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Young, unauthorised and Black – African unaccompanied minors and becoming an adult in Italy

The colour photograph Edrisa shares is of an ordinary scene (1). With his back to the camera, in the foreground of the image, he seems to be an onlooker rather than a part of the casual reverie around him in a local park. Edrisa explains that as a stranger, he is 'paying attention to the people, to the different situation, to the park and to the people, because I am not from here. By then I am seeing something else, something different'. The 'something different' is a geo-social liminality. Edrisa stands at many thresholds: somewhere between imagination and reality; and where the past, present and fray into each other. What he sees is, 'the difference in the stability between Europe and my country, Gambia. Because there is a big difference, you know, between Gambia and Europe. Between Africa in general. So, it is just amazing.'

What is also amazing, Edrisa seems to suggest, is how he came to live this 'big difference'. Born in The Gambia, he arrived in Sicily in 2017, seeking asylum as a hopeful sixteen year old. He had somehow survived a harrowing journey across the Mediterranean Sea via Libya; a migration route that has claimed countless other lives. The first author, Sarah Walker, first met Edrisa in May 2018 during ethnographic fieldwork in 'Giallo', a reception centre for unaccompanied male minors in a Northern Italian town 'Verde' (2). At the time, Edrisa was relaxed and eager to talk about the photographs he had shared as a part of the research. He was going to school and had an apprenticeship. He felt positive about the future, 'Because I know how it is like to live a bad life, or to live a life without nothing. Being nobody. Being nothing. But I wouldn't wish that for myself in the future, I wouldn't want to face something

else difficult. I just want to be somebody good, to be, like, respectable. To have a stable family, like everybody does...’.

November 2018. And Edrisa was much changed; his face furrowed by anxiety and the weariness of insomnia. The new right-wing government, elected on an overtly xenophobic platform, had recently legislated sweeping changes to the Italian immigration system through the decree law ‘Decreto-Salvini’ (3), named after Matteo Salvini, the then Interior Minister who drafted it. Edrisa's legal protection was not due to expire for a year and a half, but he was already worrying about the future. What happens next? he wondered. ‘If I don’t have job what can I do?[...]Many of us, we are in this situation. It is hard to stop thinking about it. We talk a lot about these things [...] The changes by this government impact us badly’. The policy changes that preoccupied Edrisa were amplified by increased anti-migrant media coverage and far-right populism in the run up to and following the election. Seeing and hearing this xenophobia and the promotion of a ‘Fortress Italy’ had been difficult for the young men in Giallo, the reception centre from which the following ethnographic insights are drawn. Giallo, with its education and welfare provision, was a place of refuge, offering a fresh start. ‘And they told me tomorrow you will start school, where you can learn Italian, and after 5 months [in Sardinia] I don’t speak anything’ said Emmanuel, a 19-year-old Nigerian, describing his first day in Giallo. ‘It was very good, very good. Giallo helps people a lot. [...] I started my life here’.

If Giallo was a place in which the young men could begin their lives, as part of a national migration regime it was an ambivalent space; part of a system in which residents become ‘unaccompanied minors’, subject to normative and legal constructs of childhood. We will

discuss how the imposed vulnerability of the dependent child subject can be experienced as emasculating for the young men, demanding a loss of autonomy, at odds with their migration experiences and biographies. In drawing attention to how hegemonic notions of masculinity circumscribe citizenship journeys and how adulthood is understood, we suggest that capitulation to gender normativity can be means to bolster claims to citizenship. However, acquiescing to gender norms as a pathway to citizenship is a risky strategy, foreshadowed by colonial histories of anti-Black racism, in which Black masculinity as hyper-sexualised and physical can be mobilised as a threat to social cohesion.

In describing the intimate citizenship predicaments the young Black men face, we first set out the historical and geographical specificity of the research. Following a description of the methods used, we turn to the socio-legal landscape in which Giallo is situated. We will further unpick the ambivalent moral temporality of this landscape in which the unaccompanied child who survives migration is temporarily entitled to conditional hospitality and care until the threshold into adulthood is crossed (see also Sirriyeh, 2018; 2020). We understand a 'migration regime' as explained by Tsianos and Karakayali (2010); as a 'space of negotiating practices' which 'makes it possible to understand regulations of migration as condensations of social actions instead of taking regulations for granted in their stated aims'. Such understanding recognises the agency of the precariously mobile (p.375–6).

An aim of the research was to interrogate the workings of idealised conceptions of childhood, 'home', belonging and deservingness that underpin transitions to 'adulthood' and citizenship. The child migrant by virtue of their child status, under child protection

legislation, must be protected within the 'home' of the host state. Yet, when the young people turn 18 and are considered adults—with the potential risk of slipping into irregularity—the obligation of hospitality can be dramatically ruptured. The biographical transition to adulthood thus offered a unique empirical opportunity to examine the ambivalent and racialised tension between hospitality and hostility (Derrida, 2001: 14), as the (uninvited) child guest crosses the threshold into being an unwanted 'invader' within the hosting state. Race and racism in these circumstances we suggest, are sutured into the 'hostipitality' (Derrida, 2000) experienced by the young men, in which age is not necessarily protective.

Colonial histories and the Black Mediterranean

Political and media discourses typically frame unauthorised migrants like Edrisa and Emmanuel as problems. Or, worse still as 'insects, swarms, vectors of disease' (Sharpe, 2016: 15). We trouble and invert this framing, locating Europe's 'migrant crisis' within colonial histories and the bracing formulation of what Cedric Robinson (2007: xii) has termed 'racial regimes'. Racial regimes for Robinson are 'constructed social systems in which race is proposed as a justification for the relations of power' (p.xii). Rather than being tied to Europe, racial regimes are extensive. It was striking that several of the young men described accretions of racialisation as they journeyed to Libya, eventually crossing the Mediterranean Sea to southern Italy. Discursive associations with slavery were common in their stories. Amadou, an eighteen-year old Gambian, described how '[...] since I left my country. I lose the sense of liberty. I do what they tell me to do, I move when they tell me to move, I sleep like a slave, like an animal. [...] This is the way that people treated me. Even in Sicily'. Seventeen-year old Nigerian Tayo, had witnessed a vicious police crackdown in

Sabratha in the Zawiya District of Libya where he was working, 'Every time when they see Black outside, they just catch Black'. The unrelenting anti-Black violence and death was a shock that would over time become naturalised. 'When I was in my country, I never saw a dead body, but in Libya it got to a time that I passed a dead body as if I am just passing a piece of dirt on the street. [...] So, so, common....'. McMahon and Sigona (2020: 19) have offered compelling evidence as to why proximity to death in migration *before* crossing the sea is not so much a deterrent, but rather impels dangerous risk-taking. That this should be so condenses the forceful argument made by Mbembe (2019) of the ongoingness of a necro-normalcy for those of African descent, originating in the barracoons and slave ships. For Christina Sharpe (2016:22), there is urgency in accounting for the enduring forces that make Black death a quotidian reality and in attesting to 'modalities of Black life lived in, as, under and despite Black death.'

And the young men do live 'despite Black death'. But even as they transmigrate across distances of region, nation and culture within Africa, colonial legacies and racial regimes are a continuity. The anti-Black violence in Libya (an Italian colony from 1910-1947), described by several research participants, is a regime of racialisation shaped by postcolonial histories in which white and Arab privilege jostle in the cultural edifice of postcoloniality. As Pierre acknowledges, whilst the explicitly racist scholarship of the past that 'attempted to link levels of civilization to skin colour, and connected North African advanced civilization to the area's proximity to, and biocultural influence by, Europe' has largely been discredited, these inflections continue to inform discursive fabulations of Africa (2013: 548). 'Arabness' in several North African countries, remains synonymous with racial superiority, dehumanising Blackness (Fábos, 2012).

Recognising the longevity of racial regimes is a defining feature of scholarship on the Black Mediterranean (Di Maio, 2012). Just as the expulsion and enslavement that characterised the 'Black Atlantic' were crucial to modern capitalism, Di Maio contends that colonialism and Northern paradigms of progress (Gilroy, 1993), enmesh contemporary migration with Europe's longstanding geopolitical interests in Africa. As such, the Mediterranean Sea is understood as a site of dehumaning that simultaneously obscures the extents of its violence (Di Maio, 2012: 153). For SA Smythe (2018: 8), the lens of the Black Mediterranean 'lends historical consciousness to the 'crisis of migration' and the politics of belonging'.

We thus understand Europe's 'migration crisis' as rooted/routed in deep histories of colonial exploitation that infuse 'the politics of belonging' that Smythe evokes. These histories are marked by the 'double exploitation' (Nkrumah, 1970: 27) of race and class asymmetries and the effects of the more recent structural adjustment programmes of the 1970s and 1980s (see Rodney, 1972) that imposed crushing debt on African nations. Just as such geopolitical histories frame contemporary migrations across the Mediterranean, they have also been understood as informing the reinvention of Italianness (Proglio: 2016 in Proglio, 2018: 411; Agbamu, 2019); forces that far-right politicians such as Matteo Salvini but also the current ruling Democratic Party have mobilised.

We approach the reverberations between hospitality and hostility that the young men encounter, via the Derridean (2000) neologism of 'hostipitality'. Hostipitality recognises situations and events of hostility as more than the antithesis or absence of hospitality—the latter understood 'as a vital receptivity to the needs of an Other' (Dikeç, Clark and Barnett,

2009: 11)—but as also having the capacity to coexist, overlap and supplement it. Writing with Ken Plummer’s theorisation of intimate citizenship (2003), we think of the category of the ‘unaccompanied minor’ as being constituted through the colonial and racial logics that shape migration trajectories and inform how the biographical transition to adulthood of child migrants has become a public trouble in Italy. We see struggles for intimate citizenship in how the young men try to find and establish some existential security amid the shifting tensions and hyper-regulation of hospitality. We understand this embodied and existential wayfaring as a searching for what Smythe terms ‘Black belonging’, a self-definition without the erasures demanded by cultural assimilation and colonial amnesia and which exceeds the rubric of legal citizenship (Smythe, 2019: 3). Admittedly, such recalcitrance is not unproblematic or straightforwardly anti-hegemonic. The search for Black belonging can also be narrated alongside aspirations to a muscular manhood that shores up gender inequalities and inadvertently stokes fears about the social menace of young Black men.

Methods

The research we discuss is based on eight months’ of ethnographic participant/observation (between May 2017 and December 2018) carried out by the first author, in Giallo (4). Giallo is part of the heterogeneous national asylum reception system. It hosts 28 young men in its main reception centre, with additional residents housed in its four supported living apartments for those who have reached sufficient independence. Giallo also provides integration support, including language classes and vocational courses such as metalwork, engineering and carpentry. Ensuring a transition to future employment is a key aim of the centre. However, art and culture, such as trips to Verde’s modern art museum, or collaborations with local musicians are also integral to Giallo’s practices.

The longer *in-situ* temporal frame of the research and working with the same participants over time is methodologically significant. When topic threat is political, sustained contact has been found to help participants disclose difficult experiences and opinions (Khosravi, 2009; Lee, 1993). Additionally, the ethnographic method allowed for the documenting of the biographical transition to adulthood, as well as enabling insights into how participants' accounts and research interactions can change as trust develops (Khosravi, 2009).

Methodologically, we follow Plummer's (2001: 248) imperative to engage everyday stories that reveal how individuals make choices and decisions and deal with problems and dilemmas. We explore the latter through new and evolving 'mediated intimacies' (Attwood *et al.*, 2017), as they emerge in narratives, photographs, drawings, digital networks and music; all forms of cultural expression encouraged by the reception centre and incorporated into the Centre's core activities. These mediated intimacies in the research were marked by a Duboisian (1903/ 1973: 215) double-consciousness in which the participants' spoken and visual narratives were alert to how they were perceived and measured 'by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity'. And yet, their stories and image-making also convey a bricolage of newfound knowledge and perspectives, along with biographical and socio-political reflections, at times speaking back to nationalist and racist exclusions.

Following a scoping focus group with 5 young men, repeat and in-depth qualitative interviews were carried out in Italian and English, some of which according to the participants' choices, included photo elicitation and artwork. The interview participants were 12 young African young men (6 Gambians, 4 Nigerians, 1 Ghanaian and 1 Somalian)

housed in Giallo (5). Previous research (Bagnoli, 2004, 2009) has suggested that young people prefer more creative methods of participating in research, rather than interviews alone.

Visual methods have also been found to be beneficial when researching 'sensitive' topics, understood broadly as those that entail topic threat for both participants and researchers (Hugman *et al.*, 2011; Lee, 1993). What constitutes a topic sensitive is also context dependent, inhering 'less in the specific topic and more in the relationship between that topic and the social context...' (Lee, 1993: 5). We understand the sensitivity of the topic in this study as being shaped by difficult experiences of migration, mistrust among young people in disclosing their migration stories (van Os *et al.*, 2018), increasing racist and xenophobic political rhetoric in Italy and social differences between the participants and the researcher (a white British woman), especially those asymmetries of citizenship security.

A related research concern was not replicating the enforced storytelling imposed by migration regimes, which demand a certain emotional performativity—especially in narrating trauma—for accounts to be accepted as authentic (Shumam and Bohmer, 2014). As Charles, a 17 year-old Nigerian asserted in the focus group, it is important to give a 'good' story to tell migration authorities:

[...] when you go to the [Territorial Asylum] Commission and give them your story, then later they can give you the document. But not for everyone. [...] It's luck. [...] Because if you are in a very difficult situation and you have a better story, I think you can get document for positive, but if the story is not so good can get the negative

As others also believed, their right to stay in Italy depended upon 'luck' and on the contingencies of how their migration story was evaluated. Citizenship fate they rationalised is defined by telling the 'right' story. A situation recognised by Watters and Fassin who have pointed out how in immigration systems, encounters with state professionals offer 'the undocumented foreigner or asylum seeker certain prescribed parameters of legitimacy that influence the contours of the story and are in turn constitutive in the formation of social identities' (2001: 23).

The study's methodology was also designed to recognise how trauma can be difficult, if not impossible, to put into words. Amadou, for example, has always drawn. When he talked about his drawings, the images shaped the flow of conversation, reversing conventional interview dynamics. One of his drawings (figure 1) depicted young men carrying a boat to the sea in Libya. He described how 'It was night, this represents the storm, and this is us... holding the boat [...] This is the perfect picture of ... illegal immigrants [laughs]. So, they use us in everything. We carry the boat. With the machines and everything fixed. So heavy, so difficult. You have to drag it to the sea.'

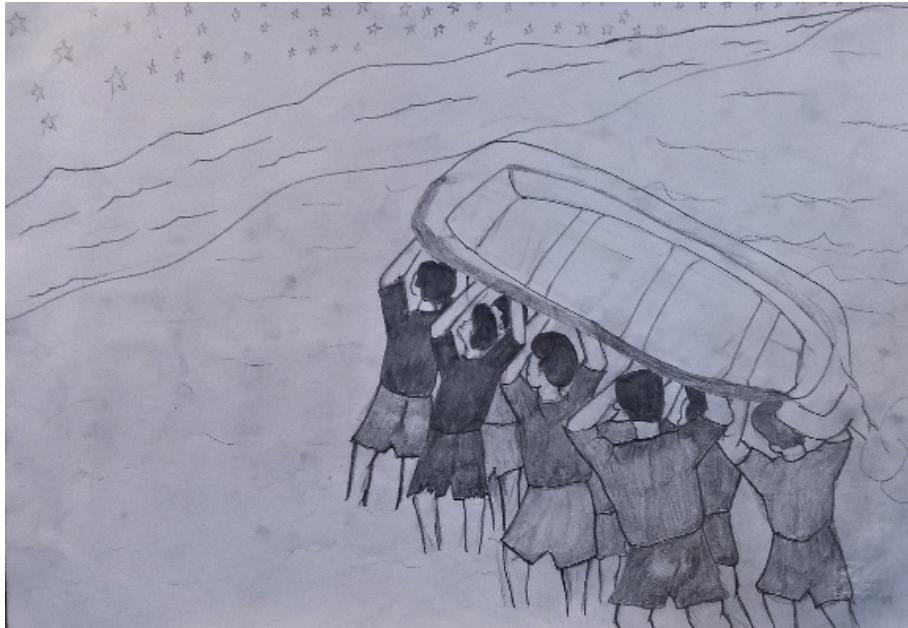


Figure 1: The perfect picture, Amadou

John Berger (Berger and Mohr, 1982/1995) was convinced of the vital differences between drawings and photographs. Photographs, for Berger, are excised quotations of a reality, while a drawing is a translation; each belongs to and constitutes a different relationship to experienced time. Drawings, we might say, materialise in their making and form, consciousness and subjectivity in process. So while Edrissa's photograph is able to tell 'about' him at a particular time in his life, Amadou's drawing, as Berger would understand it, is quite literally 'of' him, producing 'the time of its own making...the living time of what it portrays.' (Berger and Mohr, 1982/1995: 93). Indeed, the conversation between the first author and Amadou, incited by the drawing, ranged across the lived time of the image, from the extraction of the young men's labour throughout their migration journeys to the engulfing threat of death.

We interpret the 'perfection' of Amadou's picture as illustrating both the everyday lethal efficiency of smugglers where control and exploitation are totalising, '*they use us in everything*' and the consequences of European policies of abandonment that have narrowed legal migration channels. The conversation produced by the drawing also demonstrates how social differences and various capillaries of power in research can manifest through the intimate. Intimating, as Berlant (1998) reminds us, does not depend on explanation or a saying out loud. To 'intimate' Berlant (1998: 282) writes, 'is to communicate with the barest of signs and gestures'. In this case, Amadou's image and the conversation it elicited, quite literally drew out white Western privilege as lying in a distancing from violent death. So when Sarah naively asked if they had life jackets, Amadou snorted derisively, 'This is not a mission to save you!'.

Matters of intimate citizenship are thus very much a part of social research methods. And, not just in the sense that some methods are more hospitable to the telling of marginalised stories. What we have in mind is the differing capacity of methods to allow for the registering of diverse dis/continuities of experience. In other words, relations between the public and private elicited in the research are constituted by methodological choices, technologies and relationships that must be kept in mind.

Amadou's drawings, along with those of other young men in Giallo, adorned the Italian language classroom in the centre, where Maria teaches Italian, using what she calls a method of 'forgetting': of expressing and learning through artistic and unconscious means, rather than purely grammatically. Art became an entry point of communication and melting into the rhythm and flow of Giallo. Maria's warmth and the relationships made through

visual media were valued by residents, who referred to her as 'like a second mother'. The reciprocated warmth was a contrast to the hostility they had met before reaching Verde. 'So, in Sicily people run away [from you]' Amadou explained, 'and then you come here, and people are hugging you, saying nice words. I was like 'wow – oh! it is true! There are nice people around!'

Experiences of anti-Black racism had also made some of the research participants guarded about the hospitality of the reception centre. When he first arrived in Verde, Amadou found it hard to socialise with others, 'because everybody is white'. His experiences in Libya and in southern Italy had also made him sceptical of the centre's Black workers. When asked about trusting Thomas, a Nigerian-Italian keyworker, he replied amused, 'No, you know - Thomas! He is with the whites!! (...). Elaborating in a narrative highly evocative of Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (2000):

for me he would be like the worst one! [...] that is the same thing in Libya. And even in Sicily [...] Because even the black person is trying to please the white by doing wicked things to his own kind [...] to save themselves. You have so, so many people here, they are living that same self-hatred. 'Yeah, yeah, I'm a black and proud of it', blah, blah, blah. But the reality is you look in the mirror and it is like you are living in the mask, because that is the way they want you to feel.

As we move on to discuss the particular social circumstances that the young people encounter in Italy, it is important to recognise that upon crossing the Mediterranean, these young men simultaneously cross a socio-legal territory, becoming 'unaccompanied minors'. They also confront Italian constructions of Blackness; a racial taxonomy imbued with

colonial tropes (Giuliani and Lombardi-Diop, 2013). These shifting flows of othering circumscribe the various border-crossings, revealing the geo-social politics of migration and racism that the young men face in diverse locations.

The socio-legal landscape

The number of young people migrating to Europe alone, without a parent or care giver, has increased (Menjívar and Perreira, 2019). These journeys are highly gendered: over 90% of unaccompanied minors in Italy are male. However, child migration is not new. Rather, as Fass (2005) reminds us, children were integral to labour migration during the colonial era. It is only more recently that 'age has become a sorting device by which we allocate sympathy and parcel out favor [sic]' (Fass, 2005: 939), producing the biographical border that divides protection and deportation (Mai, 2014). As a result, once the child transitions to an adult, the limited rights they are accorded as children, including the right to stay in the host country, may be lost (FRA, 2012).

Italy, however, at least in theory, had a more protective system for unaccompanied children than other EU states. Under Law 47/2017 (the Zampa Law), unaccompanied minors are granted additional support to achieve independence beyond childhood. In practice, such support depends upon the financial situation of the municipality (Rozzi, 2018). Because Verde implemented the Zampa Law, the young men in Giallo were able to benefit from post-eighteen support. At the time of the fieldwork, most had been granted humanitarian protection; a two-year status that superseded the border of childhood. Importantly, then, unlike in other EU states, these young men did not lose their status and rights as children upon turning eighteen.

Nonetheless, even the (limited) protective space provided for in some centres such as Giallo, was overturned by Salvini's coalition government (6). Under the 'Decreto Salvini', which came into force on October 5th and was then converted, with amendments, into Law no. 132 of 1 December 2018, the asylum reception system was replaced with a more restrictive system. Reception support is now available to adults only after international protection has been granted. Unaccompanied minors have immediate access.

'Humanitarian protection' was abolished. The new form of 'special protection', which replaced it, provides protection for one year only for those who can prove themselves to be sufficiently 'vulnerable'; a category that has become synonymous with minors. This shift is a stark example of how the conditionality of hospitality is temporalised within the European migration regime, the effects of which can be further intensified through racism.

Finding a hospitable space and becoming a 'man'

The young men in Giallo survived their migration journeys by using virtual and physical spaces— social media platforms and in physical spaces, such as internet cafes—to share and exchange knowledge. These hubs helped them to reach and create new realities and spaces of hospitality, in what Papadopoulos and Tsianos (2013: 190-192) describe as 'the gift economy of migration'; in effect a 'mobile commons'. Their networks stretched across Italy and Africa, extending to those who have moved to other European countries, where the networks have proved to be a vital source of assistance (Allsopp *et al.*, 2014; Rosen *et al.*, 2019; Wells, 2011). As a repertoire of survival strategies and knowledge hubs (Menjívar and Perreira, 2019), individuals exchange information about safe places to stay, what support is available and problems faced, including how to avoid racism. The young men shared experiences of exclusion and recommendations of where fellow Black migrants can be

‘opportuned’, as Emmanuel put it; meaning finding work and facing less racism. In this way, they were able to mobilise the temporary freedoms of their ‘minor’ status to move from hostile areas in the south of Italy to find the more convivial spaces of Giallo, where they could access post-eighteen support. As adults, under domestic law they would lose this right to support if they were to leave the reception centre (7). The legislative changes may not have directly impacted them, but the wider climate, the ‘total climate’ of anti-Blackness did (Sharpe, 2016). They were forced to ‘weather’ the changes (Sharpe, 2016; see also Neimanis and Hamilton, 2018: 81).

The emotional impact on the young men was palpable (see also Chavez *et al.* 2019). Edrisa’s body language became more closed-down and tight, exuding stress. Amadou was so upset, he had trouble eating and had lost weight. In their conversations, the very word ‘Salvini’ was an intimation in Berlant’s (1998) sense of the term, a shorthand for fear and uncertainty. Within the racial landscape of Italy where young Black men are at best unwanted and at worst a threat, they seemed to find some reassurance in reiterating dominant narratives that conflate hegemonic masculinity with responsible citizenship.

Justice had made it to Italy from Nigeria as a sixteen-year old. At eighteen, he recognised, ‘Yeah, I am an adult now. Nobody will tell me how to [...]when I am to sleep, when I am to wake up, nothing. [...] very soon I will feel like a full man.’ What does being ‘full man’ mean?

He replied:

now I am not a full man. Because ...[clears throat, pauses] [...] being a man means if you are able to take care of yourself, like paying tax, doing things that other men are doing. So, like this you can become a man.

Although Justice was the only one to read masculinity into adulthood so explicitly, others narrated hegemonic and heteronormative scripts of being able to 'take care of yourself', interlaced with tropes of the male breadwinner. It is important to recognise that young migrant masculinities are heterogenous; a contingent enmeshing of different socio-economic structures and forces, deriving from past and present experiences (Allsopp, 2017; Griffiths, 2015; Hertz, 2018). Nonetheless, the connotations between masculinity and employment for these young men remained strong, if fluid and paradoxical (see Griffiths, 2015: 475).

Take Justice's reference to paying tax, even though tax evasion is widespread in Italy. For him, it is something 'other men' do. His reasoning chimes with Bridget Anderson's (2013) argument that the migrant must become an 'ideal' or 'good' citizen, doing what actual citizens may not do. For young men like Justice, paying taxes is necessary for residency (where an income is not taxable in Italy, it is not considered 'work' and hence, not valid for residency). Justice takes on the language of the host (Derrida, 2005; Derrida and Dufourmantelle, 2000), interweaving it with his own need for autonomy, which is very much tied to employment. Work then is narrated as central to adulthood and masculinity, reinforcing notions of the 'good' neoliberal subject (Wetherell and Edley, 1999).

There is still a limited literature within migration scholarship on migrant masculinities, particularly in relation to race (however see Allsopp, 2017; Farahani, 2012; Farahani and Thapar-Björkert, 2020; Suerbaum, 2018; Turner, 2019). The young men's narratives suggest how hegemonic masculinity cannot be cordoned off from other western citizenship ideals, 'such as demonstrating individuality and autonomy from social forces' (Wetherell and Edley,

1999: 35). This normativity amplified by the migration regime and the focus on adult independence (*autonomia*), as exemplified by work, was also stressed in team meetings in Giallo.

The freedom of being able to work as an adult was a common concern for all the research participants. Tayo, a seventeen-year old Nigerian was looking forward to turning eighteen because, 'Over 18 means you get freedom. You can do what you want. Cannot be free to go where you want as a minor. Also, you can work.' For Edrisa, the 'minor' is:

Somebody under 18. So, like a migrant under 18 years is to be protected by people. To be taken care of by people because he is underage, but if you are over 18 you will be like adult you will be more free to do what you want. [...] when you are underage you always learn and go to school.

But when you are over 18 you just go to work, you will be more free.

When asked if this is the same in The Gambia, Edrisa replied, no, kissing his teeth, then clarified 'for the law?', highlighting the prescriptive legal basis of the 'minor' in Italy/Europe, of which they are acutely aware. A kind of trade off is implied: the minor is 'taken care of' by adults; once you are 'an adult' you can be 'more free' and work. We should not lose sight of the geo-cultural specificity of the legal construct of the minor, as these young men had all worked previously in their home country, in Libya, as well as in Italy to finance their move north to Verde from the reception centres in the South, where they were held in 'nontime', unable to work or study. Subordination to such a regime, against a history of child labour was then narrated as both demeaning and emasculating.

Prior to turning eighteen the young people are not considered 'men' by the migration regime, but passive '*bambini*' (small children), as they often parodied themselves. In becoming adults, and shedding their subjugation to and dependence on the state they are able to reclaim some independence against the constraints imposed upon them by the child status; a subject position in this context which is also racialised. Such reframing can be a means to re-masculinise themselves. The child as a subject in need of assistance within the reception system is at odds with notions of hegemonic masculinity (Allsopp, 2017; Turner, 2019) and the young men's own proven capabilities and sense of agency demonstrated throughout their migrations. As Allsopp (2017) has shown, the migration regime enforces a problematic 'binary portrait of masculinity' whereby the 'vulnerable' child, must upon turning eighteen then internalise and enact traits of the 'strong young male' stereotype which fails to recognise the multiplicities and intersectionalities of their identities. The shift from child to man within the racialised migration regime remains fraught.

From child to (Black) man – shifting borders of belonging

What happens when the (Black) male child grows up? In the crossing of the legal threshold of childhood for these 'minors', it is possible to grasp how some strangers are stranger than others (Ahmed, 2000), and indeed may remain so, particularly through the persistent naturalisation of 'whiteness' as Europeanness (Agbamu, 2019; El Tayeb, 1999; El-Tayeb, 2011; Hawthorne, 2017; Proglia, 2018; Smythe, 2019). This is, in part, what Tudor (2018:1064) refers to as a process of 'migratisation': 'as performative practice that repeatedly re-stages a sending-off to an elsewhere', working through racialisation. Europeanness as Blackness is then an impossibility (El-Tayeb, 2011). Regardless of their citizenship status and efforts to be 'good' Italian citizens, the young men remain othered by

‘the logics of colonialism...embedded in contemporary Italian national identity’ (Smythe, 2019: 12).

Nonetheless, through the legal statutes that transcend the threshold of childhood and post-eighteen support, the space within Giallo is conducive to a more enduring hospitality (see Dikeç *et al.*, 2009). Many of those in Giallo were able to access vocational training courses and apprenticeships, which gave them a better chance of finding employment in the future, as well as maintaining an on-going legal status. At the same time, citizenship and residency rights are not a protection from racism. What remains undecided is the extent to which the young men’s awareness of the workings racial regimes might open up questioning, or even refusal, of the interpellations of the hegemonic masculinities that are stitched into citizenship logics.

Concluding thoughts

The narrative of the European postnational state as a ‘hospitable’ protector has been placed under duress by the contemporary ‘refugee crisis’ (Stierl, 2020). As numerous scholars have pointed out, the narrative of the European Union and its ‘hospitable’ policies is undone by the deaths at sea and the devastating failure among member states to ‘host’ refugees (Darling, 2014; Friese, 2009; Germann Molz and Gibson, 2016; Rosello, 2001; Rozakou, 2012).

Derrida is among those who have drawn attention to the inherent ‘temporal contradiction’ of hospitality ‘such that the experience cannot last’; it is performed only ‘in the imminence of what is “about to happen” and can only last an instant’ (2000: 8). We suggest that this

temporal contradiction is illuminated in migration regimes at the child/adult threshold. If deservingness is contingent upon children's innocence, as McLaughlin (2018: 1762) believes, and thus the condition upon which hospitality is granted, when the boundary of adulthood draws near, young people face a loss of hospitality, support and rights. As we have shown, racism is a continuity of hostility across biographical trajectories and as such, complexifies how we might understand socio-legal hospitality as an enclosed, singular temporality.

The stories of the young Black men in *Giallo*, contextualised within histories of the Black Mediterranean, show the many material, performative and affective layers of their demands for citizenship and recognition. These counter narratives reveal slow, dispersed violations, intensified by national policies such as the legislative changes brought in by the far-right coalition government. The young men's stories of living through these changes suggest that having legal status is necessary, but not sufficient, for belonging. As Anderson (2013) argues, belonging is a far more extensive process than its legal framing suggests. For instance, Edrisa's immigration status has not changed; and yet, following the legislative changes, his deportability (de Genova, 2002)—or perception of deportability—had increased. The grounds of his belonging were plunged into question. The new law intensified the vulnerabilities and insecurity of the young men as they transitioned to adulthood. So too does racism and the moral constructs of humanity and deservingness at the heart of Italy's, and Europe's, migration regimes.

The profoundly brutalising impact of racism on the young men was all too apparent. As the Black boy-child grows up, racist discourses can become more tangible. Yet, there are also spaces of resistance, both intimate and public, in which the hostility so embedded

within European migration regimes is held-off and contested. In their personal—intuitive and conscious—understanding of the demands of legal citizenship, the young men become attuned to the demands of the performativity of the deserving would-be Italian citizen. As Hakli, Pascuccio and Kailio's (2017) study of asylum seekers in Cairo suggests, such performativity should not be mistaken for a conniving exploitation of refugee laws and aid: 'Rather, it is about the empowering distance between one's sense of self and the identity of the refugee forcefully proposed to the asylum seekers to adopt and adjust to'. For Hakli and colleagues, such performativity, '...is also about retaining humanity in circumstances that are oppressive and humiliating, as people are expected to have their lives at stake in a struggle where survival is the only acceptable horizon of hope.' (2017: 117-118).

Within the socio-legal landscape of Italy, reception centres like Giallo we suggest, can provide a means for residents to hold on to their humanity, even while the centre's tethering to the migration system offers them an ambivalent social legibility. Amidst the pre-eminence of xenophobia and racism in Italy, Smythe's (2019) Black belonging can feel a long way off for these young men. But their 'new lives' are also beginning.

In acknowledging the tensions and paradoxes of hospitality, we find affinity with those scholars who believe that hospitality has greater, unexplored ethical and political potential. Hospitality, they suggest, can transcend the long shadows cast by its root meanings, if we disturb the guest/host binary (Berg and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2018; Dikeç *et al.*, 2009; Friese, 2009; Germann Molz and Gibson, 2016). Dikeç, Clark and Barnett (2009: 11) hold that it is 'the idea of a 'visitation' rather than an 'invitation'—that constitutes hospitality as a temporization: not just an event that takes place *in* time, but one that actually generates or

gives time.' (original emphasis). For Berg and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2018: 3), 'thinking about hospitality and hostility as embodied and enacted practices grounded in particular spatio-temporal contexts' can move us beyond fatalistic notions of hostipitality. For us, the hospitality of reception centres like Giallo offer one such spatio-temporal context, but it is a hospitality unfinished; continually destabilised and put into question by the layered histories of racism and anti-migrant hostility that stalk the young men.

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Notes

1. All names and places are pseudonyms.
2. As the category of 'unaccompanied minor' has legal and normative consequences, we use this term where it represents these institutional frames. The UNHCR and UNICEF (2014: 22) consider unaccompanied children to be any person under the age of eighteen who is outside his or her country of origin or habitual residence and who has been separated from both parents and other relatives and who is not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for doing so. Otherwise, we use 'young men', as the majority were aged sixteen and over.
3. The Decreto-Salvini was effectively overturned and 'became the past' as leader of the PD Nicola Zingaretti put it, on 5/10/2020 as the Italian government voted in a

new Immigration decree (no longer with the word 'security' in the title) which reinstates the protection system for asylum seekers and brings back the status of humanitarian protection, now called 'special protection'

4. Analysis was supported by NVivo 11, with thematic analysis supplemented by field notes. Ethical approval was gained through Goldsmiths University.
5. Accessing young women migrants was not possible primarily because social care institutions are more protective of young women (Wernesjö, 2020), leading to several procedural barriers in negotiating and obtaining access.
6. This coalition collapsed in September 2019, replaced by a coalition between M5 and the centre-left Democratic Party (PD), at the time of writing, still in government.
7. Legislated by article 13 of Italian Law n. 142/2015 deriving from article 20 of EU Directive 2013/33/EU

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