them is referred to by his/her name. The relations are based on a hierarchical approach only for what concerns formal issues of assistance the migrants cannot deal with autonomously, but they are normalized in all other instances. In Baobab people are equal citizens holding the same rights and obligations and interact in a horizontal power relation. Thanks to the constant interaction, real friendship relations develop, strengthening migrants' social inclusion and contributing to the empowerment of their political body. My integration within Baobab is a good example of the social dynamic of the community. When I arrived in Rome I was new to the city and through the volunteering at Baobab some of the migrants and the volunteers became my main group of friends. We hung out together, going for dinners, bars or birthday and graduation parties, always practicing inclusive citizenship.

The volunteers, dedicate most of their free time to assist the migrants sharing their cause and giving them a voice. Although highly limited due to their legal status, migrants are also given opportunities for lives' improvements. Some of them are helped to seek a job and supported in their administrative paper works. Others start actively participating within the community, helping with daily tasks such as cleaning the camp, distributing the food, organizing clothing and blankets distribution or becoming interpreters. From these activities, beside gaining an occupation, they also earn a small economic compensation from the Baobab's budget and can make little steps forward towards autonomy. In some cases, migrants showing particular difficulties are temporarily hosted by volunteers, who share their houses providing a short time of comfort and security to them. Recently, Baobab also managed to rent a small office which soon became a safe physical place to which migrants in need of help can refer to (photo 7). Here take place weekly language classes, legal advice sessions, community assemblies and occasional community hangs out.

The interaction between citizens and non-citizens, through a process of subjectification and empowerment, therefore, allows the non-citizens migrants to develop a new form of de-facto citizenship, through which they maintain their political agency. The de-facto citizenship is theoretically based on sovereignty, which does not reside solely in the state but also in the citizens; the nation constituting the nation-state (Giddens 1991). In fact, in the modern democratic nation-states, including Italy, the sovereign state should be the representation of all sovereign individual citizens. With the end of kingdoms and sovereign monarchs, all individuals became from objects of one sovereign subject to sovereign subjects represented by a sovereign state formed by the aggregation of all sovereign individuals into a nation. Therefore, although the sovereign state tries to remove political power from the excluded citizens (i.e. migrants), the volunteers of Baobab Experience are sovereign subjects who recognize the migrants' political bodies and values. The migrants-citizens' interaction can be identified as the site of production of the de-facto citizenship enacted by Baobab. This is constructed through all those acts of citizenship which, in practice, include to the political community individuals who are formally excluded from it. Therefore, the grey legal zone constructed by the combination of different acts of the state and some of its sovereign subjects, put the community of Baobab in a condition that I would not define as "state of exception" but as an "exception of the nation-state". With "exception of the nation-state" I mean that the condition of the migrants and the case of Baobab is the result of a set of contradictions within the nation-state, which gives life to an exceptional form of citizenship. This exceptional citizenship challenges the political and legal order in which it is embedded, and produces new

"activist citizens" (Isin 2009). Therefore, the presence of migrants sets in motion the public organizations that tend to homogenize and thus petrify the concept of citizenship. Arendt (1951) writes:

> "If a Negro in a white community is considered a Negro and nothing else, he loses along with his right to equality that freedom of action which is specifically human; all his deeds are now explained as "necessary" consequences of some "Negro" qualities; he has become some specimen of an animal species, called man. Much the same thing happens to those who have lost all distinctive political qualities and have become human beings and nothing else. No doubt, wherever public life and its law of equality are completely victorious, wherever a civilization succeeds in eliminating or reducing to a minimum the dark background of difference, it will end in complete petrifaction and be punished, so to speak, for having forgotten that man is only the master, not the creator of the world."

The experience of Baobab shows the importance of diversity within a political community, which is empowered through the interaction between citizens and non-citizens in the claim of their recognition as human beings. Isin (2009) defines the people enacting the *de-facto* citizenship as activist citizens who, through their daily struggles for citizenship as justice, embrace the Foucauldian "modern attitude" of "self-making" aiming at changing those power relations defining political belonging that regulate the wider world. However, for the migrants, the struggle towards citizenship cannot only be a "self-making" process, because as it was demonstrated before, in isolation they may lose their agency and end up in a "bare life" condition. The migrants have to interact with citizens to start the process of re-subjectification and claim for citizenship and have to also deal with constant tension of negotiation with the hegemonic state. Therefore, the de-facto citizenship that I defined as "activist citizenship" (Isin 2009) characterizing the migrants that took part in my study, is the result of a process combining self-making and being made, where the actors are the state, the citizens and the non-citizens (the migrants) (Ong 1996; Rosaldo 1994). The negotiation for recognition is a process practiced daily through "acts of citizenship" involving the excluded migrants, the citizens and the state. In the following chapter I explore the notion of acts of citizenship in the context of the community of Baobab Experience in Rome. Through ethnographic insights, I will focus on who are the subjects enacting the acts of citizenship and consequently, how the acts of citizenship can be defined as such.

Photo 7: Baobab Experience's office during a legal aid session.

Prelude

Today English class at bar Mania, which hosts us every week. We are 8 teachers for 7 students. I get introduced to the students: 2 from Libya, 2 from Gambia, 2 from Mali. I talk mainly with I., he is from Libya and he is a bit drunk. He talks a lot and enjoys my presence while drinking his second *Amaro*. He already speaks some English because with his family he lived in England, Scotland and Sweden. He tells me Sweden is much better than Italy and he insults the Italian politics, saying everything is shit and people are racist. In Sweden life was easier, but he had to come back because his papers expired and he had to renew them in Italy due to the EU treaty of Dublin. He shows me his wounds from the war in Libya from which he escaped, he is missing the middle finger of his left hand and he says he has problems with his leg. He tells me he drinks to forget all the bad stuff he has seen and to forget the constant deaths of family and friends in Libya. I. now leaves with his girlfriend, an Italian lawyer part of the Baobab community, where I. and her met.

Next to me a German girl who speaks very good Italian, is teaching to G., a guy from Gambia, how to write and read. He is starting from the basic grammar, learning letters and syllables. Another volunteer, G., is helping a guy from Mali called S., who reads a book in English and translates it to Italian. A guy from Libya that has just arrived in Italy 2 months ago, is helped by C., a Nigerian migrant who now teaches English to the new students. The environment is very relaxed and informal. As we finish the class we go back to *Tiburtina* where the informal camp was cleared during the morning by the police, who brought to the police office 20 people and threw away a lot of material such as clothes and blankets.

Today, the second day, I am a bit more comfortable and I talk to some more people. Three guys from Sudan show me some documents they don't know what to do with. Everything is written in Italian and they do not understand. I read from the document they have an invitation in 3 days to go to the police station in Crotone, in order to start the legal procedure to gain international protection. They will get explanations from some volunteers and Baobab will pay for their Flixbus tickets to reach Crotone and be at the appointment. They seem relieved when they receive the tickets and they understand what is written in the documents the police gave them.

Chapter 2

Acts of Citizenship and non-citizens' political subjectification

The vignette above provides a picture of the situation in which the community of Baobab is embedded, the people involved and some of the struggles and difficulties they go through. At the same time, it is explicatory of the importance of the interaction between the citizens and the migrants, in order to better the condition of the latter. As explained in the first chapter, the migrants living at *Tiburtina* are often forgotten and invisible to the state institutions and without the help of citizens who engage with them, they would be completely abandoned, isolated in their exclusion. Victims of the structural violence imposed by their condition and their social position as migrants, their struggles of the present are accompanied by deep physical and psychological scars from their past. Without external support the migrants would be stuck, unable to move in a society to which they do not belong. In this chapter, I describe and analyze the interactions within the Baobab community introducing the concept of "collective acts of citizenship", expanding the work by Isin (2002) on the "acts of citizenship". Examples of these collective acts are the informal language school, the psychological support provided through conversations, the translation and explanation of legal documents and the purchase of bus tickets to travel within Italy.

2.1 From "acts of citizenship" to "collective acts of citizenship"

Once I identified citizenship as the opportunity to challenge and change the power relations and structures that establish who has the right to belong to a certain community (Nietzsche 1881; Arendt 1951; Isin 2002), I want to further understand how this process is enacted in practice and by who. According to this understanding of citizenship, therefore, the power relations establishing the status quo can be considered in constant transformation. Enacting acts of citizenship, the excluded become political and claim new political spaces different from those in which they are subjugated by the dominant group. Isin defines the migrants as the "unsettling figure belying the modern figure of the citizens" and identifies them as "activist citizens" agents of the acts of citizenship. However, in my research I identify the agents of the "acts of citizenship", not only the marginalized migrants of Baobab, but the community of Baobab as whole, including citizens and non-citizens. Therefore, I conceptualize the acts of citizenship as collective acts to contest the marginalization and invisibility of migrants.

Departing from the literature arguing for the necessary presence of external support for the migrants' integration within a national political community (Dancygier 2010; Okamoto and Ebert 2016); I argue that without the interaction between migrants and volunteers, the "acts of citizenship" would not be powerful enough to set new scenes for those excluded. Therefore, the role of volunteering citizens as "social bridges" is fundamental to claim the migrants' inclusion to the political community in which they legally live. To achieve this ambitious goal, Baobab claims and practices profound cultural changes that transforms the hegemonic normative understanding of citizenship. However, to be able to engage in this challenge and "set a new scene", the collective acts of citizenship have to be performative acts, which engage with reiterative and citational processes, aiming at the materialization of the regulatory norms of a certain discourse (Butler 2011).

Baobab's acts of citizenship generate alternative identificatory processes, normatively constructed within the community of Baobab. In fact, the identificatory processes are processes necessary in the materialization and assumption of the norms, and which "precede and enable the formation of a subject" (Butler 2011). These processes are practiced through the regulated and repeated repudiation of what does not conform to the norm, which produce a disavowed but necessary domain of abjection (Butler 2011). In my research, this process can be identified both in the exclusionary acts of the state and in the collective acts of citizenship of the Baobab community. In the first case, in the process of identification of the "Italian citizens", the state "repudiates" the migrants, who do not conform to the norms defining who is "Italian" and thus excludes them in a "necessary domain of abjection" (Butler 2011). In the case of Baobab, in a similar way but with a different finality, also the abjected migrants and the community practice processes of identification. However, here the identification is not built on the repudiation of a group of individuals but of the hegemonic conceptualization of belonging. Therefore, the migrants use the processes of identification to materialize new norms of citizenship, repudiating those conceptualizations that are exclusive and thus not conform with their identification. Practicing these new norms, the community of Baobab performs a new subjectivity, which does not conform to the status quo and thus challenges it.

According to Butler (2011) the strength of the new subjects, performed by their agency to resist and challenge the status quo through what I call "collective acts of citizenship", depends on the "citation"/reiteration of the practiced norms. Butler (2011) identifies the necessity of reiteration of performances as the weakness of this process of materialization of regulatory norms. Its inefficiency due to the need of constant citation makes the process never complete and always approximate. Therefore, the instabilities arising from these weaknesses

can be used by individuals as spaces for re-articulation and to coopt the practices reproducing the norms, in order to question the hegemonic regulatory norms. This is exactly what happens in the case of Baobab, which, in the form of resistance, with its collective acts of citizenship performs new norms questioning the hegemonic ones. However, the strength of the acts from Baobab is also dependent on their reiteration. Therefore, Baobab is potentially also exposed to the risk, on the one hand, of not achieving the result intended due to low reiteration of the acts, and on the other hand, challenges by new or different articulation of the regulatory norms. However, although the risk is double, it is clear that the Baobab community, is a new subject trying to challenge the status quo without much to lose. In their collective acts of citizenship and thus of resistance, they try daily to improve the everyday life condition of migrants, therefore performances' reiteration does not represent a substantial weakness for the Baobab community as people resist a situation of struggle and oppression on a daily basis. In the next sections, on the underlying argument that the sole daily presence of volunteers next to the migrants represents a "collective act of citizenship" challenging the hegemonic norms and values of belonging, I will describe how and why more specific examples of acts can be considered as collective acts of citizenship.

2.2 Friendship as a site for "activist citizenship"

"Donate a blanket or a warm meal is a political act! Always. Now more than before: there is an emergency within the emergency. The emergency of the last. However, there is also the care for the other in the individualism that moves along with fear. To donate one's own time is a revolutionary act, especially during this Easter spent watching men, women and children abandoned adrift in the Mediterranean Sea risking their lives. What is happening in these days around and within the community of Baobab Experience is the sublimation of any resistance, driven by the need to tell each other: "I stand by the whole of humanity". There is something that this pandemic has insolently thrown in front of our eyes: the interdependence that exists among one another. Every small act and behavior, every choice, has an immediate influence on everyone around us.

The solidarity tour of Baobab Experience conquered the whole of Rome, from *Tiburtina* to *Trullo*: a network within the network made of thin and tenacious links among apartment buildings, neighborhoods, courtyards, word of mouths, exchange of goods between

balconies and landings. Covid-19 indiscriminately affects everybody and the infection of every person raises the risk for the others. The reaction to it must include everyone, nobody excluded since everyone has to be in the condition to simultaneously protect his or her self and the others. Now more than ever it is necessary to recognize the interdependence among people, considering that our health and survival depends on others' behavior."

(Baobab Experience 2020)

The migrants of Baobab, among other forms of exclusion, are often isolated from the society in which they live. Their precarious condition of homelessness and poverty prevents them from partaking in social activities that would initiate a process of integration within the Italian community. Consequently, migrants are incentivized to build separate communities isolated from the larger context of sociality of the city. These communities are most of the times built on the network of people who share the same conditions of struggle reproducing a dynamic of isolation. This phenomenon has multiple implications for the lives of the migrants, who become viciously trapped into a social context that does not allow them to improve their status. Without any external point of reference and embedded in a foreign and unknown environment, it is very hard for them to create a rupture in the status quo, which is the source of their struggles (Dancygier 2010; Okamoto and Ebert 2016; Pugh 2018). Completely marginalized, their agency would be limited by the lack of a community that listens to them and makes their acts effective, depriving them of their rights to be humans (Arendt 1951). As a result, isolation can lead migrants to engage in reactionary acts and social contestations aimed at being heard and improving their condition. Although episodes of violent reactions sometimes occur, the presence of "social bridges" such as the Baobab community, are fundamental to reduce the migrants' need to enact their agency through orthodox acts. During my fieldwork, few times migrants have turned violently to people or cars passing by the camp, police inspections or people trying to document the "degradation" of the camp and each time the Baobab community, migrants and volunteers, acted to temper the situation and ensure safety. However, rather than in specific episodes, the role of Baobab is mostly important in its daily presence next to the migrants. In fact, the production of a community that reduces the migrants' feelings of abandonment offers a structural solution to the potential risks arising from their need to be recognized.

In many cases, the relationships between migrants and volunteers become personal with people hanging out in different environments also outside the community (photo 8). In Rome,

the relationships I built within Baobab became the center of my social life. Multiple times after gathering at the informal camp, we went to eat and drink together, some of the volunteers together with some of the migrants. Several times, I met with the migrants during the day to have a coffee and a chat, normalizing a friendship that the static and traditional culture of citizenship opposes. To the migrants I talked about my personal stories as much as they did with me. Often they shared their worries about their condition. I heard stories about their sentimental relationships and I talked through the phone to their friends and family back home. I often had dinner in the house of 4 migrants living close to me, who moved in thanks to a housing project developed by Baobab (photo 9). Therefore, there are multiple examples of relations going well beyond the simple assistance and which develop into friendships, which for the migrants is a source of redemption and liberation from their condition (photo 10). This characteristic of Baobab was clear since the beginning when G., my fellow volunteer, introduced me to the community telling me: "here we base our volunteering work on equality and we build personal relations with the migrants. We often hang out together, sharing parties, dinners and drinks. As volunteers we invite the migrants to our houses and we introduce them to our friends and families. Last month some of the guys joined my graduation and we celebrated together". Another volunteer explained me: "when S. was rejected by the reception center, as we are friends he called me to tell me about his situation and he asked me if I could host him, which I did". With the same guy, S., I went to play football with some of his friends living in a reception center and during the Covid-19 lockdown we often called to chat and kill some time.

The volunteering activities of the citizens, acting in contradiction to and in place of the state, are all activities which reduce the state of abandonment of the migrants at *Tiburtina*. Through their constant presence and work, the volunteers represent the community around the migrants that, in positive and negative situations, gives them the chance to be heard and it gives their actions the chance to have an effect. The relationship between the migrants and the volunteering citizens opens from marginalization a new space for a different conceptualization of citizenship. This is based on new norms and values beyond the conventional and dominating culture. As previously mentioned, this relationship is produced through the daily presence of the volunteers in the struggles of the migrants and it goes beyond a relationship of mere assistance but real friendship is constructed. In the case of Baobab, friendship between migrants and citizens represents a rupture with the conventional norms and values that dictate the characteristics of relationships in society, which, through formal exclusion, separates citizens from non-citizens. Baobab is therefore an example of friendship which is not found on

shared cultural and social background among participants and which sets a new scene disrupting the social order through affective ties (Foucault 1997). As such, in the case of the Baobab community, friendship becomes also a form of social activism which, contextualized, I define as a collective act of citizenship. As an alternative form of friendship, the relationship between migrants and volunteers is a form of localized resistance to social normalization, where a new subjectivity can collaboratively develop out of the hegemonic and totalizing power relations (Foucault 2019). In addition, friendship here is also a large scale activist project, which challenges the excessive normalization of relationships across society (Foucault 2019). Therefore, I argue that the challenging nature of the friendship between migrants and citizens towards the hegemonic social power relation, makes their mere relationship a collective act of citizenship. Therefore, their interaction is not only the source of acts of citizenship, but often it is the act of citizenship itself. In addition, the community of Baobab demonstrates how friendship can also be based on cultural diversity and it can disrupt the influence of social norms (Foucault 1997; Webb 2003; Lynch 2009).

Therefore, Baobab not only represents a point of reference for the migrants' hope to better their condition of struggle, but it is also a clear example of mutual integration between the non-citizens and citizens which will be describe in the third chapter. Overall, in this relationship the local resistance and the large-scale societal change is embodied and reproduced through "collective acts of citizenship" of friendship repeated by daily interactions. Friendship becomes a form of activism which sets a new scene within the status quo (Kingston 2009), according to which Italians and migrants living at *Tiburtina* should not interact and establish relationship.

Photo 8: Baobab drinks at the office

Photo 9: Moving in day Baobab's housing project

Photo 10: Celebration of A.'s (a volunteer) birthday at the camp

2.3 Space as a site of citizenship

"[…] "Things to save in case of fire" is the title of a novel by Haley Tanner…

…and we are holding strong, with all our strengths, to every harshly built space of cultural rebirth, renovated social cognition and reconsideration of that abnormal normality […]"

<div align="right">(Baobab Experience 2020)</div>

In their condition of homelessness, space clearly represents a fundamental aspect for migrants' lives (Holston 2009; Lefebvre 1996, Boonyabancha 2005; Patel et al. 2002; Appadurai 2002). Even if carrier of rights to reception centers, and to not be forgotten, being humans and thus carrier of fundamental rights such as the one to a shelter, the migrants of Baobab Experience live on the streets, next to *Tiburtina* train station. As previously described, this situation is the result of an inefficient system of reception and assistance (Accorinti & Wislocki 2016), which, also due to recent budget cuts to immigration polices introduced through the *Decreti Sicurezza* by the Ministry of Internal Affairs in 2018, leaves people excluded, "unable" to receive the high numbers of requests. During a sit-in of Baobab organized in June 2020 to demonstrate in front of the municipality, the slogan of the community recited "The street is your choice" (photo 4), referred to politicians and state institutions. In fact, abandoned to their condition, the excluded migrants gather and join together to find extremely precarious shelter solutions in the streets, occupying public spaces. In the past years, the volunteers of Baobab have constantly supported the migrants in the utilization of some public places as temporary shelters. Streets, squares, stations, bus stops became temporary houses for migrants forced into homelessness. After 5 years and more than 30 evictions from multiple locations, the migrants with the help of the volunteers, established in *Piazzale Spadolini*, on the eastern exit of the newly built *Tiburtina* train station. The choice of this location provides an interesting picture which embodies the social contradictions in which the migrants live. On one side, a modern architectural project, with a large fancy commercial complex surrounding the train station, destination of most of the high speed (and most expensive) trains travelling to Rome. Next to it, an informal camp where people live with nothing, finding shelter under some of the structures of the train station and try to daily survive in a condition of exclusion and struggle. Here, the migrants together with the help of the volunteers managed to set up an informal camp for the winter, simply made of blankets and mattresses, two tables and two trash bins. To avoid additional evictions, the volunteers of Baobab made an agreement with the municipality, which

allowed migrants to live next to the station at the condition that they have to clear up the occupied space every morning, organizing their stuff in plastic bags stacked in a corner (photo 6). Although secluded to certain areas, using public spaces the excluded migrants make claims to their citizenship, through their daily lives in the same areas to which they are marginalized (Holston 2009). "It is an insurgence that begins with the struggle for the right to have a daily life in the city worthy of a citizen's dignity" (Holston 2009). However, the migrants, being in a foreign territory, not holding a legal status and thus living in a grey legal zone, without the help and interaction with the volunteering citizens could not act as agents of change.

The support of the volunteers not only comes from being social bridges between the migrants and the institutions, but it is also fundamental in providing the migrants with some of their basic needs such as food and items necessary to build a shelter and protect during the night. Food and sleeping items are provided by a network of independent citizens all around Rome connected by Baobab Experience. The food is voluntarily cooked and delivered by the citizens, who also donate clothes and blankets. The community of Baobab manages the organization, scheduling and distribution of food and donations. These aspects are fundamental to enhance the migrants' ability to use and occupy a certain space, therefore facilitating the possibility to practice those acts of citizenship which challenge the status quo through space. In the process of constructing and defending new residential spaces, the excluded migrants living in the city, transform the city while proposing a city with a "different order of citizenship" (Holston 2009).

By living at the station, the migrants become visible and with them their struggles. *Tiburtina* train station is a very social place, where people constantly come and go and therefore, have to interact with the migrants living outside of it. Some people stop to ask questions about the situation of the migrants. Tourists ask directions to reach their destinations. Others stop to complain about the degradation of the area due to the migrants. They talk about the dangers migrants bring, the smell their excrements provoke (yes, there are no toilets), the fear of people walking next to the camp and the costs that this situation has on the public image of Rome. Twice, while I was at the camp, Italian citizens told the volunteers that it is our fault if *Tiburtina* is now in such bad condition. According to them, we contribute to the degradation of the place and of the migrants' lives by helping them. One guy used a very recurrent sentence: "I am not racist BUT, this situation should not be supported and people should not be assisted if they behave in this way", "what else could they do, abandoned as they are?" I replied. Although, the informality and the "otherness" - the unfamiliarity - of the camp generates a general feeling of discomfort in people passing by the camp (which was the case also for me

the first day I arrived) not everyone reacts negatively. Some people also try to get closer and curiously get information. Therefore, the informal camp of *Tiburtina* brings the excluded migrants in a space of social spotlight, making their condition visible to citizens. Whatever opinion the citizens build, they will always be challenged by the sight and interaction with the migrants and as such they would react in a positive or negative way. Therefore, the mere presence of the migrants on public space is a first step in changing the static conceptualization of *de-jure* citizenship. Putting everyone in front of "the other", in this case the "excluded other", challenges the idea of citizenship as homologation, whereas it fosters diversity and it shows in practice the dynamic nature of the values of belonging to a community.

The importance of space as a practice of activist citizenship was particularly evident during the coronavirus crisis. During the 3 months of lockdown, the migrants have been almost completely abandoned to their faith. The volunteers were the only citizens going daily to the camp to make sure everything was good, giving medical support, providing food and answering the several questions the migrants had about Covid-19 (photo 11). During these three months, due to the lockdown and the closure of the eastern entrance of the station, no people were walking in the streets and the police stopped patrolling the area and enforcing their rules. Consequently, the migrants of *Tiburtina* managed to expand their occupation, taking some bus stops and slowly started setting up a proper informal camp with the few resources they had (photo 12). The 120 people living at *Tiburtina* started dividing in smaller groups of people according to their nationalities within the camp. They set up multiple cooking spots with stones, where they started cooking and eating together (photo 13 & 14). This situation developed especially during the time of Ramadan, when the migrants, mainly Muslims, also set up a little space at the camp as a praying area, a mosque (photo 15). With the developing of the informal camp, where with the lockdown the migrants started to pass the whole day unable to move, Baobab started to occupy more and more public space, even obliging the public transport company to move the location of a bus stop to the other side of the station. This change is an effect of the migrants use of public space and I interpret it as an additional result of the collective acts of citizenship arising from their presence at *Tiburtina*. If excluded, their acts should not have an effect, however in this case the effect is clear, symbolizing their power to challenge the power relations which marginalize them. Therefore, by occupying public space the migrants enact de-facto citizenship with which the state institutions have to deal. The migrants challenge their exclusion and thus the de-jure conceptualization with space, but through their practices they also de-facto transform the meaning of Italian citizenship. Overall, here, although the acts are enacted mainly by the migrants, the presence of the community of

Baobab is a fundamental facilitator of these acts. In addition to the characteristics that I described before about the importance of the interaction between migrants and volunteers, the collaboration to keep the space a decent living space includes a range of activities empowering the migrants. The migrants were provided with trash bins and plastic bags by the volunteers, who then bring the trash away by car daily. Furthermore, the migrants with the help of the volunteers clean the common spaces, and as volunteers we also organized some "cleaning days" during the lockdown in which, using the cleaning material bought through economic donations, we cleaned the whole area for multiple hours (photo 16). This activity is another form of collective act of citizenship in which citizens and non-citizens collaborate together to improve the condition of those living in the streets and claim their rights through the use of public space.
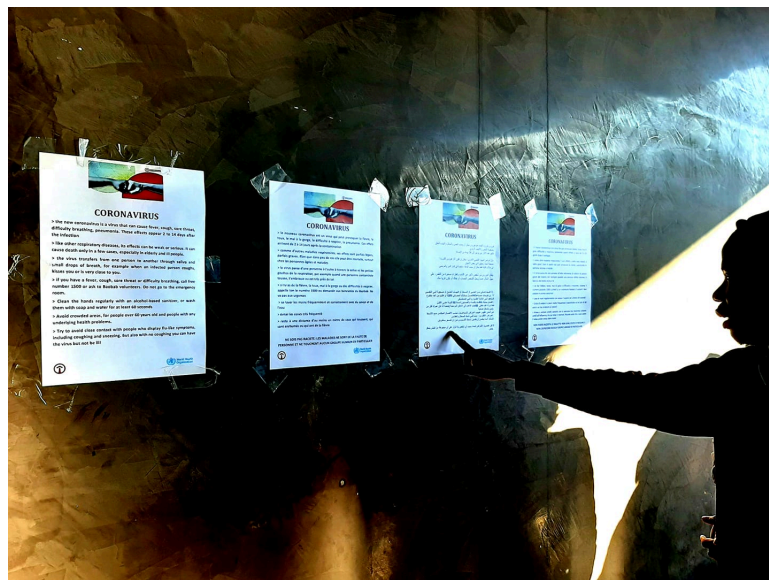

Photo 11: information at the camp on COVID-19 in 4 different languages

Photo 12: Baobab Informal camp on the public busses' stops

Photo 13: Shared dinner after cooking during the lockdown

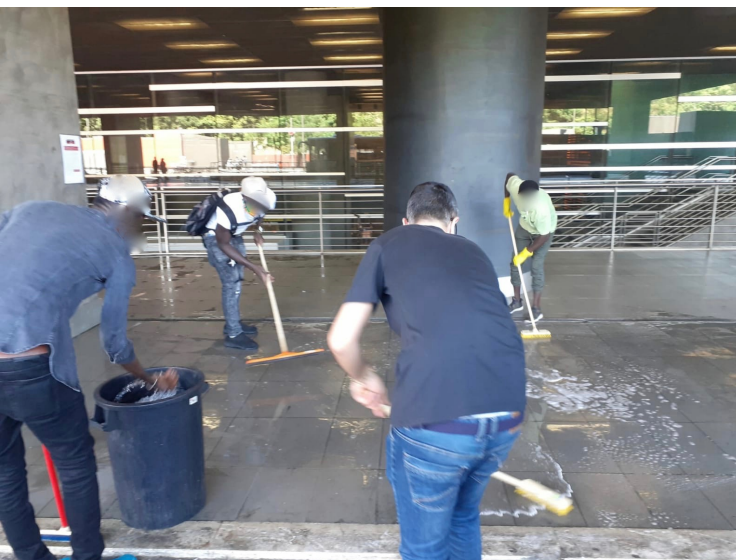*Photo 15: Informal mosque built in the camp during Ramadan*

Photo 14: Cooking spot where an Ethiopian guy was cooking

Photo 16: Baobab cleaning day at the camp after a police eviction

2.4 Language as a site of citizenship

Among multiple activities of assistance Baobab organizes informal lessons to teach the migrants Italian and English. The difficulties encountered by the migrants arriving in Italy are several, but they are all worsened by the language barrier. Although some of the newcomers are able to speak English, none of them can speak Italian. Not speaking the language of the country in which someone lives is a big limitation for anyone. In the case of the migrants coming to Italy, the limitation is even stronger as to be regularized in the country they have to go through several bureaucratic stages which require the comprehension of the Italian language. However, rejected by the reception and assistance centers, excluded from society and isolated in their migrants' communities, it is almost impossible for the migrants to learn the language. Baobab organizes language classes once a week thanks to the voluntary work of citizens, willing to contribute with their knowledge to improve the lives of the migrants. Learning the language of the community from which someone is excluded, is a first fundamental prerequisite to be able to challenge the exclusion and the community in itself. Arendt (1951) explains that one of the characteristics of people deprived of their right to have rights, therefore deprived of their humanity, is the loss of language. With the loss of language Arendt uses the word "language" with the meaning given to it by Aristoteles when defining the humans as beings able to think and talk, therefore able to regulate issues, especially public, with words and not force. Therefore, languages classes are considered by Baobab a very important instrument to empower people. It is a very important instrument to build the community through which the migrants can reduce their feeling of abandonment and exclusion. Language enhances the strength of the collective acts of citizenship, making them affective within both the community of Baobab and the wider Italian community in Rome. In the fieldwork I often observed people unable to express their needs due to communication barriers, who thus are limited in their capacity to challenge their condition. Migrants unable to communicate with the volunteers, gather in groups around the people who can speak multiple languages and can mediate within the community. Usually among these people the "mediator" who can communicate takes also a leadership role, which is symbolic of the political power of language. Here again, learning and teaching languages would not be possible without the interactions of volunteers and migrants, who, in this activity, together become de-facto activist citizens through collective acts of citizenship.

Furthermore, in addition to the importance of the educational matter, the language classes are always a very interesting place of exchange and community building. Here, people

meet and talk having the chance to know each other and learn from each other. The weekly classes become a site for building relationships that go beyond simple assistance, but which strengthen the bond and reduce the difference between the different actors of the community. In addition, a common language is an important prerequisite for the community of Baobab to develop and start a process of mutual integration. Again, language is thus a way in which migrants can feel redemption and recognized which is valuable when building new forms of belonging. In the following chapter, I will explore the formation of new values of belonging through negotiation within the community of Baobab as an alternative practice of integration from the hegemonic one. I will analyze different aspects of integration, how this takes place in the community of Baobab and how also integration can be considered a collective act of citizenship.

Photo 17: Baobab's language class at Bar Mania

Prelude

"If you join, it will be a "humanity-bath""

(Baobab Experience 2018)

Photo 18: "If you join, it will be a humanity-bath". A banner at the entrance of Baobab Experience's informal camp

Chapter 3

Integration: the negotiation of values of belonging within the Baobab Community

In the previous chapters I argued that the condition of the migrants living at *Tiburtina* train station is a condition of de-jure exclusion from the political community in which they live. Although excluded, the migrants are not completely passive towards their condition, but they are still empowered of their agency through the community of Baobab Experience. The collaborative interaction between citizens and non-citizens allows the migrants to become "activist citizens" and to challenge the power relations establishing their exclusion and "social location". However, the process of migrants' subjectification through citizenship claim making entails a combination of "self-making" and "being made" attitudes towards their condition, where the values of belonging are not simply challenged but negotiated (Ong 1996). Therefore, by engaging in this two-sided process, the community of Baobab engages into politics of belonging, in which the definition of the boundaries of who belongs to the political community and who doesn't are constantly contested and negotiated. Although this is considered by many a natural process highlighting the dynamic nature of belonging (Yuval-Davis 2009), in this chapter I will argue that citizenship and thus the values of belonging cannot be static and that the "collective acts of citizenship" are also performative acts of integration.

3.1   The values of belonging and social location of the migrants

Belonging is an enduring dynamic process of self-identification and/or identification by others, which defines social locations in which individuals are categorized according to a complex interplay of power relations within society (Yuval-Davis 2009). The social categories or locations are groups of people defined by their positionalities within society which are constantly contested and changed through politics of belonging (Yuval-Davis 2009). Although the condition of migrants is the result of multiple factors and power relations, their categorization as "migrants" has a strong effect on the social location in which they are positioned and its motion in the community in which they live (Yuval-Davis 2009). As such, they struggle due to their exclusion because they do not and are not identified with those hegemonic values needed to belong to the "community of value" of the Italians in Rome, a community based on a set of normalized values with which the majority of people identify

(Anderson 2013). Due to their condition of struggle, the power relations categorizing certain individuals as migrants, usually act also to safeguard the individuals relegated to this weak social location, for example through reception centers and social assistance. However, in the case of the migrants belonging to the Baobab community, as previously shown they are rejected from formal assistance. Although they are legally entitled to it, the state abandons many migrants in a condition of isolation and struggle. In response, the migrants are forced to engage in political processes to make themselves visible and improve their social location. Through the collective acts of citizenship, the migrants are empowered to engage in these political processes, thanks to the interaction with citizens.

The community of Baobab thus represents a newly constructed social location, which allows migrants to not be invisible and challenge the power relations excluding them, through the "collective acts of citizenship". As any social location and category of signification, the community of Baobab is the result of humans' creative freedom and autonomy and its members are agents building on certain analytical and political features such as the migrants' struggle for recognition (Castoriadis 1997). The construction of this new category (i.e. Baobab) entails the construction of new shared values of belonging, with which a new identity develops through emotional investment and desire for attachment "in a process of yearning rather than positioning of identity as stable state" (Probyn 1996). Therefore, the process of identity construction is a process of change that combines processes of being and becoming (Probyn 1996; Fortier 2020). Furthermore, the process of identity and attachment construction is built on performative acts, producing and repeating certain practices, relating specific social and cultural spaces and linking individual and collective behavior (Butler 2011; Bell 1999; Fortier 2020; Yuval Devis 2006). In the second chapter I defined collective acts of citizenship as performative acts necessary to produce social change, therefore the collective acts of citizenship are also instrumental for the construction of identity and attachment within Baobab. The constant presence of the volunteers next to the migrants is the source of a series of performative acts constructing the new identity. Therefore, not only the community of Baobab gives the migrants a voice when it was taken away from them, not only empowers them politically, but it also makes them feel included in a community where migrants and citizens come together, negotiating the values of belonging and practicing an alternative form of citizenship that values people for being people and not for their nationality, race, gender, religion or any other category constructed within society. Every day during the distribution, the volunteers spend a couple of hours at the camp reproducing and strengthening the relationship with the migrants. They listen to their needs, they try to give answers to their

questions, they reassure them with a solution to their problems, or simply they share a chat or a laugh as any normal friend would do. Therefore, the relationship between migrants and Italian citizens is normalized within Baobab, where the coexistence of different cultures is practiced daily.

3.2   Negotiating values of belonging

Much of the literature has focused on the need of individuals to conform to the groups they belong to, fearing to be otherwise excluded. Often migrants, in order to avoid the risk of creating "nativist backlash" (Thomsen, Green, and Sidanius 2008; Hopkins 2015), choose to minimize or eliminate certain identity values or characteristics which differentiate them from the norm, or even choose to seek invisibility and isolation to avoid problems (Coutin 2003; Maisonneuve and Test 2007; Engbersen and Broeders 2009; Bohman 2015). In the case of Baobab, the migrants are excluded and isolated by the formal institutions; however, they are not invisible to citizens living in the city of Rome. Of course, there are different political ideas among citizens on migration, however, although rejected by some, it is through the citizens that they find hope to better their condition and give a voice to their struggles. As it often happens it is in the informal sector that migrants find the chance to develop active political strategies through the negotiation of values with local non-state actors (Polzer 2009). Negotiation of values does not mean to minimize or eliminate one's own identity to conform to another, but it means to engage in a mutual process of learning and shifting in which both communities can gain from each other (Korac 2003). This is what happens within the community of Baobab, the non-citizen migrants and the volunteering citizens interact and engage through a constant cultural exchange. Each other's differences are understood, respected and in other cases negotiated. As the migrants are trying to move into the Italian community, the efforts they have to make are larger as they have to adapt more to the new cultural environment; however, within Baobab it is never a univocal exchange. The use of languages within the camp is a clear example of the mutual cultural exchange present within Baobab. For the migrants who want to live in Italy it is very important to learn Italian in order to be well integrated, whereas for the volunteers it is not so crucial to learn the migrants' languages. However, when possible the volunteers adapt to the migrants, speaking for instance English, French or German, depending on the migrants' needs. In addition, some of the volunteers also try to learn something from the migrants' languages, for instance Fula,

Mandinka, Wolof or Arabic. During Ramadan other forms of cultural exchanges occurred, since most of the migrants started practicing the rituals imposed by the religious tradition. For instance, when started eating only between sunset and sunrise, the volunteers changed the mode of distribution of food. Instead of going to the informal camp twice a day, one in the morning for breakfast and one at night for dinner, we started to provide both breakfast and dinner in separate bags at night. This allowed the migrants to be able to eat at the time they were supposed to according to the Muslim tradition. During the same period the guys following Ramadan asked the women volunteers to not wear skirts and to not get close to the people praying, as the religion requires. These are examples on how the Italian citizens, respecting foreign values and tradition, adapt their activities to the needs of the "others" within the community of Baobab. My time spent next to the migrant in the community of Baobab was an incredibly profound learning experience. I learned a lot about African culture, hearing stories from the migrants, listening to their music, eating and cooking with them and in many other occasions and activities. Furthermore, I learned much about migration: legal matters, migration routes, countries of origins, conflicts, social challenges and political situation of many African countries, I learned about the Italian reception system, the situation in Libya and what it means to cross the Mediterranean as the migrants do. Overall, it was a constant exchange of information, on which a new identity is constructed, with shared norms and values. The interaction between migrants and volunteers is always based on the value of mutual respect and in day-to-day activities, cultural exchanges are practiced and values shared in a process of integration.

3.3 Integration

Migrants' integration is a highly debated concept in the literature and a vague and "chaotic" term (Robinson 1998). For the sake and the context of my study I will take the definition of "integration" from the minorities literature, which understands it as the process of change in which two cultures are forced to co-exist within one society (Korac 2003). From a sociological perspective, the different values of belonging and the expectations of their respect from newcomers by hosting citizens, is what shapes the opportunities and challenges that migrants encounter in the integration process in the new community they want to become part of (Yuval-Davis 2006). The literature developed two groups of explanations on how difference among the "hosts" and the "guests" shapes the negotiation over belonging and the boundaries defining who can be in and who must be out. On the one hand, the first cluster which Pugh (2017)

denoted as the *identity explanation,* is based on the ideas of belonging and intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991). On the other hand, the second cluster of scholarship, denoted by the same author as the *bargain explanation,* argues that the presence of institutional political leverages as allies, is fundamental for migrants' integration and access to citizenship (Dancygier 2010; Okamoto & Ebert 2016). Although the literature focuses on these two approaches separately, in the case of Baobab, the field has shown a combination of them which merge in what I called "collective acts of citizenship". On the one hand, the excluded migrants have to claim their rights to belong through performing their identities, practicing citizenship through their everyday lives' activities. For instance, they pray wherever they can, listen to loud music in public spaces, cook their traditional food when possible at the camp, eat in their traditional way, speak their language and so on. Because they are very distinguishable due to their dark skin, even their simple presence in the streets affects the identity dynamics. Therefore, the migrants of Baobab use their own identity to negotiate their access to rights and protection with the state and society (Caldwell et al. 2009) using Zolberg and Long's (1999) three processes of values negotiations: boundary crossing, boundary blurring, and boundary shifting between host and migrant groups" (Pugh 2018); through what I called "acts of citizenship". Therefore, the boundary is defined by who can be a citizen and who cannot, and the way the migrants' acts defines whether the acts aim at crossing, blurring or shifting the definition of citizenship. On the other hand, the migrants need the formal institution of Baobab with its citizens and network to make those acts of citizenship effective and consequently engage in what I called "collective acts of citizenship". The presence of Baobab not only makes the acts formally effective, for instance making an appeal to the municipality, communicating with the police or organizing a sit-in in front of the state's offices, but it also enables the acts to be enacted. In fact, without the support of Baobab it would be very hard for migrants to have the necessary basic needs to be able to act as citizens and they would lose their agency within society. For instance, they would have not been able to occupy the space outside the station for such a long time. Differently from what Pugh (2018) argues, who identifies NGOs as brokers between the migrants and the state, I identify Baobab Experience as an agent, who acts out of a "new" citizenship produced and practiced together with the migrants, while claiming for their rights to belong. Therefore, instead of having to univocally and totally adapt to the "community of value" (Anderson 2013), through a mutual negotiation of values the community of Baobab practice integration by creating a new scene, negotiating what is the "community of value" and "bridging social capital" (Putnam 2000).

To sum up, I interpret the role of Baobab and its approach to the assistance of migrants extremely valuable in the process of integration. The interaction between citizens and migrants, and their collective acts of citizenship functions both as an agent of local change for the migrants and larger social change to reshape the values of belonging for the transformation of the concept of citizenship. The collective acts of citizenship are thus the source of empowerment for the migrants to be able to challenge the status quo, but they are also the site for the negotiation of values of belonging and the practice of a new citizenship. According to Baobab's principles, the goals of governments and institutions should be to "protect people and not borders". The core values driving the community of Baobab are based on the idea that humans are equal and as such are all entitled to protection and human rights. Therefore, the process of integration is a two-way process, rather than a kind of medication that refugees take in order to 'fit in', imposed from top to down. Baobab is the representation of a community "bridging social capital", therefore constructing broader identities and reciprocity (Putnam 2000), through performative acts, reproduced and reinforced through daily interactions and cultural exchanges between migrants and citizens. Therefore, the collective acts of citizenship can become the source of integration, migrants' empowerment and political change.

Conclusion

Migration and citizenship are two concepts that have been widely explored by the academic literature, both independently and in relation to one another. While migration represents a highly debated societal problem accessible to anyone, the debate on citizenship is something that is generally related to a niche of people. Usually they are either academics and professionals working on this topic or people to whom citizenship represents a goal to end some sort of struggle, to improve one's life condition. Especially, in relation to this last group of people the concepts of migration and citizenship merge both on academic and societal level, and it is on this point of contact that my research focuses. The large increase of illegal migration of people to Italy in the past years has raised many question and heated a political debate on how to manage the newcomers. Despite several different and contrasting opinions, as mentioned by Ossman (2007), in whatever way we try to understand migration, it will always challenge the conceptualization of the modern citizen, an individual carrier of an exclusive sense of loyalty, identity and belonging. As such, not only does migration raise questions about the reception and management of newcomers, but also it challenges the traditional conception of citizenship.

The research and the fieldwork conducted in Rome proved that, although formally excluded from the Italian political community, many migrants are included and empowered by an informal network of actors, citizens and non-citizens, daily practicing alternative forms of citizenship. The research highlights the important role played by citizens who voluntarily recognize and support the excluded migrants, both in relation to their chances to improve their condition and to the challenge to set in motion the values of belonging which marginalize them from the Italian citizenry. The activities of Baobab as a community can all be intended as "collective acts of citizenship" challenging the power relations which force the migrants in a condition of struggle (Isin 2009). Without the presence of the citizens and their support, the migrants would be very isolated, and it would be extremely complicated for them to claim their rights to belong to the "community of value". The interaction between citizens and non-citizens (migrants and volunteers in the case of Baobab), allows the collective acts of citizenship to be enacted through the recognition of migrants' political bodies. Instead of being marginalized in a condition of "bare life", migrants are empowered by their daily interactions with the urban context in which they live and with its sovereign citizens. As such and since sovereignty does not only reside in the state, individuals living in democratic nation-states from which they are politically excluded, should not be defined as secluded in a "state of exception" but should be

considered as an "exception of the nation-state". The mere interaction between citizens and non-citizens, since it should not occur according to the inclusion/exclusion dichotomy of de-jure citizenship, is an act of citizenship in itself. It represents a performance of a new de-facto citizenship enacted through collective acts. Therefore, Baobab community is a performative community of alternative activist citizens. Through collective acts of citizenship, it challenges the exclusive hegemonic power relations and transforms Italian citizenship, negotiating and practicing new, more inclusive, values of belonging through mutual cultural exchanges.

Overall, the research acknowledges the dynamism of citizenship and the importance of its *de-facto* characteristics rather than the *de-jure* aspects. It aims at shifting the academic debate from the static categorization of social actors and the impediments to social equality, towards the performative aspects of the production of alternative practices of citizenship. It recognizes the ability of people to develop new subjectivities and new negotiated values of belonging, alternative to hegemonic ones in which they are embedded. However, many questions still remain open. The limited time and budget available for this research did not allow to conduct a thorough enough fieldwork to fully substantiate the findings observed and reported here. Therefore, more research should be conducted on the performativity of the *de-facto* citizenship in constructing new cultural values. The performativity of the collective acts of citizenship should be further empirically explored with a particular focus on the potential of relationships and mere interactions among individuals and communities to challenge the status quo. In addition, performativity should also be researched in relation to the conflicts of the newly developed communities with other sovereign citizens who support citizenship as a static idea, especially in this historical time of rise of nationalism and populism. On the other hand, more research should be also done on the transformative power of these alternative realities and in the ways they question the dominant culture. How are the new communities integrating and being integrated within the wider political community of the nation-state in which they are embedded?

Finally, this research and its findings call for the respect of people as human beings. Although aware of the complexity of migration matters, the example of Baobab must function as the acknowledgment of the right to have rights as human beings, despite all the social, civil or physical differences that characterize humanity. We are diverse and in diversity we can find ways to cooperate, with an aim to develop a more equitable and just world, with room for everyone.

Acknowledgments

This thesis is the result of a one-year journey into Academic Anthropology. I started fearful of not being fit for this kind of study and I now finish confident of the results I have achieved. Not only I am proud of the results I achieved but I really enjoyed the academic training that led me here. Therefore, I want to thank all the professors that supported me to become familiar with anthropology providing the necessary knowledge. In particular, I would like to thank my supervisor Joost Haagsma, who followed me in the development of my research, from initial stages to the fieldwork and through writing and finalizing my thesis. I am grateful also towards my fellow class mates with whom we went through a whole year of preparation and studying. A special thanks to Sarah that supported me during the fieldwork in Rome and with whom I shared the struggles of the COVID-19 lockdown. Sarah also helped me proof reading my thesis as well as Claudia and Giovanni and they have been extremely helpful in finalizing my project. My gratitude goes also to my parents who always support me in what I do and in pursuing my goals.

Finally, the biggest thank goes to the community of Baobab Experience for welcoming me inside the community and making me one of them. I would like to thank the entire community for the incredible job that they daily do. For their courage and perseverance in practicing and promoting human solidarity and for being an example and inspiration for my life.

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