

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the issues of borders and migrants by closely analysing the artwork *Centro di Permanenza Temporanea* (Centre for Temporary Permanence) [2007] by Albanian-born artist Adrian Paci. *CPT* is a short video filmed in San José, California, not far from the US – Mexico border, which is fraught with issues of migrant influx. The work makes a pointed reference to institutions in Italy whose function is to detain illegal migrants and determine whether they remain in Italian territory or face expulsion. Paci's video subtly yet powerfully denounces the ongoing treatment of specific groups of migrants at troubled borders and skilfully films near the US – Mexico border in California. This paper aims to explore how *CPT* illustrates, in parallel scenarios, the ongoing discriminatory process against migrants with 'undesirable' provenances.

keywords

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Adrian Paci and Immigration to Italy

Centro di Permanenza Temporanea

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Introduction

On the 28th of April 2017, the Triennale Museum in Milan inaugurated the exhibition *The Restless Earth* (Fondazione Nicola Trussardi 2017). Organised conjointly with the Trussardi Foundation, it showed works by over sixty artists on the theme of migration and the present refugee crisis. The title of the show, borrowed from a collection of poems written by the Caribbean writer, Édouard Glissant, reflected on different perspectives regarding transnational migration, voyage, refugees, multiculturalism, host countries, integration, human rights, and acceptance. The artists, who came from a wide variety of backgrounds and perspectives, offered their insights concerning these delicate themes. Among them, one artwork by Albanian-born but naturalised Italian artist, Adrian Paci, born on the 28th of January 1969, was featured (Morandi 2020). His video entitled *Centro di Permanenza Temporanea* (Centre for Temporary Permanence) drew attention to the condition of undocumented migrants detained in these prison-like structures in Italy while awaiting their fate.

Scope of the Article

This article analyses an artwork by Adrian Paci, who currently resides in Milan, Italy, following his departure from his home country in 1997 (Marie and Marta 2013: 56).

Son of an artist and a trained artist himself, Paci arrived in Italy after fleeing with his young family from the political instability and violence in Albania. He is part of a mass migration of Albanians to Italy that occurred throughout the 1990s when the Italian peninsula first experienced a strong influx of people in search of a better life (Antonela 2011: 20-27). Paci, arriving in Milan, became a building restorer,¹ whereas in his hometown, Shkodër, he worked as a professor at the Shkodër University, teaching art history and aesthetics (Bonazzoli 2020: 57-58). His personal story of being a migrant permeates his artistic practice, expressing themes of loss, abandonment, nostalgia, discrimination, hostility, hope, family bonds, and the excitement of settling in an unknown territory. Working with a wide range of media, including video, photography, and installations, but also sculpture, performance, collage, and paintings, Paci focuses on deeply personal interpretations of pivotal issues such as migration, xenophobia, and instability. Through private details concerning his personal and family life, the artist expresses powerful political statements taking the viewer 'beyond' statistics, numbers, surveys, polls, and policies (Bonazzoli 2020: 57-58). Paci adds a human dimension to complex themes that are often difficult to understand by simply absorbing information from media outlets.

This article discusses how contemporary art responds to issues concerning migration, specifically in Italy. My objective is not only to understand Paci's perspective on current migration patterns in Italy and the world but also to understand how other contemporary artists such as Ursula Biemann and Francis Alÿs respond to a deeply political yet personal phenomenon. I focus on Paci's work because of the consistency of his artistic practice in highlighting themes of migration from a personal perspective. Paci not only reflects his personal experience as a migrant in a country that is at times hostile but also confronts viewers with the humane side of newcomers and what this experience entails in the private sphere.

According to the Statistics Immigration Dossier of 2019 produced by the Centre for Research and Study IDOS, there are 5,255,503 foreign citizens in Italy, which corresponds to 8.7% of the entire Italian population (Raffaella 2019). This is a relevant increase compared to the 6.5% of foreign citizens in 2008. The same dossier recorded an increase of 6.8% in foreign residents in Italy between 2013 and 2018. Italy has only recently become an immigration target country, having historically been a nation of emigration. According to Eurispes, the Research Institute of the Italians, the past twenty-five years in Italy have seen a shift in demographics. From being a country where its citizens emigrated for a better life, during the past few decades, it has experienced a significant influx of migrants. Italy, along with countries such as France, the UK, and Germany, is one of the European nations with the highest foreign resident population. Due to the relative novelty

¹ In a moving interview with Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera*, Paci on the occasion of his personal exhibition at Sant Eustorgio cloisters in spring 2017, admits that throughout his experience as a building restorer he previously worked at those same cloisters. During those days he would fantasise about exhibiting his art there, a dream that decades later became true thanks to his former colleague and restorer Luciano Formica. (Bonazzoli 2020)

of this phenomenon, Italian-born citizens often manifest hostility against foreigners, particularly those with 'undesirable' provenances or specific phenotypes.² According to data gathered by the European Social Survey in 2016, Italians were asked if foreign immigrants rendered Italy a better place and the responses were overwhelmingly negative. Only Hungary and Russia gave bleaker assessments than Italy.

Albania experienced a ruthless Communist dictatorship under the ferocious rule of Enver Hoxha starting in November 1944 and ending with his death in 1985 (King and Mai 2008). Hoxha was a strict follower of the Marxist-Leninist doctrine and led Albania with an iron fist. He first isolated the country so that it would not be 'contaminated' by Western civilisation. Then, in 1945, land reform was passed that sought to prevent anyone from owning land, consequently almost entirely banning private property. The core of Hoxha's regime was the denial of the individual in favour of the collective, thus rendering individual profit an impossibility and plunging the country into extreme poverty. With Hoxha's passing in 1985, Albania was left in a precarious state of economic instability and violence, which forced numerous Albanians to flee the country (Vattese 2006: 107-108). Coincidentally, an era of political turmoil also reigned north of Albania as Yugoslavia's breakup unfolded during the Yugoslav Wars,³ which ravaged the region throughout the 1990s, causing incalculable human loss and destruction.⁴ It was then that numerous Eastern Europeans escaped to Western Europe, especially to Italy and Greece, which lie nearby (Destanisha 2011: 14). During this mass exodus, Italians, who had never experienced hefty influxes of people, started manifesting prejudice and xenophobia against Albanian migrants, also fuelled by the fear of Albanian organised crime groups (Perlmutter 1998: 211). According to authors Nicola Mai and Russell King in their book *Out of Albania*, Albanians in the 1990s were intensely stereotyped in Italian media as criminals, morally depraved people, and sex traffickers. This narrative contributed to Albanian migrants in Italy being denied access to skilled jobs, even when they had the qualifications, as well as suffering poor housing conditions and interpersonal discrimination from Italian colleagues and bosses.

Economic discrimination often kept Albanian migrants in a spiral of poverty, which was hard to break and further contributed to their social exclusion.

In this article, I focus on Paci's work entitled *Centro di Permanenza Temporanea*, which shows a group of people, seemingly South and Central American migrants, walking up a passenger stairway that is not docked at the side of an aeroplane, and instead leads nowhere [Fig. 1].⁵ The aeroplane never appears at the stairs, thus leaving them in a state of limbo. This work is a powerful denunciation of Italian detention centres, which, as I will examine, were created in 1998 to hold undocumented migrants while their fate is decided by Italian law and bureaucracy (Fraser

² *Cosa pensano gli Italiani degli immigrati? E gli Europei?*, <https://www.infodata.ilssole24ore.com/>, European Social Survey, Published on March 30th 2019, Last accessed 12 January 2024, <https://www.infodata.ilssole24ore.com/2019/03/30/cosa-pensano-gli-italiani-degli-immigrati-gli-europei/>

³ The Yugoslav Wars were a series of devastating conflicts in the Balkans between the years 1991 and 2001. Yugoslavia was a country formed following the Second World War constituted by six different states: Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo, and Republic of Macedonia. Tensions rose amid strong religious and ethnic hostilities as well as increasing nationalism on behalf of the six nations fuelling the desire to separate from Yugoslavia. After the death of Yugoslavian dictator Josip Broz Tito, havoc in the region arose thus causing massacres of ethnic minorities such as in Srebrenica in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1995 where Muslim men and boys were killed at the hands of Bosnian Serbs. At the end of the twentieth century, following international negotiations where the United States took place six independent states were formed. John Zametica and International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Yugoslav Conflict: An Analysis of the Causes of the Yugoslav War, the Policies of the Republics and the Regional and International Implications of the Conflict*, (Adelphi Paper, 270. London: Brassey's, 1992), pp. 3-4

⁴ BBC, *Balkans War: a Brief Guide*, Last Accessed 27 February 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17632399>

⁵ Erika Cammerata, *Adrian Paci e Centro di Permanenza Temporanea*, Ritrovare l'Arte WorldPress (Blog), Posted on April 3rd 2017, Last Accessed 27 February 2020, <https://ritrovareartewordpress.wordpress.com/2017/04/03/adrian-paci-e-centro-di-permanenza/>



and Gili 2013: 64). Paci, by filming in San José, draws a direct correlation between the mistreatment of migrants at Italian borders and those detained at the high-profile USA-Mexican border.

Centro di Permanenza Temporanea

The video is five minutes and thirty seconds long, and was filmed in San José, California, in 2007, not far from the USA-Mexican border.⁶ Translated in English as *Centre for Temporary Permanence* [Fig. 2], the work makes a pointed reference to existing institutions in Italy, later called Centres of Identification and Expulsion, and as of June 2019, Permanent Centres for Repatriation.⁷

The function of these centres is to detain illegal migrants to determine whether they are allowed to stay in Italian territory or to expel them.⁸ Once detained, migrants are held and reside in a temporary limbo⁹ without any idea of what their future might hold, powerless to decide their own fate. The video commences on a sunny day showing an empty boarding stairway on a functioning airstrip. The solitary staircase stands immobile, though the viewer later hears aeroplanes landing and taking off in the surroundings. As the video focuses on the upper part

Fig. 1 Adrian Paci, *Centro di Permanenza Temporanea*, 2007, 16:9, 4'32", video, colour, sound (video still), edition of 6 + 2 AP, Courtesy of the artist and kaufmann repetto Milan / New York, and Galerie Peter Kilchman, Zürich

⁶ Vimeo Video, *Adrian Paci / Centro di Permanenza Temporanea*,

⁷ Osservatorio, *Detenzione, Accoglienza, Migranti Puglia, Centri detenzione: I Centri per il rimpatrio*, Last Accessed 27 February 2020, <http://www.osservatoriomigranti.org/?cie>

⁸ Progetto Melting Pot Europa, *Cosa sono i C.I.E.*, Last Accessed 27 February 2020, <https://www.meltingpot.org/Cosa-sono-i-C-I-E-Centri-di-Identificazione-ed-Espulsione.html#XlgJgxNKhPN>

⁹ The time frame established for migrants residing in these spaces changed over time as the Turco – Napolitano law changed. Initially, in 1998 when the law was promulgated, the time

Fig. 2 Adrian Paci, *Centro di Permanenza Temporanea*, 2007, 16:9, 4'32", video, colour, sound (video still), edition of 6 + 2 AP, Courtesy of the artist and kaufmann repetto Milan / New York, and Galerie Peter Kilchman, Zürich



Fig. 3 Adrian Paci, *Centro di Permanenza Temporanea*, 2007, 16:9, 4'32", video, colour, sound (video still), edition of 6 + 2 AP, Courtesy of the artist and kaufmann repetto Milan / New York, and Galerie Peter Kilchman, Zürich

of the stairs, a line of people slowly walks towards it and climbs to the top until all of its tiers are full. The camera first frames their legs and feet while walking, then, from a distance, films them from the top of the staircase as they ascend [Fig. 3].

When all are 'ready to board', Paci shoots close-ups of their facial expressions with a chiaroscuro effect, which vary between expectation, weariness, fear, resignation, sadness, anger, and curiosity. The viewer does not see what occurs around them, only the people are filmed. At that point, the camera slowly moves away to frame the entire staircase from different angles. It emerges that all the individuals on the stairs stand there in silence with aeroplanes, by now visible to the spectator, moving in the background. The striking aspect of the video is the absence of an aeroplane for them to board. Customarily, passengers walk up some type of ramp or staircase to enter an aircraft that will take them to their destination. Yet in this short film, these men and women ascend only to wait futilely. Since no aeroplane is present for their transportation, there is no possibility of flight or destination, only uncertainty as to what to do next.

In contrast, everything around them is in motion. It is only towards the end of the video that the artist reveals to the viewers what is occurring: most of the time the camera is focused on the people and not the surroundings. The human dimension is the primary focus of this artwork, which contrasts with numerous mainstream media accounts concerning migrants, which are often dehumanising.

Paci uses the airport as a metaphor for a place of transit through which most people pass with a precise destination in mind. He furthermore employs Central and Southern American migrants in the video, thus underlining the similarities between ordeals faced by non-white migrants in Italy and at the border between Mexico and the USA. During a conversation I had with Paci back in March 2020, he affirmed that what truly interested him about these structures was the name itself: 'temporary permanence'.¹⁰ In Paci's view, this wording created a universal dissonance that spoke to a global condition of being a migrant with a 'wrong' provenance waiting at the border of a richer (whiter) country. The irony, in these cases, of imposing a 'permanence' that is uniquely temporary is another example of the unfair treatment these individuals are subjected to.

Paci is not the only artist to reflect on issues of migration between borders, particularly the often controversial US-Mexico border. Belgian artist Francis Alÿs, in his 1997 work *The Loop*, reflects on the boundary between Mexico and the US, more specifically between San Diego and Tijuana (Riou 2019). This performance was an attempt to go from Tijuana to San Diego without crossing the border, a highly volatile place. To accomplish this ambitious task, the artist travelled for thirty-five days around the globe; from Tijuana, he went to Mexico City, then to Panama, then

span was of a thirty-day maximum. Following the Bossi – Fini law in 2002 it was increased to sixty days and in 2008, with new modifications, one hundred and eighty days became the time limit in which migrants could stay. In 2011 the law morphed again and the maximum went up to eighteen months only to be reduced to ninety days in 2014. As of 2017 the average stay in these spaces is 25,5 days. Senato della Repubblica – XVII Legislatura, *Rapporto sui Centri di Identificazione ed Espulsione in Italia*, Published December 2017, Last Accessed 24 August 2020, https://www.senato.it/application/xmanager/projects/leg17/file/repository/commissioni/dirittiumaniXVII/Rapporto_Cie-Cpr.pdf According to the prefecture's official website, detainees have the right to legal assistance either by a lawyer of their choice and at their expense or by one provided by the Italian government. Moreover, it is their legal right to access an interpreter, have pocket money (€2,50 per day), partake in Italian classes, have external visits, eat regularly, access a telephone and postal service, recreational activities and medical treatment including psychological assistance. (Prefettura 1998)

¹⁰ Adrian Paci, *Conversation with Adrian Paci*, Deborah Galante, Skype interview via Mac with recording, March 2020

to Santiago de Chile, Auckland, and continued his loop around the Pacific until he arrived in San Diego. This symbolic performance aimed to show how difficult and absurd barriers can be, depending especially on which side the individual is departing from. This piece can be considered a political act, indicating the arduous task of traversing from one country to another, documenting that most people do not have the means to travel in the same manner he did.

Independent curator Emma Mahony, in discussing *The Loop*, describes the artist's choice to transform this performance into a series of postcards that viewers are free to keep (Mahony 2010). This action is taken so spectators might have a grasp of the significant difficulty this journey entails even for a privileged person such as Alÿs. Furthermore, it might inspire them to undertake similar journeys and to reflect on the theme of borders. Mahony suggests that the artist was inspired by the desperation numerous people face in traversing this passage fraught with tension. Paci, in a similar way, chooses to locate his video near the border between the US and Mexico because of its intrinsic meaning. Capturing on camera a symbolic performance in such a location conveys a powerful message to viewers, showing how a short strip of land can represent a distressful situation and even define an individual's human dignity.

According to artist Ursula Biemann, 'There is nothing natural about the border: it's a highly constructed place that gets reproduced through the crossing of people; because without the crossing, there is no border' (Biemann 2002: 30). In 1999 Biemann produced the 43-minute video *Performing the Border* in which poor Mexican women are interviewed in the town of Juarez. This place is located at the border between the US and Mexico and is a crossroads of the migrant flow of South and Central Americans attempting to reach North America. Juarez is also sadly known due to its high poverty and crime rates, particularly the murder of vulnerable and impoverished women. Biemann suggests it is not casual that this situation stems from this city being at the frontier between a richer country and a poorer one. The artist suggests that the border is a 'gigantic metaphor for the artificial division' between white, privileged bodies and racialised ones, between urban settings and deserted ones, between prosperity and misery, thus marking a deliberately systemic exclusion of the 'undesirables'. Paci's video denounces a similar process of mistreatment, poverty, and marginalisation of racial undesirables at a border that is nothing other than a constructed concept of exclusion. Author Shahram Khosravi suggests that one manner of excluding unwelcome migrants is through waiting and delaying, thereby implying that their time is less important than that of white Westerners (Khosravi 2019: 417-418). Keeping the so-called 'other' in perpetual waiting status, whether that means being deported or requiring an entry visa, is a manner of exerting control and power. Khosravi

asserts that ‘borders do not stop people but delay them’. Waiting is an act that is performed by a less powerful group, thereby giving more authority and domination to the ‘gatekeepers’. Borders, according to the author, exacerbate this process and are vehicles of exclusion of the less privileged. Khosravi further suggests that ‘borders signal that the people on the other side are different, undesired, dangerous, polluting and even non-human’ (Khosravi 2019: 414). It is not by chance that Paci’s video ends with the South and Central American migrants waiting helplessly on the staircase with no aeroplane to board. The message is clearly conveyed; their future, at this time, is out of their control. It is interesting to note that although they never actually appear in Paci’s video, the Italian detention centres are iconically represented through the artwork’s title.

Centres for Temporary Permanence are institutions that currently exist in Italy.¹¹ They were first established in 1998 by the Turco-Napolitano Law, which sought to regulate immigration to Italy. Their name evolved to *Centri d’Identificazione e Espulsione* (Identification and Expulsion Centres) following a legislative decree in 2002.¹² In 2017, following the Legislative Decree 13/2017, the name was further modified to *Centri di Permanenza per i Rimpatri* (Repatriation Detention Centres), which is the current nomenclature. The morphing of these institutions’ names coincided with governmental changes in Italy: the first terminology, Centres for Temporary Permanence, was coined during Romano Prodi’s government, a left-wing coalition¹³; while the second shift in nomenclature, in 2002, to Identification and Expulsion Centres, was introduced by Silvio Berlusconi’s right-wing government, communicating an increasingly protectionist stance in Italian policies concerning migrants. Unsurprisingly, one of the signatories of the Bossi-Fini law was Umberto Bossi, a notorious anti-immigration politician and one of the founders of the strongly nationalistic and formerly separatist party La Lega (Romano and Bonasera 2010: 17). On 17 February 2017, a final change to the terminology was introduced by the left-wing government led by Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni, which specifically included the terms ‘repatriation’ and ‘detention’. This further modification might suggest Italians’ increasing hostility to newcomers, thus reflecting the rise in the ‘need’ for laws severely limiting it.

Paci poetically underlines the sense of individual frustration and sadness at being kept in a state of immobility when everything around is moving. The staircase is overflowing with people, thereby directly referencing the overcrowded conditions of these spaces and the forced idleness people are obliged to endure. Of crucial importance is the fact that the individuals in the artist’s video never communicate with one another, even though they are ‘cramped’ together. They do not even make eye contact, thus suggesting their isolation and alienation not only from their surroundings but even from others in the same situation. No person comes to their

¹¹ Medici per I Diritti Umani, *Arcipelago CIE: Indagine sui Centri di Identificazione ed Espulsione Italiani*, (Modena, Infinito Edizioni, 2013), pp. 17-18

¹² Open Migration, *La sospensione dei diritti nei CPR*, Last Accessed 27 February 2020, <https://openmigration.org/analisi/la-sospensione-dei-diritti-nei-cpr/>

¹³ *Cosa sono i C.I.E. (Centri di Identificazione ed Espulsione), Rinominati dal Decreto Legge 13/2017 C.P.R. (Centri di Permanenza per i Rimpatri)*, Meltingpot, Last Accessed 12 August 2020, <https://www.meltingpot.org/Cosa-sono-i-C-I-E-Centri-di-Identificazione-ed-Espulsione.html#.XzKMgxMza3I>

rescue, total indifference reigns around them. Despite the difficult circumstances, their facial expressions and body language do not express agitation, but patience, as if hopeful that something may change for the better and move them from limbo. At the end of the movie, the migrants look directly at the camera, as if questioning viewers' indifference or ignorance concerning their plight.

It is uncommon for viewers to have a direct account of the migrant experience from those who are living through this process. When reading or watching the news, most of us view a second-hand narration, generally made by journalists and reporters whose job is to report content – with strict wordcount or time limits – and to attract readers and viewers, often with graphs and statistics or sensational headlines and reportage. In contrast, Paci forces viewers to confront their indifference and to see the actual faces of the 'migrant crisis'. In 2023, filmmaker Matteo Garrone, directed the impactful movie *Io Capitano*, about two Senegalese teenagers who attempt to reach Europe in perilous ways to escape poverty, ending in the ruthless hands of traffickers and brutal Libyan detention camps.¹⁴ Garrone, in a crude manner, shows through his movie a terrible reality that numerous people face still today. Film and video productions revolving around migration offer viewers a more relatable and often immersive experience compared to that of experiencing an installation or painting.

According to a report by the website Osservatorio Migranti (Migrants Monitoring Unit) the 'inmates' in the CPTs are prohibited from having contact with the outside world, meaning they spend most of the time in their rooms without engaging in any activity.¹⁵ Despite the Turco-Napolitano law stipulating respect for migrants' human dignity, according to numerous reports and denunciations by activists, politicians, journalists, and academics, the living conditions in these centres are disastrous.¹⁶ In June 2005, Amnesty International published a fifty-five-page report expressing concerns over the treatment of migrants detained in these centres. The report is based on critical comments made by people held there as well as the assessments of external inspectors. In the introduction, Amnesty states that it understands the necessity for countries to ensure all people entering have appropriate legal documentation. However, it affirms the inviolability of human dignity and the necessity to implement strong guidelines so that migrants, regardless of their legal status, receive proper, fair, and humane treatment. Amnesty notes this seldom happens, substantiating the report with numerous accounts of physical harm, verbal abuse, xenophobic behaviour, lack of hygiene, inadequate food, denial of legal counselling or representation, isolation, and the withholding of information regarding individual cases (Amnesty International 2005).

While viewing some of these locations, the non-profit organisation Medici Senza Frontiere (Doctors without Borders) reported instances in which 'inmates' self-

¹⁴ Pathe. "Io Capitano – Official Trailer in HD," 28 November 2023. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z6fLvLN2EqM>

¹⁵ Contacts via telephone are allowed; however, they must not exit the structure, which is surrounded by fences and guarded by armed personnel. Osservatorio, Detenzione, Accoglienza, Migranti Puglia, *Centri detenzione: I Centri per il rimpatrio*,

¹⁶ Open Migration, *La sospensione dei diritti nei CPR*

harm due to frustration, depression, and anxiety, mainly driven by the uncertainty of their future and feelings of alienation from the outside world (Dardanelli 2008: 231). The report further denounces that, in January 2004, some migrants held in the CPT in Bologna accused security personnel of illicitly adulterating meals and drinks that made them drowsy and severely ill. Due to restrictions in accessing these structures, confirming these denunciations presents significant challenges. However, the sheer volume of negative reports and the centres' secretive way of functioning suggest these are not just rumours (Amnesty International 2008: 18-19).

The artist films the scene from different angles; at the beginning of the short movie, aeroplanes are rarely seen, but by the end, the continuous landing and taking off of aircraft stands in contrast to the immigrants' immobility. The camera backs away slowly, focusing on different angles of the staircase to highlight the silent crowd of people who are kept in limbo. As the movie comes to an end the focus is placed towards the front side of the stairs, but at a distance, while the group continues to gaze directly towards the camera. As the focus continues to grow more distant, the screen blackens to the end of the video.

Scholars Francesca Esposito, Jose Ornelas, Erica Briozzo, and Caterina Arcidiacono, who conducted fieldwork at the centre Ponte Galeria in Rome between March 2014 and January 2017 (2019), express serious concerns regarding the treatment of the people 'hosted' in CPTs. During their research, they interviewed the 'inmates', asking them about their feelings regarding their incarceration. The data collected portrays a gloomy, distressing environment, where people are stripped of their human rights and dignity, subjected to verbal and physical abuse, isolated from family and friends, and have no alternative to spending their days waiting for a sign of their fate – generally a piece of paper.¹⁷ The academics further point out that legal services are scarce and inadequate, often lacking necessary interpreting services. Researcher Anna Simone argues that these establishments are set in place to purposely exclude 'non-citizens' from being an active part of society and to deprive them of their humanity (Simone 2006: 132-134). Simone suggests that this process is part of the government's so-called rational power or, simply put, a power to exclude. In other words, the hospitality of people without proper documents becomes a pretext to exclude specific subjects who are deemed 'illegal'.

Philosophy professor Donatella Di Cesare, in 2014, published a short pamphlet called *Crimes Against Hospitality* in which she talks about her visit to one of these centres and unapologetically denounces them as systems not meant to regulate the migration flow but to dehumanise specific people on the basis of race and provenance. She describes witnessing a severe lack of hygiene, migrants stripped

¹⁷ An investigation done by Doctors Without Borders in 2013 carefully analysed the internal arrangement of these detention structures. It concluded there were indeed rooms (four beds in each one) and bathrooms for migrants held there however they were often overcrowded and, in some cases, there was no door for the washroom meaning a lack of privacy. The common areas were set up so that detainees could eat, watch TV, go to class and when available practice sport. These centers are also provided with gardens so that individuals residing there can go out for fresh air. Overall, however, they reported that migrants spent most of their time in their rooms without activities to keep them busy. These spaces' over crowdedness is represented in Paci's video because of the density of people waiting on the staircase in the middle of the airport. There appears to be no free space hence reminding viewers of the absolute lack of personal comfort detainees are forced to endure. *Medici per I Diritti Umani, Arcipelago CIE: Indagine sui Centri di Identificazione ed Espulsione Italiani*, (Modena, Infinito Edizioni, 2013), pp. 41-42

of their clothes for disinfestation from diseases such as scabies, the heavy usage of psychiatric drugs, and people left alone without any comfort, legal counselling or occasions to connect with others speaking their same language. Di Cesare argues these 'protocols' are not a way to protect Italy from illegal migrants, but to strip migrants of human rights and eventually expel them. She further states that self-harm and suicide attempts are common. (Di Cesare 2014) A humane system of hospitality is thus critically necessary along with, in case of expulsion, a plan to provide a safe way of providing this. She also denounces the fact that some of the expelled migrants were simply repatriated to a country that was not theirs and left without any resources to provide for themselves. The existence of these structures is well known by the Italian government and the public; however, with few exceptions, they turn a blind eye.¹⁸

Author Awad Ibrahim in his essay 'The Question is the Foreigner: The Spectre of Blackness and the Economy of Hospitality in Canada' expounds on the idea of being the 'other'. He reflects on his personal experience as a Sudanese black man with a 'different' name living in Canada. He recalls arriving in North America as a refugee and working as a university professor in a space that did not welcome him due to racial factors and his 'unusual' name. Ibrahim ponders Derrida's idea of 'unconditional hospitality'; that is, welcoming people regardless of race, religion, and provenance. The author argues he has seldom felt accepted in North America, mainly because of his black body, hence being regarded as an outcast in the 'Great White North'. Ibrahim, contrary to the people represented by Paci, lives in Western countries and has a prestigious job as a university professor, and has proper documentation, therefore his residence should not be questioned. However, this did not protect him from being stopped and searched by the police, being mistaken for a Muslim because of his name's phonetics, and asked the seemingly harmless question 'but where are you *really* from?', which evinces a perception of non-belonging in North America despite residing there legally (Ibrahim 2010). Migrants represented by Paci, even if granted entrance by border patrol, are more likely to experience difficulties because of a restricted idea of hospitality often based on provenance. Scholar Cristina Lombardi-Diop argues that 'Italianness' is perceived as inherently white, and that blackness is regarded as a foreign entity, something to be feared and kept at a distance. Diop suggests that the concept of whiteness as an intrinsic component of being Italian partially stems from racist eugenic theories that were popular in the 19th and 20th centuries, which often justified the colonial subjugation of African countries and the ethnic cleansing of Jews during the Fascist regime under racial laws promulgated in 1938. Although Italians, historically, are not a racially homogenous group, the lie of a homogenous white Italian population has been promoted for the purposes of social cohesion since Italian unification

¹⁸ Journalist Emilie Kassie, in her accusation against detention centres at the border between the USA and Mexico, affirms the usage of these sites has grown exponentially in the past decades as well as their cost. Just as Italy's Centres for Temporary Permanence withhold asylum seekers and people devoid of legal documentation, USA's detention centres operate in a similar manner. Kassie affirms these spaces were not born under the Trump administration; however, it has increasingly relied on them due to augmenting (even though since 2007 there has been a slight decrease) numbers of refugees and asylum seekers coming to the USA border. The journalist contends these sites have become spaces where basic human rights are disregarded; children sleeping on concrete floor, denial of soap and toothpaste, people crammed into small rooms, families separated at the border are just few human rights violations denounced in regards to border detention centres. Border Patrol and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) have both come under scrutiny over mistreatment of people held in these structures. According to Kassie these cruel conditions pertain to a "zero tolerance" stance taken by the Trump administration in order to deter illegal migration (Kassie 2020).

in 1861. This would distinguish the ‘superior us’ versus ‘inferior them’, and instil a patriotic feeling in the newly formed nation. The author contends that the idea of being white in Italy is inextricably linked to hygiene and health, thus relegating blackness to the realm of disease and dirtiness. Diop suggests it is unsurprising that Italy shows hostility towards non-white migrants and attempts to exclude them since they are ‘inherently’ soiled, contaminated, dangerous, thus inevitably ‘un-italian’ (Lombardi-Diop 2012).

Author Sandro Mezzadra furthers his contention that ‘new nationalism’ of today, which aims at excluding non-whites and therefore non-Italians, stems from Italy’s shifting demographics due to recent migratory patterns. The fact that more non-whites are becoming Italian threatens the concept of a homogenous white Italian population, which translates into virulent discrimination against incoming non-white migrants (Mezzadra 2012). Author Fabien Georgi, whilst discussing the role of racism in the so-called migrant crisis in Europe, suggests that most European natives, due to constant frustration caused by ‘capitalist life’, will take out their negative emotions on minority groups. Scapegoating, the scholar suggests, is a convenient and narcissistic manner of exerting a perceived superiority over those thought to have less power. Georgi furthers his contention by asserting that racist policies undermining migrants’ livelihoods can be explained by a set of privileges enjoyed by white Europeans, who want these privileges to be kept intact: access to better employment, proper housing, preferential treatment by authorities such as the police, and so on (Georgi 2019).

Paci not only focuses on migrants without proper legal documentation but specifically chooses non-whites to show viewers how the experience of immigrating can be ambiguous depending on race. Unsurprisingly, the artist focuses on the Mexican-U.S. border to illustrate the difficulties for non-whites to enter a predominantly white space.

Israeli curator Edna Moshenson, in her essay concerning Paci’s work, argues that *Centre for Temporary Permanence* embodies the concept of liquid ‘modernity’ as elaborated by Polish intellectual Zygmunt Bauman. His theory elaborates on contemporary society’s ‘dual nature’: on one hand, we strive for order, domestication, and peace so that reality is deemed more ‘controllable’ and less scary; but on the other, humanity is in constant motion with travelling, globalisation, precariousness, and the gradual crumbling of traditional norms and values. Thus, according to Moshenson, Paci’s video illustrates the mutability of modern existence (Fraser and Gili 2013: 65-66). The people represented are in a state of uncertainty due to economic instability and volatile circumstances in their home countries, which are also countries subjected to destabilisation and impoverishment by Western nations.¹⁹ The author further points out that although globalisation helps connect different parts

¹⁹ Journalist Annalisa Camilli, during the beginning of March 2020 when Italy’s lockdown due to coronavirus had begun, points out the stark deterioration of the conditions at the Centres for Temporary Permanence: The reason being inadequate preparation in the face of a global pandemic and Italian government not promulgating specific provisions for these places hence suggesting carelessness towards people kept there. Migrants stranded in these spaces, Camilli argues, are cramped in small cells, do not have access to proper protection gear such as masks, gloves and sanitization alcohol and cannot even be repatriated because of the impossibility for most airplanes to fly. Furthermore, associations helping detainees can no longer visit the CTD due to the lockdown. An already difficult situation was aggravated by the Covid 19 (Camilli 2020).

of the world at an impressive speed,²⁰ at the same time it can destabilise social order and create, as Paci's artwork poignantly expresses, significant hardship for some.

The second theory Moshenson quotes is the idea of *non-place* put forth by the French anthropologist Marc Augé, in which he suggests that 'If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a 'non-place'. Augé contends that airports are a pivotal symbol of a world in motion where nothing is stable and all is in constant transition (Augé 2008). More so than trains or buses, aeroplanes signal the crossing of international, not merely domestic, borders. They therefore imply the need for permission – signalled by passports or visas – to enter countries where the traveller is not a citizen. For those whose rights have not been denied, airports are comfortable places of mindlessness or even fantasy which function purely to transport us from one destination to the other without fears or problems linked to our status. However, as Paci shows us in his long close-ups and slow camera movements, for others they are infernal locations where, as postcolonial scholar Gayatri Spivak posits, they are deemed 'subaltern', unable to speak due to their 'Third World' provenance as well as their race and, in some cases, gender. In Spivak's words, 'subaltern' denotes people who do not belong to a Western country and who are the 'wrong' race or gender (Spivak 1988: 95-99). Their humanity, I suggest, is reduced to documentation and the simple 'misfortune' of 'not being born on the right side of the world'.

Paci subtly yet powerfully denounces the ongoing stratification of the population and skilfully films near the US-Mexican border in California to illustrate a shared condition. By choosing Southern and Central American migrants, he underlines specific contexts in which the ugly truth of racial discrimination perpetrated by Western countries against poorer ones occurs. This impoverishment forces people from these nations to flee to richer, Western states to have access to basic living standards.

Conclusion

Paci's work goes beyond the piece I analysed in this article. However, for my argument, I have discussed this work in particular because I believe it best speaks to issues of migration and transnational connections. Earlier works, however, also touch on these themes: *Home to Go* [Fig. 4], for example, is a project the artist performed in 2001 in which he presents himself to the public scantily clothed and bearing on his bent back a tiled roof tied with ropes (Fiammetta 2020). This per-

²⁰ The coronavirus pandemic has furthermore aggravated access to basic education for people without an internet connection. Lockdowns and social distancing have significantly altered the way educators perform hence largely conducting classes online. This results in poorer strata of the population or people living in rural areas having difficulties with internet connection and therefore not being able to join online courses. This problem further exacerbates inequalities (Romm 2020).

formance evokes the heavy burden of migrating, moving to a new and likely unfamiliar location yet perpetually carrying the weight of a life left behind and all the associated memories. In October 2021, in Victoria Square in Athens, Greece, Paci along with curators Niovi Zampouka-Chatzimanou and Almir Koldzic, created the installation *We Apologize*. The artwork states the following: ‘We apologize for the discontent and stress that this may have caused you.’ The selection of this square was no coincidence: it is the meeting spot for numerous communities that are considered to be on the margins of society, such as prostitutes, refugees, and drug addicts. Paci, in a deeply poetic manner, obliges passers-by to confront their prejudices about ‘undesirable people’ present in the square disrupting their comfort. Greece, furthermore, has been at the forefront of the ‘migrant crisis’ due to its geographic location, hence it is regarded as a hotspot for undocumented migrants arriving to Europe in difficult conditions (Ståhl 2021). The artist provides a deeply humane perspective on issues often perceived in numeric and policy terms. He illustrates in a quiet yet potent manner the human toll of a world obsessed with working efficiency, social status, the economy, and money.²¹ Paci’s artworks focus on the private dimension of a collective experience, not in productive terms, but in a subtly familiar way, drawing our attention to each person’s unique sensitivity, individuality, and vulnerability. Despite showing a group of people, the artist underlines each person’s individuality, suffering, and desolation, which are shared by all the people he represents. An individual experience is illustrated as a collective, shared destiny, seemingly impossible to change. In many of Paci’s works, migrants and transnational workers occupy a pivotal point because of the type of representation they are subjected to in Western mainstream media, specifically in terms of their perceived utility, making them tokens rather than human beings. In a conversation with art curator Cristina Cannelli, Paci revealed that he attempts to give dignity to those who have been stripped of it so as to offer a personal perspective of a phenomenon mainly seen through news outlets or political propaganda. His work seeks the subject’s raw emotions without journalistic or didactic filters. Unsurprisingly, most of his artistic production not only focuses on migrants but also specifically on asylum seekers and refugees (Steininger and Hopper 2020). He admits his own experience of escaping from an economically ravaged country that went through a devastating dictatorship and arriving in a different place and starting from scratch deeply influenced him (Budak 2019). Paci offers an intimate and personal view. Seldom do nuanced accounts of the complex immigration process have any visibility in mainstream Italian media, which offers statistical accounts and alarmist reportage. Despite a flourishing migrant cultural network as evidenced in such publications as the literary magazine *El Ghibli*, and exhibitions dedicated to this topic, these types of news outlets

²¹ Throughout the current coronavirus crisis numerous countries such as Italy, France and Spain have imposed on its citizens complete lockdowns meaning anyone can exit their residences only for strict necessities such as buying food or medication. This was barely the case in the United States where former President Donald Trump often bolstered about re-opening the country in the midst of the pandemic regardless of the high risk this entailed. During this time US economy is imploding and over forty million Americans have lost their jobs thus the urgency of ‘getting back to work’ even though health professionals advise against it. This novel virus has shown to what extent today’s society is work obsessed regardless if it is a hazard to public health. (Pilkington 2020). Texas Republican governor lieutenant Dan Patrick has gone to the extent of stating publicly he would rather see the elderly perish instead of a country’s shutdown. In May 2020 Patrick appeared on Fox News to speak to host Tucker Carlson about the economic crisis unfolding because of the coronavirus and he argued it is better to be productive and earn profits instead of a total lockdown, which has demonstrated to be an effective way to protect from the pandemic. He contended he was comfortable with the idea of grandparents dying to save the economy (Beckett 2020).

Fig. 4 Adrian Paci, *Home to Go*, 2001, Plaster, Marble, Dust, Tiles, Rope, 165 x 90 x 120 cm / 65 x 35.4 x 47.2 in, edition of 5 + 2 AP, Courtesy of the artist and kaufmann repetto Milan / New York, and Galerie Peter Kilchman, Zürich



remain on the edges of mainstream information production in Italy (El Gibli 2020). The artist depicts the raw, 'unglamorous' side of occurrences happening daily in the contemporary world, such as migrants being held in inhumane conditions in designated structures at borders. In *Centro di Permanenza Temporanea*, by unapologetically focusing the camera on the facial expressions of the migrants stranded on the staircase in North America, Paci symbolically denounces a harrowing experience that is happening even now on another continent. This emphasis on the human aspect of global migration is a driving force of Paci's artistic practice.

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