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Activism of immigrants in vulnerable conditions and radical-left allies: a case study of Italy’s Struggle of the Crane

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ABSTRACT
As interest in immigrant mobilisations in hostile national environments grows among migration scholars, the reasons why immigrants in vulnerable conditions engage in radicalised mobilisation at the local level and why they make alliances with controversial non-institutional radical-left actors need to be further explained. This study examines the conditions of mobilisation and radicalisation by undocumented immigrants in Brescia (a mid-sized city in Northern Italy) through the lens of a contentious moment that took place for two months in 2010, known as the Struggle of the Crane (Lotta della gru). It addresses two questions: why have undocumented immigrants in Brescia been mobilised to contentious political activism? And, why have they created partnerships with non-institutional radical-left organisations, rather than institutional non-state organisations, such as the Church and traditional trade unions? In addition to the hostile national context, discrimination and repression by local authorities triggered the motivation for mobilisation and nourished the radicalisation of the struggle and its endurance. Additionally, competing discourses and practices over immigrants’ access to rights and deservingness by multiple non-state actors played a key role in shaping alliances. The long-lasting alliance with the radical left since the 1990s was renewed and reinforced in 2010 by immigrants’ growing distrust towards institutional non-state actors.

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In Western Democracies in recent years, we have observed a new era of more restrictive official integration policies and increased practices of excluding immigrants and ethnic minorities. Migration scholars argue that this shift, combined with the rise of anti-immigrant sentiments and widespread xenophobia, leads to the construction of people of migrant background as a ‘social threat’ and to state-supported practices of criminalisation and disqualification (d’Appollonia 2015). The financial crisis that started in 2008 has worsened this situation by reinforcing hostilities. Raissiguier (2010, 4) observes that, ‘global economic transformations, the construction of Europe, increasing national anxieties and the economic crisis’ have all contributed to the emergence of a ‘hegemonic discursive and material practice’ which defines immigrants and ethnic minorities as outsiders and
undocumented immigrants have been increasingly depicted as ‘impossible subjects’ of the nation state. Additionally, increasing restrictive legislation ‘normalises migrants’ subaltern position’ in the labour force, and, in doing so, legalises the exploitation of cheap labour, transforming sections of the immigrant population in the new subaltern class (Oliveri 2012, 794–797; see also Anderson 2010b).

Hostile environments raise structural barriers to access to basic rights by vulnerable groups and make their lives and their working condition in receiving societies extremely difficult (Ambrosini and Van Der Leun 2015). Among other things, they lower their chances to participate in the public life and make rights claims in the societies where they settle. Nonetheless, extremely hostile environments often leave immigrants no other choice, but to mobilise, giving birth to new immigrant identities and forms of resistance (Anderson 2010a). A growing literature on migration is showing that vulnerable migrant populations and their non-state allies have mobilised to make rights claims and demand greater recognition as well as the end of increasing discrimination and violation of immigrants’ human rights (Chauvin and Garcés-Mascareñas 2014; Nicholls 2013, 2014; Oliveri 2012; Voss and Bloemraad 2011; Zepeda-Millán 2016). Among other things, mobilisations are possible when immigrant activists and their allies highlight the tensions between rights available to individuals as citizens and universal rights. This tension allows movements to claim access to rights that the state otherwise tries to deny to vulnerable immigrants, while putting forth a discourse that establishes these groups as deserving of rights regardless of their formal status (Chauvin and Garcés-Mascareñas 2014; Nicholls 2013; Nyers 2010). What is more, the resources, both material and symbolic, of ‘native’ organisations can be key in transforming grievances into political action, and to shaping the types of participation in which immigrants will engage (Nicholls 2013, 86).

As interest in immigrant mobilisations in hostile national environments grows among migration scholars, the reasons why immigrants in vulnerable conditions engage in radicalised mobilisation at the local level and why they make alliances with controversial non-institutional radical-left actors need to be further explained. This study examines the conditions of mobilisation and radicalisation by undocumented immigrants in Brescia (a mid-sized city in Northern Italy) through the lens of a contentious moment that took place for two months in 2010, known as the Struggle of the Crane (Lotta della gru). On the one hand, this local protest attracted national attention both for its length and its radical character, and was seen by many activists and civil society organisations as a unique case of resistance by undocumented immigrants to the extreme form of exclusion by the state. On the other hand, detractors expressed concern about their radicalisation and criticised the radical left for using these immigrants in vulnerable conditions for their political purposes. Through the help of first-hand sources collected during several months of fieldwork, I address two questions: why have undocumented immigrants in Brescia been mobilised to contentious political activism? And, why have they created partnerships with the radical left rather than other organisations, such as the Church and traditional trade unions? I first show that in Brescia, while the hostile national context was similar to that of many places in Italy and was at the heart of the motivation for mobilisation, hostilities by local authorities pushed immigrants’ mobilisation and radicalisation. Subsequently, I demonstrate that competing discourses and practices over immigrants’ access to rights and deservingness by multiple non-state actors play a key role in shaping alliances. Since the 1990s, the radical left has offered material and symbolic
support for immigrant mobilisations in the city. However, it was not until 2010, with the Struggle of the Crane, that a stronger alliance emerged with the radical left. This renewed alliance can be read in part as the result of increasing distrust that the immigrant activists have in the main institutional non-state actors.

The goal of this article is to shed light on our study of immigrant mobilisations and alliances with non-state actors in hostile environments by examining two dimensions still underexplored. First, while the literature concentrates on the role of national hostile environments in triggering mobilisation, I focus on the role of local hostile environments in shaping specific local responses by immigrant activists. Monforte and Dufour (2011, 204) show that the local level is where practices of exclusion take place and, consequently, where immigrant activists and their allies articulate their claims. In this view, the local arena is not only where the national battle unfolds, but also where undocumented immigrants experience different degrees and forms of exclusion, as well as unequal access to rights and services. Following these authors, I argue that local factors can account for the ways immigrant and their allies mobilise in the first place and then for how they frame their claims. For these reasons, under a similar national context, we can expect important local variations in the ways state and non-state actors interact with each other around issues that are framed at the national level (such as the mass regularisations). For this reasons, we can also observe different local mobilisations’ outcome in the same national framework (see also Cappiali 2015). Furthermore, while the literature identifies how immigrant social movements, with the help of ‘native’ organisations, respond to the exclusionary discourses and practices of the state (Voss and Bloemraad 2011), I suggest we look further into the nature of alliances and conflicts with those actors that are ‘in-between’ the states and mobilised immigrants. Most studies tend to take alliances with immigrant support for granted. In particular, they fail to investigate the role of ideological and political tensions among potential allies and the immigrant activists (see for instance Chimienti 2011; Monforte and Dufour 2011). Supporters with different political affiliations can find a common ground for mobilisation (Ambrosini 2013b). However, what prevails in most cases is competition over the legitimacy of discourse on immigration and immigrants’ representation. By appropriating the cause of immigrants, allies can overshadow their own struggle for recognition and obstruct immigrants’ claims (Nicholls 2013, 2014). Finally, immigrant activists in most cases actively choose among the different opportunities offered by their allies. They prioritise practical considerations, such as the relevance of their allies in the political arena as well as ideological ones, such as the belief that these actors are putting forward a discourse of inclusion and access to rights that is in line with their needs, beliefs and their perception of deservingness (Cappiali 2015).

Among the immigrants’ supporters, the radical-left organisations are controversial, yet often key. The radical left is a complex world of grassroots entities that includes communists, anarchists and libertarians. Cosseron (2007) explains that radical-left organisations share the idea of ‘no borders’ and ‘free movement’ and challenge the legitimacy of the state’s control over the movement of people through legal means. Alliances with radical actors are puzzling, given that, in establishing such alliances, undocumented immigrants can isolate themselves from powerful non-state actors, diminishing the chance to succeed in their struggle for recognition. The lack of wider support by powerful non-state actors can undermine the likelihood that immigrants will succeed in their efforts to receive
greater recognition. Finally, the radical left has been criticised for favouring conflict over negotiation, and for exposing immigrants in vulnerable conditions to repression by the state and police. In Brescia, many local actors criticised the radical left for taking advantage of vulnerable immigrants for ideological purposes and encouraging them to use ‘illegal means’ (the occupation of the crane) in their fight for recognition. However, this study presents evidence that the alliance with the radical left, as well as long-lasting friendships between immigrants and mobilised Italians, represented in part a deviation from these general patterns.

I begin with the introduction of my methodology and my description of the Struggle of the Crane. I continue with a description of the Italian immigration regime and the few mobilisations that took place in Italy between 2010 and 2011, which inspired the Struggle of the Crane. I proceed with an analysis of how hostile discourses and practices by local authorities triggered and nourished the protest. I carry on by presenting a historical reconstruction of alliances with the radical left since the 1990s and the conflicts between mobilised immigrants and institutional non-state actors, with a particular focus on the Struggle of the Crane. I conclude with a discussion of the relevance of this case study for our understanding of radicalisation of undocumented immigrants and the role of allies.

Methodology

This study is part of a larger project that took place in four Italian cities between February and November 2013, and May and August 2014. The empirical research focused on extensive ethnography, and examined forms of immigrant activism and the role of non-state actors in promoting participation at the local level. The data selected for this article were collected during four months of fieldwork in the city of Brescia between June and October 2013. Following the literature on social movements, which shows the value of ethnographic research for studying actors and their actions (Della Porta 2014), I used a variety of qualitative research methods. They included participant observation of weekly meetings, assemblies, demonstrations, informal conversations and in-depth semi-structured interviews with immigrant activists and members of non-state organisations. For this article, I have selected 12 interviews with local actors (6 with Italian and 6 with immigrant activists) (see Appendix). I also relied on participant observation at meetings and events, and had many informal conversations with various members of two radical-left organisations: the older and more established association, Rights for All (Diritti per tutti), created in the 1990s, and Crosspoint, an organisation created during the Struggle of the Crane in 2010. I also participated in weekly meetings at the Social Center Warehouse 47 (Magazzino 47). I talked with members of the Church and of the two main trade unions in the city. The first trade union, the CGIL (Italian General Confederation of Labor – Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro), is of communist background and, with the highest number of total workers enrolled, is the most powerful union in Italy. The second trade union, the CISL (Italian Confederation of Trade Unions – Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Lavoratori), is of Catholic background and is the second most powerful union in Italy after the CGIL (see Caritas/Migrantes 2012, 273). I triangulated these methods with archival research (e.g. local newspapers, pamphlets, reports, documents, visual material published on the internet, etc.), which helped me reconstruct the Struggle of the Crane and identify the main actors. I also consulted the archives of the
Radio Collision Wave (Radio Onda d’Urto), a daily radio broadcast linked to Rights for All.

The Struggle of the Crane

In 2010 – from 28 September to 16 November – the mid-sized city of Brescia, with its approximately 200,000 inhabitants (around 20% of whom were immigrants), was at the centre of an extreme form of protest by undocumented immigrants who showed their despair and their will to fight against unjust treatment by national and local authorities. The action, known as the Struggle of the Crane (Lotta della gru), started with a mobilisation of around two hundred immigrants (mostly male Egyptians) in the centre of the city. The organisers were undocumented immigrants who had applied to regularise their status through the mass regularisation ‘for housemaids and caregivers’, which was launched in September 2009 by the right-wing Berlusconi government and saw 294,744 applications. The migrants who organised the first day of protest asked for and received the support of Rights for All. This organisation was linked to the Radio Collision Wave and the Social Center Warehouse 47, and all three were known among immigrants for their support of their causes since the 1990s.6

Protesters mobilised in response to the mass regularisation launched by the state, which they called a ‘fraudulent amnesty’. After waiting a full year, most people had received no answer because the Italian bureaucracy was extremely slow. Additionally, many immigrants considered the amnesty to be discriminatory, since it aimed at regularising only housemaids and caregivers, while ignoring the many undocumented immigrants working in the underground economy as industrial workers, masons, farmers, etc. Third, they believed the amnesty was created to take money from vulnerable immigrants without giving them stay permits. And finally, since the permit depended on the employer, many immigrants had to pay their employers to submit their applications. This exposed them to opportunism by those who took advantage of their vulnerable situation and created a black market for permits.7

From day one, the protest was characterised by violent confrontations with the police. The mobilisation had started with a demonstration and an overnight occupation in front of the prefecture, and was violently attacked the next morning. In response to this violence, a second demonstration was organised the next day and attracted around 300 people of migrant background. Members of the Indian, Pakistani, Senegalese and Moroccan communities (mostly men) joined the initial group.8 By the end of the second day, protesters established a permanent occupation in front of the prefecture to demand that public authorities meet with them at the negotiating table. In response, their protest was violently repressed by the police in the following days.9 Nonetheless, the protesters maintained the occupation in front of the prefecture day and night, and organised sit-ins, meetings and trainings in Brescia and other parts of Italy for almost a month. In front of the complete closure by the local authorities, protesters organised another demonstration on 30 October with the support of immigrant organisations in the territory surrounding Brescia (Figure 1).10 Local authorities denied them permission to demonstrate. Nonetheless, the organisers decided to go ahead. On the day of the demonstration, the city was armed and there were police everywhere. After some confrontation with the police, some protesters climbed up on a crane that was placed in a construction site at the
centre of the city. Recalling that moment, during our interview, Yusuf, an undocumented migrant from Pakistan who led the action and was the spokesman for the protesters, told me:

We felt we had no other choice. We opted for a radical gesture. We took one of the banners that said ‘AMNESTY!’ … we wanted to be visible and expose the injustice inflicted on us by the state through the amnesty …

Seven young men climbed onto the crane. They were all undocumented immigrants originating from different countries (Morocco, Pakistan, Egypt, India and Senegal), each of whom had spent between three and seven years in Italy and had applied for amnesty. Hanging onto the crane at 35 metres in the air, they demanded five things: (1) to talk with the Minister of the Interior, the leader of the Northern League, Roberto Maroni; (2) a chance to negotiate with local authorities; (3) authorisation for a permanent occupation in a visible place in the city; (4) amnesty for all who had applied for the permit; and (5) a guarantee that they would not face charges after the protest. After three days on the crane, and unsatisfactory negotiations with local authorities, Yusuf took a megaphone and shouted:

We won’t come down! What do we have to lose? There are people here who have not been able to go back home for ten years, who are sick and cannot go to the doctor, who cannot have a decent job because they do not have a stay permit. We only want to be able to live with dignity. Until today we have always been invisible … people who supply labor at low cost. Now we are persons!
Faced by stonewalling and repression, which included the incarceration of Italian and immigrant activists, and the deportation of nine undocumented immigrants protesting under the crane, the men on the crane sustained their struggle for 17 days. They climbed down only after difficult negotiations, which were made possible by pressure from three of the most powerful actors in the city, the Church and the trade unions CGIL and CISL, who mediated between local authorities and the protesters. The protesters agreed to climb down on one condition: that they would be defended by the lawyers of the radical-left organisation Rights for All, the only organisation they really trusted.\footnote{15}

**The hostile national context and immigrant mobilisations in Italy**

Like other Southern European countries such as Spain, Greece and Portugal, Italy unexpectedly transformed from a country of emigration into one of immigration in the first half of the 1980s. In only 30 years, it developed one of the largest migrant populations among EU countries. By 2013, the migrant population reached more than four million – or 8.2% of the total population – giving Italy the fourth largest migrant population in Europe in absolute numbers (OCSE 2014). The first attempts to implement policies for social, economic, cultural and political integration were made by a left-wing government only in 1998 with the first comprehensive Law on migration, Law 40/1998, also known as the Turco-Napolitano Law. Moreover, when the right-wing government came to power in 2002, it made the legislation more restrictive with the introduction of two Laws – the Bossi-Fini Law (Law 189/2002) and the so-called Security Package (‘Pacchetto Sicurezza’, or Law 94/2009). This new legislation reflects the increasing influence of the anti-immigrant party, the Northern League, in shaping integration and immigration policies in Italy, and it has been criticised for having undermined attempts to integrate immigrants with different statuses. Among other things, Triandafyllidou and Ambrosini (2011, 264) note that, in this legislation, immigration is framed ‘as a question of security and public order’ and ‘immigrants are presented as a population that is potentially dangerous and that needs to be under surveillance’. What is more, the economic crisis that started in 2008 has worsened the situation of immigrant workers, because with the restrictive legislation, as immigrants have been losing their jobs, they are also at risk of losing their regular status and become undocumented in less than 6 months (Triandafyllidou and Ambrosini 2011). To add to these problems, the general context contributes to an increase in racism and social exclusion, while also weakening their economic and juridical status of immigrants (OCSE 2014). Finally, as we look at the context for the Struggle of the Crane, Ambrosini (2013a) points out that discriminatory discourses and practices towards immigrants are widespread not only nationally, but also at the local level (especially in the North). After the elections of 2008, the Northern League had more power than ever in its history, and in the city where it won the election with a right-wing coalition, it was able to implemented local policies of social, economic and cultural exclusion that were unprecedented in the history of the Italian Republic and that were against the Italian constitution.

As far as the situation of undocumented immigrants is concerned, the legislation approved by the right-wing governments faces a paradox. Despite the rhetoric of the Northern League, who made the fight against illegal immigration a cornerstone of its policy platform, the recent legislation has not solved the presence of undocumented
workers in the underground economy. Since the 1980s, a great number of undocumented immigrants have fed the Italian underground economy (Triandafyllidou and Ambrosini 2011). To tackle this situation, left-wing and right-wing governments have approved seven amnesties, or temporary mass regularisations, to legalise undocumented migrants, who find themselves in situations of irregularity and exploitation in the workplace. These amnesties have represented one of the main instruments of Italian immigration policy to fight irregularity. Since the first amnesty, around 1,760,200 undocumented immigrants have been regularised (Triandafyllidou and Ambrosini 2011). The right-wing governments guided by Silvio Berlusconi between 2002 and 2012 approved four mass regularisations. Even though these amnesties have been presented by right-wing governments as an attempt to regularise undocumented workers, these practices have been criticised by civil society organisations as fraudulent, and as having taken advantage of the vulnerable immigrant population (Mometti and Ricciardi 2011; Oliveri 2012). What is more, there is evidence that instead of diminishing the magnitude of ‘irregularity’, this legislation contributes to produce a large pool of vulnerable immigrant workers condemning them to ‘invisibility’ in the underground economy (Oliveri 2012, 796–797).

As the financial crisis was worsening the conditions of workers in Italy since 2008, a few significant immigrant mobilisations took place between 2010 and 2011 in response to the legislation and discrimination towards immigrants in Italy (Oliveri 2012). The mobilisations organised by immigrants and their allies were often influenced by or linked to Italian workers’ protests. While many Italians mobilised in the workplace to ask for better working conditions and limits on the processes of precarisation during the financial crisis, protests by the migrant population and their allies were motivated by economic and working conditions as well as the difficult ‘immigrant condition’ caused by restrictive legislation (Oliveri 2012, 798).

Immigrant mobilisations started with a key symbolic event on 7 January 2010: the protest of hundreds of undocumented immigrants in Rosarno in the Southern region of Calabria. These immigrants, who were working as orange-pickers for organised crime, ‘rebelled after two of them were injured by three Italian youngsters in a drive-by shooting’ (Oliveri 2012, 793). This event became a symbol of migrant resistance to exploitation and encouraged new protests in the following months (Oliveri 2012). Directly referring to the protest of the orange-pickers in Rosarno, on 1 March 2010, there was a national event: ‘A Day Without Us: The Strike of Migrants’. The event was organised by civil society organisations composed of Italian and immigrant activists who formed the ‘Committee of the First of March’ (Comitato Primo Marzo) and took thousands of people to the streets for organised sit-ins, demonstrations and strikes (Oliveri 2012). Finally, an important protest that inspired the Struggle of the Crane occurred on 9 April 2010, when two Italian workers occupied a crane in Milan because their company was not paying them. It was only one of the many protests that were taking place all over Italy, but it carried a particular symbolic weight. It was backed by the radical section of the main left-wing trade union, the CGIL-FIOM (branch of the metalworkers), and lasted a few days. The Struggle of the Crane in Brescia was the peak of these protests (Mometti and Ricciardi 2011). It marked a very contentious and polarised moment, and attracted the attention of the national and international media and encouraged a national debate, as well as new struggles in 2011, when protests and other events were organised throughout Italy. It was seen as a struggle against the exploitation and unjust treatment of immigrants, but...
also as a symbol of resistance against the increasing precarisation of all workers. The crane, occupied a few months earlier in Milan by Italian workers, was a particularly rich site symbolically, because the immigrants wanted to emphasise that even while they worked ‘invisibly’ in the underground economy, they were workers, contributing to the growth of Italy’s economy and for this reason they ‘deserved respect’. They receive support from both migrant and Italian workers, as well as radical-left activists throughout Italy and beyond (Mometti and Ricciardi 2011).

The hostile local context and the radicalisation of immigrants in Brescia

In order to understand why undocumented immigrants in Brescia decided to mobilise in the first place, we need to look not only at policies generated at the national level, but also at the hostile local context. Institutional discrimination of the right-wing administration in Brescia was at the heart of the immigrants’ frustration, and this frustration nourished their contentious political activism and radicalisation. Since 2008, immigrants in Brescia experienced an unusually hostile local environment. This context was not unique in Northern Italy, but in Brescia hostilities were more intense than everywhere else. Leading up to the elections, the right-wing coalition, which included a strong Northern League presence, launched a ferocious campaign centred almost exclusively on fighting ‘illegal immigration’ and on a need for ‘tighter security’. Once in power, ‘a war against immigrants’ was launched, and manifestations of symbolic and material exclusion became more and more widespread. The leader of the Northern League issued several openly racist statements, which were denounced by the left-wing trade union, the CGIL. Forms of discrimination and ‘differential treatment’ towards immigrants in hospitals, schools and public spaces were common (Ambrosini 2013a). Supposedly ‘neutral’ local institutions, like police headquarters and the prefecture, became increasingly discriminatory towards immigrants.

The Struggle of the Crane took place in this climate of hostilities. Immigrants were particularly angry of this unfair and discriminatory treatment in their regards. Moreover, in 2010, the prefecture of Brescia, following a circular launched by the right-wing government in March 2010 (the so-called Circular Manganelli), agreed to exclude retroactively from the amnesty all those who had received a paper for expulsion before the submission, even if they had a job and had paid for and submitted a regular application. In September 2010, faced with the choice whether or not to accept the circular and thus exclude the ‘clandestines’ from the amnesty, the right-wing administration of Brescia decided to support it and thus agreed to deny the permit of stay to all undocumented immigrants who according to the recent legislation were considered to have ‘criminal records’.

During the days of protest, the hostilities by the local right-wing administration increased and this pushed immigrants to greater radicalisation. Local authorities adopted a ‘zero tolerance’ attitude, refusing to negotiate with the immigrants, and labelling the protest illegitimate. The administration characterised immigration as a ‘problem of public order’, and undocumented migrants as ‘people with no rights’. The mayor of Brescia, a member of the Party of Freedom, referred to the demands by immigrant activists as ‘unacceptable blackmail’, while the deputy mayor, a member of the Northern League, declared: ‘They can stay on the crane forever. They will never have the stay permit, because they have no right to have it according to current legislation.’ He added: ‘It is
they who are denying Brescians the right to work, to study, to free movement and to exercise their economic activities in the area where they are protesting.\textsuperscript{26} The undocumented immigrants I interviewed who were involved in the protests told me that local repression resulted in the reinforcement of the migrant social movement in Brescia. During our interview, Ibrahim, an undocumented immigrant from Senegal who demonstrated under the crane, told me: ‘The local government tried to intimidate people who were active in the movement, but they did not succeed. The more they tried to repress us, the stronger we would become.’\textsuperscript{27} Ramzi, an undocumented immigrant from Egypt who was protesting on the crane, declared that police repression had only made them more determined and that is why they opted for the occupation of the crane:

\begin{quote}
After the police charge on Saturday [30 October] during the demonstration, which impeded us from demonstrating for our rights, when they evacuated our occupation […], they did not know it, but they made us stronger. It was like telling us that we had nothing to lose.\textsuperscript{28}
\end{quote}

Overall, the role of the local administration helps us to understand why undocumented immigrants undertook increasingly radical actions, and sustained these over a relatively long period of time. In the following sections, I will offer evidence of the motivations for their alliance with the radical left.

**Immigrant mobilisations and alliances with the radical left**

Mobilisations by the immigrant population in Brescia have a long history and have resulted in the development of a migrant social movement in the city, which was still active in 2013, during my fieldwork. The Struggle of the Crane represents the last of three highly contentious moments, each separated by about a decade. The first key mobilisation took place in the 1990s, when housing was the greatest problem for migrant workers and local administrations had failed to respond promptly. There were a few centres mainly run by the Church that welcomed immigrants when they first arrived, but they were not enough to cover the needs. Lack of housing caused several occupations by the immigrant population (Giancola 2008/2009, 65–70; my translation). In 1991, around 400 migrants of different origins occupied a place, the Motel Agip. The occupation was backed by radical-left organisations, while the Church and the CGIL supported negotiations with local authorities. Following prolonged protests by both immigrants and social forces, the administration of the time left the motel to the occupants and legalised their occupation (Giancola 2008/2009, 70–75).\textsuperscript{29}

The second major mobilisation took place in the year 2000. At that time there was a problem with the amnesty launched in 1998 by the left-wing government in power. After two years, many people had not received an answer. A demonstration took place in the centre of the city, with thousands of immigrants, who came also from the surrounding territories. It was the first public demonstration and the first time undocumented immigrants came out, thanks to the support of Italian and immigrant activists of the radical-left (Giancola 2008/2009, 148). The CGIL at the time offered material and symbolic support until the end of the mobilisation.\textsuperscript{30} The demonstration led to a 50-day protest movement that had as its participants a few hundred migrants and that lasted in its entirety a few months, with a continuous occupation of the squares of the city, and that brought about
Recalling those days, Khalid, an Italian citizen originally from Morocco, and a member of the migrant social movement since the beginning of the mobilisations in the 2000s and in charge of the CGIL’s Office of Foreigners for more than 12 years, told me that in the face of silence from national authorities, immigrant protests in Brescia radicalised:

In 2000 there were many demonstrations, occupations and protests against the amnesty … There were also evacuations. Immigrants were tired of being clandestine. They wanted to work in a regular way, and yet their requests were always rejected. They threatened radical acts. Someone said that he/she would burn herself. Many were brought to police headquarters.

As the protests against the amnesty were protracted and took place in the rest of the country, national authorities responded to the migrants’ request for permits for all and to give the permit to those who had previously been excluded from the amnesty (Giancola 2008/2009, 123–124). The more open national context at the time and the great national mobilisations facilitated the positive outcomes of the protest.

The third significant moment for immigrant mobilisations came with the Struggle of the Crane. Contrary to the mobilisations in 2000, this mobilisation did not bring about the results protesters were fighting for, including obtaining a ‘permit for all’, which would have covered all the undocumented immigrants who applied for amnesty. Nonetheless, according to the undocumented immigrants and their immigrant and Italian supporters, the protest was not a complete failure. The action did achieve a number of things: (1) it drew the attention of the media, and opened public discourse on the issues faced by undocumented immigrants in Italy; (2) it demonstrated the capacity of immigrants to fight injustice under difficult conditions; and (3) it built greater solidarity between the mobilised immigrants and their allies, the radical-left organisations.

The three key events identified above have been characterised by the gradual development of a strong and long-lasting alliance with the radical left in the city. The material and symbolic resources of these allies were pivotal for immigrant mobilisations. At the same time, the radical-left organisations in the city benefitted from this alliance by legitimating their work and thus establishing themselves as relevant political actors in the city. During our interview, Vinicio, the lawyer who worked as an activist in the radical left, explained that Rights for All kept all the other radical-left organisations together. It was born in the first years of the mobilisation of immigrants in the 1990s and became official in 2000. The protests of 2000 were at the origin of the immigrants’ alliances with the radical left and resulted in the consolidation of this key radical-left organisation. As the name suggests, from the beginning, the organisation’s mandate expressed a commitment to the recognition of migrants as subjects with fundamental rights, independent of their legal status. Vinicio explained that, as part of its commitment to social justice, ‘the radical left had to deal with immigration’. He added that, ‘in the 1990s, we got involved in a situation where institutions had not responded promptly and adequately’ ‘to the problem of migrant workers’ housing. In 2000, we offered material and logistical support to the immigrant struggles against the amnesty’.

As the brief reconstruction of the Struggle of the Crane suggests, the support that the radical left gave to immigrant activists in 2010 was crucial. The memory of this support as
well as the Struggle was very strong even in 2013, during my fieldwork. My interviewees explained how during the first month of the protest, before the occupation of the crane, members of the radical left maintained the occupation with them day and night. During an informal conversation one of my informants told me:

Our friends from the radical left organized meetings, trainings, and sit-ins with us. They slept alongside us in the tents to protect us from the police. The radio covered the protest continuously, which allowed for the spread of information and increased local support.

Yusuf confirmed this point:

The radical left organizations have always been with us! They have always supported us! They have confronted the police for us! During the occupation of the crane, they sent mattresses, blankets, and food to the protesters. They kept in radio contact with those who were occupying the crane, and joined with the immigrant communities in organizing an occupation below.

Ibrahim added:

The radical left was with us throughout. In the months after the crane, they created events in support of the immigrants’ cause and promoted the symbolic relevance of our initiative. They offered legal help to the undocumented immigrants who had been on the crane, and succeeded in bringing back the 9 undocumented immigrants who had been deported during the protest.

Abou, an undocumented immigrant activist from Senegal, made a similar statement: ‘I believe that the only organizations who are really on our side are the radical left organizations. It is about material, logistical, political and moral support!’ Overall, most of my immigrant interviewees recognised the key role of the radical-left organisations in supporting them in their cause.

The following section will focus on the conflicts between the mobilised immigrants and three key institutional non-state actors in the city: the Church and the two main trade unions, the CISL and the CGIL.

**Conflicts with institutional non-state actors**

Since the 1980s, when the first inflow of immigration arrived in Brescia, the Church, the CISL and the CGIL provided assistance and protection to the immigrant population through specific offices created for this purpose. Their support for immigrants finds its roots in their commitment to universal solidarity. Ambrosini (2013b, 315) explains that, ‘although they start from very different ideological and political assumptions’, these non-state organisations ‘agree on the moral principle that immigrants should be welcomed with no distinction based on race, nationality, religious belief, or status’. Nonetheless the different ideological positions of these organisations have implications for their responses to immigrant mobilisations in the city (Cappiali 2015). While the Church and the CISL tend to favour compromise over conflict and to avoid promoting mobilisations, the CGIL, a left-wing trade union with communist roots and particularly radicalised in the city of Brescia, is more prone to engage in mobilisations and to support contentious politics to make claims. In the past, they mobilised on several occasions to support immigrants’ claims and this helped to develop an alliance with the migrant
social movement. Nonetheless, by the end of the 2000s, as hostility towards immigrants in the city grew, things changed in a significant way. Immigrant activists became increasingly distrustful of the CGIL.

Tensions with the institutional non-state actors in the city preceded the Struggle of the Crane. Yet, as undocumented immigrants protracted their protest and became increasingly radicalised, open conflicts emerged. The first conflict emerged between the migrant social movement and the Church and the CISP. As some interviewees explained, the Church and the CISP had a very limited role in the city in contrasting the increasing discriminatory treatment and the violence against immigrants. What is more, during the first month of protest, the Church and the CISP did not show up in those places where immigrants were carrying out their permanent occupation, and they did not mobilise to support the protest, either from a material or symbolic point of view. When the protest intensified during the occupation of the crane, these organisations got involved, by expressing their point of view publically and by mediating during the negotiations with local authorities. They were present at all the negotiations with local authorities, and pushed for quick resolution, privileging compromise over conflict. Their role was crucial at the end of the negotiations. When tensions grew between local authorities and protesters, the referents of the Church and the CISP condemned the violent interventions of the police, and criticised the right-wing administration’s ‘attempts to collect votes on the skin of immigrants, people who have human rights’. Nonetheless, these organisations were particularly critical of what they defined ‘extremism’ by the protesters. The referent of the Church criticised undocumented immigrants who supported the occupation of the crane, saying it was ‘at the limit of legality’, given the ‘illegal’ occupation of the crane, and he added: ‘there is no place for outlaws’. On several occasions, he expressed his belief that the radical left was manipulating the undocumented immigrants on the crane, and accused them of exploiting the vulnerability of immigrants for political purposes. The then-secretary of the CISP spoke of the centrality of immigrants’ rights, but he also denounced those ‘who decided to organize an unauthorized demonstration’. He said that the protest bolstered ‘the fracture between immigrants and citizens. The latter need to be reached with information to make them understand the injustices inflicted on people who come into the country’. He criticised the radical left for using ‘immigrants as an expedient for political conflict, forgetting that there are people up there’. He then added: ‘They must climb down! They are impinging upon the rights of other workers’. He concluded by saying that the protest on the crane was ‘against the city!’

From the perspective of immigrant activists, the Church and the CISP not only failed to offer support for their cause, but they also sought to delegitimise the reasons for their protest. Ramzi summarised the view of many of my interviewees. He told me:

We are angry with these organizations because before the occupation of the crane, when we were demonstrating in front of the prefecture for more than a month, they never showed up. Then when we occupied the crane, they kept saying we should have stopped the protest. We wanted them to understand how desperate we were, we wanted them at our side to support our claims, but they didn’t.

The other conflict emerged with the CGIL. Immigrants in the city recognised that differently from the Church and the CISP, the CGIL responded in a vigorous way to the
growth of discrimination in the city. When the right-wing government came into power in 2008, it expanded its work in protecting immigrant rights and fighting institutional discrimination, which was widespread in Brescia and the surrounding areas. For this purpose, it created legal offices and pursued lawsuits (Cappiali 2015). Nonetheless, these responses were considered insufficient by immigrant activists who believed that the CGIL at the national level had not done enough to fight against the existing legislation which made them very vulnerable. Abou summarised the point of many of my interviewees.

The actions against institutional discrimination by the CGIL are important. But we consider it to be a marginal issue compared to things that matter for us. We want to see the CGIL express an authentic solidarity, not one of façade. Most immigrants in the city have reasoned as follows: ‘They do not represent us! They have detached themselves from our struggles and our claims.’ We want to see the CGIL fight against the underground economy and in favour of our dignity. Before the Struggle of the Crane, in 2009, when the ‘fraudulent amnesty’ was launched, they could have struck a few hours to show their support, but they didn’t. We could have had better and quicker results.

What is more, referring to the Struggle of the Crane, Khalid described how the CGIL changed with respect to past mobilisations:

The CGIL used to have a really positive political. It gave immigrant activists the possibility to work autonomously and it created platforms to support our mobilisations … It was a very important time for immigrants’ participation! There were platforms at the time in which even undocumented immigrants could participate … During our protests in 2000, the CGIL gave its support to the [immigrant] movement 24 hours per day. During the Struggle of the Crane, the CGIL betrayed us.

Most of my interviewees explained that the CGIL did not help organise the occupation and it did not fully understand and support them. At the beginning of the protest, the CGIL backed protesters’ demands by giving them two large shelters to sleep in during the occupation. According to some immigrant activists (including people who were members of the trade union), the CGIL was somewhat present during the long occupation in front of the prefecture, but during the moments of greatest tension (when the protesters climbed the crane) the CGIL attended negotiations but did not fully support the protest.

During the Struggle of the Crane, the CGIL was very critical of the local administration. Also contrary to the Church and the CISL, it was not openly criticising protesters, because it did not want to enter into an open conflict with the mobilised immigrants. However, the CGIL’s unwillingness to come out fully in support of the protesters created major fractures in that organisation, with some of the more active immigrant members choosing to disengage from union activity.36 Ibrahim told me:

At one point, the trade union drew back. It was ambivalent … We wanted to go ahead and they hesitated. Later on, when the Struggle of the Crane ended, the CGIL understood that they had made a mistake and they came to apologize.

Overall, the Struggle of the Crane uncovered and worsened the existing tensions between immigrant activists and key institutional non-state organisations in the city. These tensions had been nourished by the perception among protesters that these organisations had not done what they could to show solidarity towards immigrants.
Conclusion

This article contributes to our study of immigrant mobilisations and alliances with non-state actors in hostile environments. First, I have shown how, in addition to the hostile national context, institutional discrimination and repression by local authorities triggered contentious activism and nourished radicalisation by immigrant activists. As the protest unfolded, undocumented immigrants felt they had nothing to lose, and this pushed them to protract their radical protest. This component of my analysis speaks to those studies that highlight the role of hostile environments in mobilisation (Nicholls 2013). I have demonstrated that, even though they mobilised against legislations that pertain to the national level (such as the mass regularisations and the migration legislations), undocumented immigrants and their allies articulated their claims and mobilised at the local level (see also Monforte and Dufour 2012; Zepeda-Millán 2016). Second, I have explained why undocumented immigrants have created partnerships with radical-left organisations. This study suggests that the decisiveness of alliances can vary across time and space and need to take into account interaction among multiple actors and the perceptions of immigrant activists of the support of their potential allies (see also Cappiali 2015). In Brescia, conflicting relationships between immigrant activists and non-state institutional actors such as the Church and the trade unions stemmed in large part from these latter organisations’ unwillingness to provide significant material and symbolic support to the protesters. This fact explains the renewed alliance with one of the immigrants’ historical allies: the radical-left organisations.

Repression and hostility do not necessarily result in political radicalisation, just as immigrants’ rights claims do not necessarily result in contentious politics. As Nicholls (2013, 99) points out, in most cases, activists stress ‘the moral and cultural attributes’ that make a specific group ‘particularly deserving of the legal rights to stay in the country’, and more radical claims are often left aside. In hostile environments, this approach can be an even stronger incentive for undocumented immigrants to stress their deservingness and belonging in the receiving society. Nonetheless, under some conditions hostile environments can trigger radicalism. The case of Brescia shows that, in addition to extremely hostile national and local contexts, two key factors triggered radicalisation: the presence of a long-lasting migrant social movement in the city and its legacy, and the alliances with radical actors that helped to shape the types of claims brought forwards by mobilised immigrants. By offering material and symbolic support, these allies of the radical left encouraged immigrant activists to make more radical claims, while also contributing to the polarisation of local politics.

The analysis of the Struggle of the Crane sheds light on two key aspects concerning the nature of alliance in hostile environments. First, conflicting discourses around immigrant rights and ‘deservingness’ influence the kind of alliances immigrant activists establish with potential supporters. In Brescia, the right-wing administration depicted undocumented immigrants as people with ‘no rights’ and restated the right of the citizens of Brescia to live in peace. In response to this context, the Church and the CISL opposed the idea that immigrants have no rights by speaking about human dignity and universal human rights. But they also opposed the ‘illegal’ occupation and contrasted the rights of immigrant protesters with the right of other citizens to work and live in peace. The CGIL was a little more cautious in this respect, but this merely created conflicts with the
immigrants who expected more from this traditional ally. The radical left and the mobilised immigrants, on the other hand, utilised a discourse of deservingness and human dignity that challenged the discourses put forward by all other actors. Since undocumented immigrants perceived their situation of exclusion and repression by state and local institutions as extremely unjust, they found the more moderate position of other non-state actors unacceptable. They believed that their radicalisation was not something to condemn, but rather something that had to be understood within the context of extreme social and political exclusion. That immigrant protesters were often targeted as extremists was a strategy meant to disqualify their claims. From this point of view, we can interpret the alliance between immigrant activists and the radical-left organisations as a result of their shared understanding of immigrant rights and deservingness.

Second, the case of Brescia suggests the shifting saliency of alliances between immigrants and traditional left-wing organisations. Immigrant activists gradually lost trust in their past allies of the CGIL. This culminated in a complete fracture between immigrant activists and this trade union during the Struggle of the Crane. The conflict-laden relationship between immigrant workers (documented and undocumented) and the CGIL is not unique to Brescia. Scholars have suggested that in Italy and other Western countries (Adler, Tapia, and Turner 2014), traditional trade unions have been criticised for not having adequately protected the most vulnerable workers and supported their claims against social inequality and exploitation. At the same time, some trade unions have also progressively understood the importance of mobilising in favour of immigrant workers in vulnerable conditions. For this reason, they have in some cases broadened their approach, by mobilising around, for instance, status regularisations and access to housing and basic services. As Marino, Penninx, and Roosblad (2015, 9) highlight, in the face of vulnerable conditions, trade unions in receiving societies have enlarged their sphere of action ‘well beyond labour claims and labour equality to also, increasingly, involve social and legal status’ (see also Adler, Tapia, and Turner 2014; Penninx and Roosblad 2000). In Italy, the traditional trade unions have been criticised for having failed to address several issues related to immigrant workers’ rights, including institutional racism (Oliveri 2012), and exploitation in the underground economy (Cobbe and Grappi 2011). They have also been criticised for having neglected to respond more vigorously to the increasing hostile environment (Cappiali 2015). Additionally, one main criticism made by more radicalised left-wing groups is that the CGIL has often focused on the protection of its members at the expense of other, more vulnerable, groups (documented and undocumented), thereby failing to protect the overall rights of the working class (Cobbe and Grappi 2011). There is empirical evidence that these problems encountered by the CGIL have resulted in the increase of distrust towards this organisation, even among its migrant members (Cappiali 2015). It is also true that, even after the financial crisis, traditional trade unions in Italy still organise more than one million immigrants, a number only slightly affected by the economic crisis (see also Caritas/Migrantes 2012). In this respect, grassroots unions, which have very small numbers of people enrolled compared to the CGIL and the CISL, still have very little impact in terms of the inclusion of immigrant workers in the receiving society. Nonetheless, in response to a growing general distrust towards trade unions, many immigrant workers are preferring to unionise with other, less institutionalised grassroots unions. Others have shown a willingness to act independently – as did undocumented workers in Brescia – or to make
radical claims even if they are enrolled in one of the more traditional unions. In times of financial crisis, the loss of jobs and homes by many immigrants is triggering the resurfacing of class – rather than ethnicity-based issues, and is thus shaping new alliances and political affiliations with these actors (see Cappiali 2015).

This study suggests new avenues of research on the role of alliances in hostile environments. It points to the need for further investigation into the nature of alliances and conflicts with those actors that are ‘in-between’ the states and mobilised immigrants. Furthermore, we need more research on how immigration and immigrants are contributing to the transformation of alliances and conflicts among actors in the receiving society. The question, for instance, of how specific groups of immigrants, particularly those in vulnerable conditions, contribute to the transformation of the political landscape of receiving society, is still unanswered. Finally, we need more research on the role of left-wing actors in promoting immigrant mobilisations and in particular the role of the radical left in filling gaps left by more institutional actors.

Notes

1. In Western Democracies, the mobilisation of the discourse on human rights is enabled by the incorporation of the human rights frame through the signature of the conventions of human rights (Cook 2010, 146) or through its incorporation in the National Constitutions by states.
2. The Italian radical-left organisations mobilised early on the issue of immigration, between the 1980s and 1990s. Some radical-left organisations are historically associated with the Communist Refoundation Party (Partito Rifondazione Comunista), while other organisations are not associated with any party and claim extra-parliamentary trajectories of political action (Cosseron 2007).
3. All the names of interviewees are pseudonyms, to protect their identities.
4. The social centres are usually abandoned buildings occupied by radical-left organisations for political and cultural activities. Most of these occupations in Italy took place in the 1970s and the 1980s, when the immigrants in the country were still few.
5. In 2011, the total number of workers enrolled in the main traditional trade unions in Italy was 14,460,919 and 1,159,052 migrant workers. The CGIL had the highest number of workers enrolled (5,775,962), of which 410,127 (or 7.1%) were immigrant workers. The CISL had 4,485,383 workers, of which 384,237 (or 8.6%) were immigrants. The other trade union members are distributed among the third main left-wing trade union in Italy (the UIL) and other minor unions.
6. As I observed during fieldwork in 2013, the radical-left organisations were composed of Italians (men and women) of different backgrounds and ages, who are committed to social justice and human rights. Among them, some are more radicalised than others. Some have a Catholic background, but have decided to be part of the mobilisation to help the situation of immigrants. The Struggle of the Crane resulted in the development of a collective identity that included immigrant and Italian activists, and was still very strong in 2013, when my fieldwork took place.
8. Interview with Ramzi.
10. Interview with Ibrahim.
11. Interview with Yusuf.


16. Some Italian scholars and activists (especially grassroots movements of the left) have called the mobilisations that took place in 2010 and 2011 ‘a new cycle of protests’ (Oliveri 2012). However, the impact of these new mobilisations should not be over-emphasised. As early as 2012, as the financial crisis continued to impact the most vulnerable workers, many of whom are immigrants, these protests and mobilisations had lost a considerable amount of steam. In part, these mobilisations reflect the weakness of immigrant activism in the political arena, as well as the difficulties that non-state actors encounter in their attempts to create advocacy coalitions capable of supporting immigrants’ claims for greater recognition. The organisation behind ‘A Day without Us’ is a case in point. After the first mobilisation in 2010, another mobilisation took place on 1 March 2011, but the results were less important than the previous year. In 2012, the mobilisation was not organised.

17. The organizers of the event were inspired by the French movement that launched ‘The Day Without Immigrants: 24 Hours Without Us’ (‘La journée sans immigrés: 24h sans nous’) in France.


19. Interview with Mohamed.

20. Interviews with Carmine and Vittorio.


22. Ambrosini shows that the most blatant discriminatory ordinances concerned cultural, social and security exclusion. For a complete analysis of these ordinances, see Ambrosini (2013a).

23. Interviews with Benedetto, Carlo and Marta.

24. Interview with Mohamed.


27. Interview with Ibrahim.

28. Interview with Ramzi.

29. Interview with Vinicio.

30. Interview with Khalid.

31. Interviews with Benedetto, Carlo, Carmine.


36. During the protest, the CGIL also went through internal pressure by some of its members of migrant origin who were supporting the mobilisation. See interviews with Khalid and Carlo.

37. One example of the fracture between the CGIL and documented, but vulnerable, migrant worker is the mobilisation of approximately 400 porters of Indian origin in Reggio Emilia (Northern Italy) in 2011, who at the end of the protest opted for a hunger and thirst strike. This protest lasted more than six months and the CGIL supported the migrant mobilisation. However, as the negotiations with the employers were protracted, the difficulties that these workers experienced with the CGIL emerged in a visible way and ended with a final rupture of relationships with this union. For the reconstruction of the event, see M. Rinaldini. 2011. “La lotta dei lavoratori indiani in una cooperative di Reggio Emilia.” Inchiesta. June 15. Accessed March 5, 2015. http://www.inchiestaonline.it/lavoro-e-sindacato/la-lotta-dei-lavoratori-indiani-in-una-cooperativa-di-reggio-emilia/.
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References


**Appendix. List of my selected interviews in 2013**

- Vittorio (12 July), Italian (male), Worked for the left-wing administration between 1998 and 2008 and for the CGIL since 2008
- Benedetto (11 October), Italian (male), Director of the Migrants Center Association of the Diocese
- Carlo (11 October), Italian (male), Social worker
- Carmine (11 July), Italian (man), In charge of the Office Against Discrimination of the CGIL
- Marta (17 June), Italian (woman), Working in the Office for Immigrants of the CISL
- Vinicio (6 September), Italian (man), Lawyer of Rights for All
- Yusuf (18 July), Pakistani (man), Activist of Rights for All
- Ibrahim (8 September), Senegalese (man), Activist of Rights for All
- Mohamed (21 October), Moroccan (man), Activist of Rights for All
- Ramzi (18 July), Egyptian (man), Activist of Crosspoint
- Abou (15 July), Senegalese (man), Activist of Crosspoint
- Khalid (15 July), Moroccan (man), Activist and in charge of the Office for Migrants CGIL
“Whoever decides for you without you, s/he is against you!“: immigrant activism and the role of the Left in political racialization

Teresa M. Cappiali

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“Whoever decides for you without you, s/he is against you!”: immigrant activism and the role of the Left in political racialization

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ABSTRACT
Much of the migration literature neglects the questions of why and how “native” allies obstruct activism by immigrants and ethnic minorities. Left-wing organizations in particular are often assumed to be supportive of inclusion, and little research exists on the ways they have prevented the migrant population from having a voice in the political arena and from taking part in society as equals. Drawing on the critical theory literature, I introduce the concept of political racialization. This concept refers to mechanisms whereby political actors, in order to legitimize their work on immigration, have partially included immigrants in the political sphere, but in a relationship of “ethnic” or “racial” subordination. Through the analysis of 57 in-depth interviews with immigrant activists, I show how political racialization works within the Italian Left and how it contributes to marginalize the migrant population. I further explain how immigrant activists have challenged political racialization through their activism.

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Immigrant activism; left actors; immigrant allies; politics of exclusion; immigrants’ racialization; Italy

Much of the literature on the mobilization of immigrants and ethnic minorities tends to assume a positive role of “native” allies in supporting the migrant population’s struggle for recognition (see for instance Voss and Bloemraad 2011). Very rarely, however, does the literature examine why and how these allies obstruct the mobilization of this migrant population.¹ This is particularly true for left-wing organizations, which are “often un-problematically assumed to be supportive and even representative of immigrants” (Però 2005, 833). This lacuna is regrettable because it has prevented scholars from assessing the implications of the responsibilities of the Left in marginalizing and discriminating against immigrants and ethnic minorities in Western democracies.

In Italy, a few authors have examined the interaction between native organizations and immigrant activists from a critical perspective (see for
instance Però (2005, 2007); Pojmann (2006); Cappiali (2015, 2016). In particular, Davide Però (2005, 2007), in his study of the left-wing city of Bologna, suggests the presence of powerful internal contradictions within the Italian Left, and a strong ideological discrepancy between inclusive rhetoric and exclusive practices. He identifies mechanisms by which the “Otherness” of immigrants is produced, including paternalism, inferiorization, and essentialization of immigrants’ culture and difference. Additionally, in my previous work, I have shown that left-wing organizations have contributed to obstructing immigrant claims, often using immigrants’ struggles opportunistically to gain visibility and power in the political arena (Cappiali 2016). An important contribution in a similar direction can also be found in the feminist literature. In her book, Immigrant Women and Feminism in Italy, Pojmann (2006) presents an in-depth examination of the interaction between the historic feminism of Italy and the activism of migrant women living in that country. The author points out that Italian feminists tend to work on behalf of, instead of with, migrant women. She highlights, moreover, the many attempts by migrant women to advance the cause of democratic pluralism, as evidenced, for instance, by the creation of multi-ethnic migrant groups (Pojmann 2006, 133).

Building on the pioneering research presented above, this article examines the responsibilities of the Left in the political exclusion of immigrants and ethnic minorities in Italy. I address the following questions: How do left-wing organizations contribute to exclude and marginalize immigrant activists in the political sphere? What are the implications for inclusion in receiving societies? How do immigrant activists challenge their allies? I base my analysis on first-hand data collected during fieldwork between 2013 and 2014 (see below).

My interest in investigating the persistence of mechanisms of exclusion by the Italian Left was piqued during an interview I conducted in Italy in 2013. The interview was with a key immigrant activist of the radical left who had been active for more than twelve years, since his arrival in the country at the beginning of the 1990s. This interviewee said to me:

For many years, left-wing organizations from the whole political spectrum have prevented us [the immigrants] from having a say in the decisions taken on our behalf. As Gandhi said: “S/he who decides for you without you is against you!” You want to support immigrants’ struggles for recognition? We have to construct the political itinerary together, because if we do not, we construct itineraries that represent a true regression with respect to immigrants’ political participation and self-determination. (Radical left activists, Turin, emphasis in original)

Over the years, Gandhi’s expression has been widely used among immigrant activists in Italy to criticize the tendency of their left-wing allies to talk on their behalf and prevent their self-determination, thereby creating obstacles to their ability to develop their own claims and strategies for greater
These criticisms contrast with the rhetoric promoted by the Italian Left, which depicts immigrants as legitimate political subjects (see for instance Cobbe and Grappi 2011). It also conflicts with several attempts by the Left to create channels for encouraging immigrants’ participation (see Caponio 2005, Però 2005, 2007, Cappiali 2015).

I draw my analytical approach from the critical theory literature and introduce the concept of political racialization. This concept refers to a process whereby left-wing actors, in order to legitimize their work on immigration, have partially included immigrants in the political sphere (by creating, for instance, channels of participation and promoting their representation, see Cappiali 2015), but in a relationship of “ethnic” or “racial” subordination. Through the analysis of in-depth interviews with immigrant activists, I show how political racialization works within left-wing organizations. I also point out that by systematically preventing immigrant activists from taking the floor and determining their own trajectories within their organizations, they have contributed to producing and reinforcing their marginalization in the receiving society. I further examine how, despite marginalization, immigrant activists have challenged political racialization through their activism.

I begin with a presentation of my theoretical approach and my methodology. I proceed with a discussion of the difficult alliances between immigrant activists and the Italian Left. I then carry on the analysis of a number of interviews that I conducted with immigrant activists. I conclude by presenting a summary of my findings. I also suggest some new avenues for further research.

**A critical theory approach**

This study applies a critical theory approach to key concepts of inclusion and exclusion. These two concepts are central in the migration literature because they define those processes by which immigrants and ethnic minorities have, or are prevented from having, access to material, political, and cultural resources. These resources are crucial because they allow immigrant and ethnic minorities to interact on an equal footing with other actors in the receiving society (Bloemraad 2006). Alternatively, some authors have explained how specific practices in receiving societies, such as restrictive immigration laws and citizenship regimes, serve not to exclude the migration population, but rather to include them within specific relations of subordination that result in “differential” or “subordinated inclusion” of the migrant population vis-à-vis the labour market (Mezzadra and Neilson 2010; see also Anderson 2010).

In ethnic and racial studies, the critical theory approach is a useful paradigm to investigate dynamics of inclusion and exclusion because it helps us
shed light on how specific relations and hierarchies of power, supported by institutional and discursive devises, shape the position of actors in society and their interactions. In particular, scholars show how discourses and practices by specific actors in the receiving society – including, for instance, the state, institutional actors and the media (El-Tayeb 2011), specific immigration and labour laws (Anderson 2010), bureaucratic services (Marchetti and Scrinzi 2014), and employers (Maldonato 2009) – rather than completing excluding, produce instead complicated process of subordinated inclusion. Building on this literature, I investigate one aspect widely overlooked in the study of Western democracies: how and why left-wing political actors themselves have contributed to the racialization of immigrant activists. The migration literature has shown the importance of the concept of inclusion and exclusion to explain immigrants’ political incorporation (Hochschild et al. 2013). Yet, scholars have failed to apply the critical theory approach to the study of immigrants’ interaction with their allies. In order to overcome this major lacuna, I introduce in this article the concept of political racialization to examine the mechanisms of “differential inclusion”, specifically in the political sphere. Political racialization calls attention to mechanisms whereby political actors have partially included immigrants in the political sphere, but in a relationship of “ethnic” or “racial” subordination.4 Through this concept, I am able to show how left-wing organizations contribute to the “othering” of the migrant population, by reinforcing the binary narrative that distinguishes between “us” and “them”, or native-born Italians and the migrant population. This relation of power is “differential” insofar as the Left deploys complex mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion that result in the subaltern integration of the migrant activists in their organizations. I refer to these mechanisms as processes of “othering” because, through structural and discursive devices, they construct immigrants and ethnic minorities as inferior “Others”. This is done on the basis of their perceived difference or the presumed backwardness of the migrant population relative to the “native” Italians (Però 2007). At the same time, these mechanisms produce processes of “racialization” (or “ethnicization”) because they are based on ascribed characteristics of ethnic, race, and religious affiliations, and usually involve a “native” or “white” European population addressing a “non-native” and “non-white” group of people (El-Tayeb 2011; Aly 2016). “Racialization” towards immigrants and ethnic minorities are reflected in different forms of racism and discrimination as well in Islamophobic practices and the criminalization of the migrant population and their descendants (El-Tayeb 2011; Aly 2016). They further result in differential paths of economic and social inclusion of immigrants and ethnic minorities in receiving societies. These paths often result in concentration of specific “ethnic” or “racial” groups in marginal or unequal social and economic positions (Chaudhary 2015).
Methodology

My research draws from extensive fieldwork conducted in Italy between 2013 and 2014. It is based on a selection of data collected during fourteen months of research, including archival material (e.g. newspapers, official, and unofficial documents of the left-wing organizations), participant observation of key events (e.g. national and local meetings with the main left-wing organizations) and 111 in-depth, semi-structured interviews, of which 57 were with immigrant activists. The research was conducted mainly in four middle-sized cities in Northern Italy – Bologna, Reggio Emilia, Brescia, and Bergamo – but some interviews were also conducted in Milan, Turin and Rome, where I met some key migrant activists known at the national level. I triangulated the interviews with participant observation and use of material shared by the activists in order to better assess the role of immigrant activists in left-wing organizations. I supported my analysis with field notes from informal conversations I had with activists during meetings and events. All selected material was analysed and coded with the help of Nvivo software.

For this study, I have selected relevant material to analyse the relationship between immigrant activists and the Left, and I have relied mostly on the fifty-seven interviews with immigrant activists. These interviews were mainly with third-country nationals or new Italian citizens originally from non-EU countries (see Table 1). Most of these activists were members of left-wing organizations or had collaborated with them in a way or another. Most interviewees were councillors or members of the executive of local administrations, delegates or functionaries of traditional trade unions, and militants of social movements and grassroots unions. I also interviewed cultural mediators and members of some key immigrant associations with a political orientation, as they focused on influencing the public sphere at the local or national level. Out of fifty-seven interviewees, fifteen were women. Most women I interviewed had not held roles of responsibility within the organizations examined in my study, or were relatively marginal activists, which explains their underrepresentation in my sample. The same reasoning holds for the selection of some nationalities over others. Among the immigrant activists, eight interviewees were second-generation migrants.

Table 1. Immigrant interviewees.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of origin</th>
<th>Most numerous groups: Morocco (14); Senegal (14); Pakistan (6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Two interviewees per country of origin: Moldavia; Egypt; Cameroon; Ghana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>One interviewee per country of origin: Albania; Algeria; Bangladesh; Bolivia; China; India; Nigeria; Peru; Philippines; Romania; Somali; Togo; Tunisia; Ukraine, Cote d'Ivoire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cities</td>
<td>Milan (2), Turin (1), Rome (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reggio Emilia (13); Bologna (19); Brescia (14); Bergamo (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration status</td>
<td>EU citizen (1); Italian citizen (15); Permanent resident (17); Temporary working permit (14); Student permit (4) Undocumented (6)</td>
</tr>
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I gave particular attention to key left-wing organizations that have mobilized around the issue of immigration in relevant ways and that have done so since the first arrival of immigrants in the 1980s and 1990s (Kosic and Triandafyllidou 2005, 26). A particular focus was given to the main left-wing party, the Partito Democratico – the Democratic Party – and the main traditional left-wing trade union, the Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro (CGIL) – the Italian General Confederation of Labor. However, I also looked into several anti-racist organizations belonging to different political orientations within the radical left, including groups belonging to social centres (for an articulated definition of the radical left see Cosseron 2007). I followed some activities of grassroots trade unions (e.g. USB and Cobas) – organizations that have been able to grow during the financial crisis that started in 2008, and that have been mobilizing vulnerable immigrants around issues of housing and better working conditions (see Cappiali 2015).

**Complicated alliances**

The migration literature assumes that traditional ideological positions of equality and solidarity make left-wing organizations the “natural” allies of the immigrant population (Però 2005). This assumption is supported by empirical evidence that shows a long-lasting alliance with left-wing actors and consistent left-leaning affiliations of the migrant population, even among those migrants that have more conservative values (see Garbaye 2005; Cappiali 2015). Bird, Saalfeld, and Wust (2011, 100) argue that, in Western Democracies, in the face of increasingly hostile national environments, immigrant and ethnic groups have developed into a “migrant interest group”, which pushes them to vote for or support left-wing parties, which are usually less hostile towards immigrants and ethnic minorities than parties on the right. The increasingly hostile national context and the ongoing financial crisis have strengthened this idea that left-wing groups and migrant workers are natural allies (Bird, Saalfeld, and Wust 2011). As in many Western democracies, Italian left-wing organizations have offered immigrants opportunities for political participation, through the opening of various channels, including platforms for discussion on issues of immigration and support for mobilizations (Cappiali 2015). What is more, as a result of restrictive legislation and the vulnerable economic conditions of many immigrants, over the years, the Left has mobilized together with immigrant activists to promote the improvement of immigrant working and living conditions (Cappiali 2015, 2016; Oliveri 2015).

Regardless of these efforts, the Left has also been vigorously criticized for failing to fully support the inclusion and participation of immigrants and migrant workers. Traditional left-wing political actors, such political parties and trade unions, have been criticized for failing to convey the claims of
the most vulnerable in society, and have been challenged for their inability to offer feasible responses to the needs of vulnerable migrant workers (Mottura, Cozzi, and Rinaldini 2010). This has led to a vacuum, which the more radical left-wing groups have increasingly sought to fill (Cappiali 2015, 2016). In particular, the radical left organizations and grassroots trade unions (such as the USB and Cobas) have mobilized on issues of material justice, and have become especially active in those spheres in which other left-wing actors have been absent, such as housing rights, the rights of refugees, and the working rights of undocumented immigrants (Cappiali 2015; Oliveri 2015). Nonetheless, relationships between immigrant activists and radical left organizations can be very complicated, and problems that have already been raised with more moderate political actors are often reproduced in these relationships (see analysis below).

Many immigrant activists have critiqued both traditional and radical left-wing groups for their paternalistic attitudes and, in particular, their tendency to speak on behalf of immigrants, rather than supporting the self-organization and self-determination of immigrant communities (see Pojmann 2006; Mottura, Cozzi, and Rinaldini 2010; Oliveri 2012; Cappiali 2015). In order to confront these paternalistic attitudes, immigrant activists have, over the years, mobilized and in some cases created autonomous organizations (Pojmann 2006; Mantovan 2007). For instance, in 2001, a group of immigrant activists created a national organization, the Immigrant Committee of Italy (Comitato Immigrati d’Italia), in opposition to the Table of Migrants of the Social Forum created by the radical left. Another important national event was “A Day Without Us: The Strike of Migrants” in 2010, in which among other things, immigrant workers in Italy challenged the paternalistic approach of the main left-wing trade union, the CGIL, and groups of anti-racist organizations, mainly of the radical left, which were criticized again for doing things on behalf of immigrants (Oliveri 2015).

Data analysis and findings

Distrust of the Left

Analysis of my fifty-seven interviews with immigrant activists shows a growing, almost irreconcilable, lack of confidence in the traditional allies, such as the Democratic Party and the CGIL. Activists explained that when the Democratic Party was in power, it did not do much to advance immigrants’ rights. In particular, it failed to change the current restrictive legislation on immigration, something it had promise for many years. Significant criticisms were also made of the CGIL, which in recent years had failed to protect vulnerable immigrant workers. Therefore, my fieldwork in Italy confirmed the hypothesis suggested by Bird, Saalfeld, and Wust (2011, 100),
according to which the persisting left-leaning affiliation of immigrant and ethnic groups over the years should be read as a “migrant interest group” rather than an authentic political partnership. Most migrant activists in Italy support the Left as the more likely allies in what are increasingly anti-immigrant political environments. Nonetheless, very few seem to trust the Left in issues that concern immigrants specifically and Italian society in general.

Another reason for the existence of alliances between immigrant activists and the Italian Left were the opportunities for participation opened up by left-wing organizations. The platforms created by the Left to encourage participation in most cases lack influence and actual power in the political arena (Cappiali 2015). Nonetheless, they represent some avenues for participation and opportunities to interact with political institutions. Some of these channels are consultative bodies, others are parallel channels for participation at the city level, or specific platforms for immigrants to participate in left-wing organizations. Even though many of my interviewees criticized these channels, they also viewed them as opportunities for building personal and political skills for their own individual trajectories of participation, and for pushing for some positive change for migrant communities in Italy. Because of these indirect personal and collective benefits, immigrant activists would take part in these platforms. Yet, their criticism was pervasive and most of my interviewees critiqued these efforts as being only minimally effective. In most cases, these channels represented a façade rather than an opportunity for immigrants to discuss, on an equal ground, matters that concerned them. As one of my interviewees expressed: “There is no real platform where we can compete in the political arena as equals and make our own legitimate claims as individuals and as collective political forces. They always talk about us, but never truly with us!” (RL, Brescia). One example, brought in on several occasions, was the tendency of left-wing trade unions and political parties to bring immigrants to their events and demonstrations, without proposing any concrete initiatives to improve their conditions. One of my interviewees told me: “I have found many platforms, many political parties and trade unions. I have understood that the Left only wants to use immigrants” (RL, Bologna).

The lack of trust shown towards mainstream left-wing organizations explained why many immigrant activists allied with the radical left. However, alliances with the radical left were also complicated. I asked immigrant activists about the role of radical left organizations in inclusion and whether they considered them as an alternative to traditional left-wing organizations. The radical left was also an object of severe criticism. The analysis of the interviews showed mixed perceptions about these organizations. Immigrant activists in these radical left organizations said that while mainstream left-wing organizations had failed to promote inclusion and neglected to address some key issues that concerned them, the radical left was more
inclined to support their struggles for greater recognition. Some immigrant activists in more vulnerable conditions, such as undocumented immigrants of recent arrival, stated that radical left organizations let them “take the floor” and allowed them to bring forth their claims. Other immigrant activists in the radical left with a longer stay acknowledged the ability of radical left actors to advocate for, and mobilize, immigrants in vulnerable conditions. The financial crisis was believed to encourage these alliances, and they argued that it was better to have these organizations than to be faced with a complete empty space. Nonetheless, these interviewees also explained that, even though they shared the struggles supported by the radical left, they also believed that these organizations were “using immigrants like anybody else”, and in many ways they were not as different from other left-wing organizations as they claimed to be. They felt that radical left organizations had their own agenda and were not willing to challenge their own political views to include those of immigrants. In doing so, they showed resistance to the idea of opening up to pluralism and change.

Many immigrant activists who did not ally with the radical left organizations believed that these organizations were not able to promote real inclusion or offer viable political solutions. Their focus was on a limited number of issues, rather than on the multiplicity of problems associated with integration. These organizations addressed issues such as undocumented immigrants’ rights and exploitation. They also concentrated on housing and bureaucracy. However, they neglected major issues linked to cultural integration, while also ignoring challenges faced by the more stable migrant population, including racism, religious accommodation, etc. As one of my interviewees noted:

The radical Left prioritizes conflicts with authorities rather than integration. […] We need to build a basis of cohabitation beyond ideological conflict. Integration concerns neighborhoods, work, schools, and social life. The radical left is blind to most of these issues. (DP, Brescia)

Some interviewees pushed their criticism further. They believed that the radical left had its own agenda and used immigrants for ideological purposes, like any other left-wing organization. In terms of participation they expressed many concerns. Above all, they criticized the radical left for exposing vulnerable immigrants to police violence. In the words of one activist:

The radical left does not know how to identify with immigrants. If someone goes to their demonstration, he/she risks being deported. […] They have a political agenda that silences vulnerable immigrants’ voice and needs. (Cultural mediator, Bologna)

Overall, immigrant activists from all political spectrums made a straightforward criticism of all left-wing organizations, which present themselves as friendly and
willing to support immigrants’ struggles, but de facto opposes immigrants’ successful trajectory in the political sphere and in the receiving society at large.

**Resistance to granting local voting rights**

One point that was often raised during my interviews was that the Left prevented immigrants from having a say on matters that affected them, and used them as an object of their discourse. Immigrant activists shared the belief that, despite its rhetoric about immigrants’ participation and self-determination, the Left used an inclusive discourse to gain legitimacy in the political arena, rather than encouraging a true participation of the immigrant population. In particular, one key point raised by all immigrant activists I interviewed was the importance of introducing local voting rights, a fair exchange for the many third-country nationals who do not have formal citizenship, but who contribute to the cities through taxation and exchanges with the local community. The immigrant activists I spoke with argued that local voting rights would prevent immigrants from being used by politics, including the Left. The lack of will on the part of the Left to introduce local voting rights for immigrants was a central issue that emerged during the interviews. Consider, for instance, the following statements from one of my interviewees:

In Italy, there is a political side that defends immigrants [the Left] and a side that is against them [the Right]. Both sides prevent immigrants from speaking for themselves … Immigrants are used by politics. Immigrants … do not have the power to negotiate politically, because they can’t vote. The Left fears the right to vote, because that will allow us to speak for ourselves. (DP, Brescia)

This criticism was addressed to radical left organizations as well. “Why does the radical left never talk about the right to vote at the local level? The Left knows that if immigrants could vote, many would not vote for them” (DP, Bergamo).

Most of my interviewees pointed out that the Left’s reluctance to introduce local voting rights created political apathy among the migrant population, with a consequent sense of political alienation and social and cultural marginalization vis-à-vis the receiving society. As one woman argued:

We have lost many years and now the political apathy of immigrants is a consolidated practice …. The Left should have promoted local voting rights to encourage a sense of belonging at the local level. Because this has not been done, the result is a complete disinterest in politics and more in general the withdrawal of many migrant communities from the broader Italian society. (Cultural mediator, Bologna)

To sum up, this section has pointed to the structural mechanisms by which the Left silence migrant activists. In the section below, I detail why the Left prevents immigrant activist from taking the floor and how this results in the de facto subordination of immigrants in their political organizations.
The “consumer paradigm” and political racialization

During my fieldwork, while digging into the Left’s reluctance to grant voting rights at the local level and, more generally, its refusal to allow immigrants effective power in the political arena, I was able to further investigate the process of political racialization by the Italian Left. One of my interviewees explained the existence of a “consumer paradigm” or a “paradigm of dependence and subordination” of immigrants’ in Italy that the Left helps to reproduce:

This is the country of mediation: do you have a problem?! It is the Italian organizations [such as the Catholic Church, trade unions, NGOs] that must deal with your problem. And you remain a “third” party, as if the thing did not concern you. When immigrants enter into Italy they are wedged in at the interior of an enormous paradigm of which the Left is also an important actor. In this paradigm the immigrant is represented as consumer, as someone who has to be served, and as passive subject. The discourse of the Left contributes to reproduce and reinforce this discourse. You are part of their discourse, because this legitimates those who talk on your behalf. The Left doesn’t want immigrants to become autonomous, because they want you to go to them and have them do things for you. (DP, Bologna)

According to my interviewees, immigrants occupy a subordinate position within the Italian paradigm of dependence or subordination vis-à-vis the Italian organizations. Therefore, in order to understand the Left’s tendency to silence the migrant population, we need to understand its function within this paradigm. From this point of view, we can argue that the Left contributes to including immigrants in the Italian society, but in a relation of subordination.

Democratic representation and political racialization

Barriers to representation are widespread in Italy. Recent research shows a very low level of representation of the migrant population in the Italian political parties and the main left-wing trade union, the CGIL, at both the national and the local levels (CGIL 2013; Cappiali 2015). Also, during my research in 2013, I found that no one with an immigrant background was elected at the regional level. As for the main left-wing trade union, the CGIL, recent research conducted by the organization shows the very low level of representation of the migrant population within this organization. While immigrant workers make up about 15 per cent of the total union membership, only 3 per cent of the union’s leadership is of immigrant background. What is more, their representation is generally at the level of delegates, that is, as representatives of workers (Italian and migrant) in the workplace. Delegates are usually elected on a democratic basis by their co-workers. However, there is no representation of immigrants as functionaries, where members
have roles of responsibility in the union at the level of their sector, or at the executive level, where members take decisions on behalf of the organization as a whole (Cappiali 2015; see also Mottura, Cozzi, and Rinaldini 2010). I asked my interviewees about the barriers to democratic representation that existed in the Left, and the way in which this is linked to the problem of political racialization. I discussed with them the three main levels of representation described by Bird, Saalfeld, and Wust (2011): descriptive, symbolic, and substantive. The first indicator of democratic political inclusion is “descriptive representation”. This term refers to the number of people of immigrant background who have roles of responsibility in political organizations. Bird, Saalfeld, and Wust (2011, 5) observe that, “systematic exclusion of a group from elected office tends to signal [that] group’s exclusion from full membership in the political community”. Additionally, enhancing group representation is crucial to the progress of democratic and pluralistic inclusion. Representation can make available “less intimidating channels” through which marginalized groups can convey their own preferences outside periodic elections. It also introduces “new perspectives and [a] broader range of reasons to [engage in] democratic debate” (Bird, Saalfeld, and Wust 2011).

Most of my interviewees were very critical of the role of left-wing organizations in preventing greater descriptive representation. They all agree that the low level of descriptive representation was the result of the lack of will on the part of the Left to open up to diversity and pluralism and to assume the implications of being truly inclusive. Some also added another criticism: the real barrier was mistrust towards immigrants due to prejudice and racism. Talking about the CGIL, a long-time member of the union told me: “If there is little or no representation, it means that there is racism! In the CGIL there is a widespread idea that Italians are more trustworthy than immigrants” (CGIL, Reggio Emilia).

My interviewees also condemned the ways in which the Left used “symbolic representation”. Bird, Saalfeld, and Wust (2011, 5) explain the importance of the “symbolic value of representation”. A party or union leadership that accurately reflects the diversity of its membership sends a message about the importance of giving greater voice to marginalized groups in society. Over the years, Italian left-wing organizations have promoted this approach in many ways, by making more “visible” activists who had an immigrant background (see Cappiali 2015). However, when I asked my interviewees about this topic, they argue that the Left adopted this practice instrumentally, to gain legitimacy in the political arena, rather than working in favour of greater inclusion for the migrant population. My interviewees highlighted the presence of practices of co-option and tokenism. These practices were seen as a way of attracting immigrants to one’s organization, while nonetheless ensuring that they would not be able to exercise any actual power. On this point, I could observe that left-wing groups selected
immigrants for certain positions based on their ethnic background, in an attempt to attract particular ethnic groups into their organizations. Processes of ethnicization or racialization were particularly visible. In more recent years, tokenism was also based on the representation of “immigrants” as a broader category, commonly used by left-wing organizations and migrant themselves. Nonetheless, the specific use of symbolic representation as a specific mechanism of racialization used in the past for specific ethnic groups was still holding.

Tokenism and instrumental use of symbolic representation were strongly felt as major obstacles to achieving the most important form of political inclusion: “substantive representation”. According to Bird, Saalfeld, and Wust (2011, 6), this latter form of representation tells us “what a representative does, and who he or she speaks for”. I use this term to refer to the level of substantial inclusion of those immigrant activists who hold roles of responsibility in left-wing organizations. Substantive inclusion can be captured by looking at two aspects: (1) the extent to which immigrant activists in roles of responsibility are able to speak out and negotiate their interaction with other members of the organization on an equal footing; and (2) the extent to which immigrants are recognized for their individual skills and characteristics. Most of my interviewees explained that being elected or appointed as a representative in the political party or trade union was the first step towards greater autonomy and self-determination, but that this was not enough. They observed that left-wing organizations stood in the way of those who had been elected, and, instead of valorizing their individual competencies and merits, promoted their compliance and subordination through, among other things, paternalistic attitudes. One of my interviewees, the Assessor of Integration in the province of Bologna, told me:

The role occupied by immigrants in Italy in any political organization is mainly based on compliance. If one of us is Assessor of Integration – as in my case – regrettably, he is not doing anything else but answering to the consumer paradigm of immigrants. Because the mayor, when he appointed me, thought he was doing a favor to the cause, instead of thinking that I am actually competent. This is why, instead of working on communication, which is my specialty, I am given the role of Assessor of Integration, which reminds me that this is supposed to be my role: an immigrant working for other immigrants. (DP, Bologna)

Other activists pointed out the presence of different forms of exclusion of the immigrants in leadership positions, including prejudice on the base of race and religion, fear of the “Other”, and a lack of meritocracy. Overall, they all agree that these mechanisms were systematically racializing migrant activists within the organizations of which they were members. I asked one of the elected councils of migrant background if he thought there was equal treatment in the political party. He answered: “I am afraid there is no equal treatment! I call their approach ‘Democratic racism’! I hold
the Left responsible for reproducing mistrust and prejudice within their organizations” (DP, Reggio Emilia).

To sum up, all my interviewees spoke of strong structural barriers to democratic representation on the Left. These barriers worked to racialize immigrant representatives, producing a situation of differential inclusion within the left-wing organizations. This relation of power then persists precisely because immigrant activists are constructed as “outsiders” or inferior “Others”, in a binary narrative that produces the Us/Them distinction.

**Immigrant activists challenging political racialization**

My study suggests that immigrant activists are resisting and challenging the process of political racialization produced by the Italian Left. Their trajectories are multiple and rich in activity, but those I spoke with all reflected a similar will to transform the Italian Left from within, breaking the persistent construction that sees them as outsiders, and challenging the tendency to externalize them by defining them as “immigrants”. First, even though they had different strategies to achieve their goals, they all expressed openly the need to break with the Left’s tendency to silence their voices. They shared the idea that, it was about time to start taking the floor without asking. One of my interviewees, politically active since the beginning of the 1990s, told me:

In the 1990s, there were the first attempts by immigrant activists in Italy to rebel against the tendency by the Left to talk on our behalf. … In 2001 there was the first substantial rebellion. We created our own organization and called it, the Immigrant Committee of Italy. It lasted only two years, but represented nonetheless a qualitative leap because we showed that we were persons above all and not a homogenous category. We have political opinions, rivalries, and conflicts. We shared everything with any other political movement. (RL, Milan)

Second, immigrant activists pointed out the need to go beyond the Us/Them binary distinction conveyed by the Left, by refraining from reproducing this narrative themselves.

We need to move away from the idea that we are immigrants, and start taking care of our city and its real problems. We [the immigrants] will fall behind if we are not able to make this qualitative leap: once we overcome the “immigrant” label, we must act as people who are part of this society. (DP, Brescia)

Third, for some interviewees, the way to break with political racialization was through mainstream politics. To assume even a minimal role within the political party was believed to be the beginning of proactive participation. One interviewee elected at the administrative level told me:

*This is the threshold!* Immigrants who come to Italy are represented as users, as those who are served. My goal consists of saying the opposite … that we are citizens, legitimized with full rights to occupy the role of those who administrate and take decisions, not only of those who receive services. (DP, Bologna)
Others interviewees felt the need to challenge the Left outside mainstream politics. One of my interviewees told me: “Participation is synonymous with self-determination. It means to ‘speak for oneself.’ Our organization [of radical left] is the voice of immigrants, for immigrants” (RL, Brescia). Overall, even though mostly suffocated and opposed, migrants and ethnic minorities resist their political marginalization in multiple ways, depending on their political views, interests and understanding of immigrants’ conditions in Italy.

**Conclusion**

This article explained that the Italian Left, despite its rhetoric that immigrants should take part in political life and speak for themselves, has resisted the efforts that immigrants have made towards political self-determination. Taking my cue from Gandhi’s expression, “Whoever talks for you without you is against you!” – an expression widely used among immigrant activists in Italy – I unpacked the mechanisms by which the Left keeps silencing the “voice of immigrants”, producing what I called *political racialization*. I used this analytical tool to explore how left-wing organizations have de facto systematically silenced and politically marginalized the migrant population and created a relationship of “ethnic” or “racial” subordination. Additionally, I argued that political racialization had a negative impact on efforts to include immigrants in Italian society. By systematically preventing immigrants from taking the floor and shaping their struggles for recognition, the Italian Left has contributed to the political apathy of immigrants and ethnic minorities and to the alienation of their communities. It can be further argued that, in doing so, the Left has obstructed the transformation of Italy into a more inclusive democracy by preventing immigrants and ethnic minorities from contributing to the development of a pluralistic, democratic society, in which multiple voices can be expressed and heard (see Pojmann 2006, 133). Furthermore, my research highlighted that, notwithstanding major obstacles, immigrant activists have fought and are still fighting to express their political subjectivity.

By focusing on the case of Italy, this study has only scratched the surface of several issues that bear on the relationship between immigrant activists and their “native” supporters. By way of conclusion, I want to highlight some potentially fruitful avenues of research. First, we need more comparative systematic research to assess the responses of the Left to immigration and its role in failed processes of integration in different Western democracies. More in general, we should assess how the Left is mobilizing around issues of equality and social justice in the face of “changing boundaries of citizenship” in the neo-liberal era (Jenson and Papillon 2000). Second, studies of the historical evolution of various alliances are needed in order to understand how, in different countries, the Left has responded over the years to the quest of immigrants and ethnic minorities for greater inclusion in general, and political
participation in particular. This article suggested that the Left has been unable to fulfil its promise of greater equality and inclusion, and has been slow in understanding what was at stake in the promotion of greater inclusion of the migrant population beyond self-preservation. We need to deepen our knowledge on why this was the case. Third, further investigation should be carried on to assess how processes of “othering” in receiving societies work along immigrant statuses as well as ethnic, racial, religious, gender, and class lines. Feminist and diaspora studies have shown the importance of looking at their intersection in different systems of oppression (El-Tayeb 2011; Aly 2016). Among other things, we should assess how experience of complex forms of oppression affect the oppressed ones’ “subjectivity and a specific standpoint and specific political interests” (Lépinard 2014, 2) as well as the ways in which immigrants and ethnic minorities mobilize and make their voice heard notwithstanding powerful opposition (see, for instance, Pojmann 2008; El-Tayeb 2011; Kassir and Reitz 2016).

Notes

1. Some exceptions are represented by the works by Pojmann (2008), Nicholls (2013) and Cappiali 2016.
2. To simplify, I use the expression “immigrant activists” to refer to people of migrant background with different statuses, including Italian citizens of migrant background.
3. During the pacifist mobilization for the independence of Indian under British colonial rule, Gandhi used this expression to tell his Christian allies to let Indians take up their own struggles for freedom.
4. I avoid the concept of “differential inclusion” as Mezzadra and Neilson (2010) used it for a different analytical purpose than mine.
5. The Democratic Party is the main social-democratic party in Italy. It was created on 4 October 2007 by former members of the Democrats of the Left (heirs of the Italian Communist Party) and the Democracy is Freedom Party, a small party with Catholic roots.
6. I will use the abbreviations DP to refer to the interviews with immigrants active in the Democratic Party and RL for those active in various radical left organizations.
7. The increasingly hostile environment towards the migrant population is reflected in two laws introduced by two right-wing majorities with a strong presence of the anti-immigrant parties, the Northern League: Law 189/2002, also known as the Bossi-Fini Law, and Laws 125/2008 and 94/2009, also known as the Security Package (Pacchetto Sicurezza). This legislation has been criticized for denying that immigration is a structural phenomenon, for failing to address major issues linked to an increasingly diverse population and for having made immigrant workers highly vulnerable, due to its implementation of institutional racism (Oliveri 2012, 2015).
8. I owe this insight to two founders of the Immigrant Committee of Italy.
9. For an overview of these channels (see Kosic and Triandafyllidou 2005; Mantovan 2007; Cappiali 2015).
10. Like other European countries, Italy has not introduced local voting rights for third-countries nationals.

11. In 2014, there was only immigrant activist who was a member of the national executive of a trade union, the USB.

12. The CGIL used extensively this strategy with the goal of unionizing immigrant workers to avoid the decline of the union in face of the decrease in number of native-born Italian workers.

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References


## Conflicting Ideologies and Competing Mobilization Frames: Taking Stock of the 2010 Migrant Strike in Italy

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Abstract

This article examines why and how civil society organizations such as trade unions, grassroots organizations and advocacy groups hinder the struggle for greater immigrant rights and recognition in receiving societies. In contrast with most migration literature that looks mainly at the role of the state in shaping alliances between immigrants and ‘native’ organizations, I adopt an organizational-level approach and investigate the role of ‘native’ allies in shaping mobilization outcomes. I also assess what explains the success, or lack of success, of sustained mobilizations. In carrying out this analysis, I present an in-depth case study of the conflict-laden organization of the national mobilization, “A Day Without Us: The Strike of Migrants,” that took place in Italy on March 1, 2010. Drawing from primary and secondary sources collected in Italy between 2013 and 2014, I analyze the conflicts that emerged at the national level, while also comparing mobilizations in two cities with different configurations of power: namely, left-wing Bologna and Catholic Bergamo. The organization of the event saw the mobilization of thousands of people all across Italy and the coordination of strikes in some cities. In the long run, however, the impact of the mobilization was in many respects very limited. I explain that the mobilization did not succeed in the long run, because allies failed to fulfill three key tasks. These tasks include: (1) building solid coalitions; (2) developing a winning mobilization frame; and (3) promoting the participation of immigrants themselves in the struggle for greater rights and recognition.
Introduction

In recent years, immigrants in Europe and the United States have been mobilizing to protest against the passing of anti-immigrant legislation and the growth of anti-immigrant and xenophobic attitudes more generally. This has been seen, for instance, in the protests of May 1, 2006 in the US (Voss & Bloemraad 2011; Zepeda-Millán forthcoming 2016), as well as in the mobilizations of the Dreamers (undocumented youth in the US (Nicholls 2013)) and the sans-papiers in France (Nicholls 2013; Raissiguer 2010), Spain (Huelva 2008) and Italy (Cappiali 2016a). What is more, in recent years, many migrant workers—both documented and undocumented—have mobilized and unionized at the national and local levels to demand the improvement of their working and living conditions, and to call for basic labor rights to counter the exploitation that migrant workers experience on a daily basis (Adler, Tapia and Turner 2014; Milkman 2011; Anderson 2010; Huerta 2008).

The widespread nature of these protests and mobilizations has pushed migration scholars to investigate in more detail why and how immigrants mobilize in hostile environments (Voss & Bloemraad 2011), and why and how some campaigns are more successful than others (Adler, Tapia and Turner 2014; Bloemraad, Silva and Voss 2016). This literature does a good job of explaining that non-state actors can be key in promoting and sustaining immigrants’ struggles for greater inclusion (Voss and Bloemraad 2011; Zepeda-Millán forthcoming 2016). Among other things, this literature has shown that ‘native’ allies are often crucial in promoting the success of immigrant struggles, as they offer the latter important material and symbolic support (Nicholls 2013; 2014; Cappiali 2016a). Much of this research has been important and groundbreaking. But this article departs from these analyses in order to examine an equally important phenomenon: namely, the tendency for civil society organizations such as trade unions, advocacy groups, and grassroots organizations to unwittingly hinder the struggle for immigrant rights and recognition. Indeed, studies show that immigrant allies frequently adopt opportunistic approaches, including paternalistic and/or instrumental attitudes towards immigrant activists themselves (Cappiali 2016b; Nicholls 2013). I have argued elsewhere that ideological and political interests as well as different understandings of the working and living conditions of immigrants in the receiving society shape the kinds of alliances that are established between immigrants and ‘native’ organizations (XXXX 2016a). As a result, ‘allies’ often come to exert much more influence over the course of immigrant struggles than do immigrants themselves. For all of these reasons, immigrant ‘allies’ have often been criticized for obstructing the ability of immigrants to participate in their own struggles and to shape their collective identity. In short, ‘allies’ have been critiqued for undermining the impact of immigrant mobilizations.1

In this study, I adopt an organizational-level approach to investigate the role of ‘native’ allies in shaping mobilization outcomes. I argue that conflicting ideologies and competing understandings of immigrant struggles are crucial for making sense not only of the ways in which mobilizations take place, but also their degree of success or failure. I explain that interactions among allies considerably affect the outcome of immigrant mobilizations in both the short and long-run. My analysis focuses on the conflict-laden organization of the national mobilization, ‘A Day Without Us: The Strike of Migrants,’ that took place in Italy on March 1, 2010. This is a useful case to examine alliances and conflicts among civil society groups. In the first place, it was organized entirely from below, by church-based and lay organizations together with the migrant associations. In addition, radical-left actors from different groups, including collectives and social centers, participated in the initiative. Institutional political actors, such as trade unions and left-wing political parties, remained mostly marginal in the organization of the event. This study examines the conflicts that emerged at the national level in the months preceding the event, while also comparing mobilizations in two cities.
with different political cultures. I selected Bologna and Bergamo as case studies because the main political actors in these cities exhibit very different ideological commitments and approaches to mobilization. Left-wing actors are much stronger in Bologna than they are in Bergamo, while center-right and church-based organizations tend to be much stronger in Bergamo than in Bologna (Caponio 2006; Mantovan 2007). The organization of ‘A Day Without Us’ saw the mobilization of thousands of people all across Italy and the coordination of strikes in some cities. In the long run, however, its impact was in many respects very limited. I explain that the mobilization did not succeed in the long run, because allies failed on three crucial accounts: (1) to build solid coalitions; (2) to develop a winning mobilization ‘frame’; and (3) to promote the participation of immigrants themselves in the larger struggle for rights and recognition.

I start by reviewing the existing literature and outlining my own theoretical approach. Using social movement theory and drawing from existing studies of immigrant organizing, I highlight my own contribution to the migration literature. I then examine the national political scene, as a way of contextualizing the conflicts that emerged around the organizing of the event, both at the national and local levels. I continue with an assessment of the short- and long-term outcomes of the mobilization. I conclude by highlighting the contribution that this study makes to the broader literature, while also drawing out its implications for future research.

Literature Review and Theoretical Approach

The Literature on Migrant Mobilizations

Much of the literature on immigrant mobilization focuses on the role of states and institutional actors in shaping the responses of migrant workers and their allies (see for instance Koopmans and Statham 1999; Raissiguier 2010; Nicholls 2013). This is the dominant approach and it has been adopted to study immigrant mobilizations at both the national and local levels (see for instance Monforte and Dufour 2011). However, this perspective that narrowly focused on the role of the state, fails to systematically examine the role that allies have played in shaping the outcomes of these mobilizations (on this point see my own work XXXX 2015). Furthermore, scholars that adopt this approach usually argue that immigrant mobilizations are unlikely to succeed in hostile national environments unless they adopt ‘narrow frames’ that highlight the strong correspondence between the cultural values of migrants and those of native-born citizens. For example, in his study of undocumented migrant workers who have mobilized for regularization in the US and France, Nicholls (2013) points out that hostile institutional environments create important obstacles not only to the mobilization of immigrants, but to the ‘framing’ of the mobilization itself. He explains that, “Increasingly xenophobic environments limit the range of discursive options available to rights claimants. If they are to gain recognition as [a] legitimate ‘voice’ and avoid being dismissed as impossible noise […], they must construct representations of immigrants and their cause in ways that cohere with the core normative and moral values of the nation” (84). He adds: “The intense hostility […] has made it difficult if not impossible to justify rights claims on the basis of universal arguments (that all human beings possess inalienable rights in spite of immigration status and cultural differences)” (84). For this reason, the mobilized migrants and their allies often opt for narrower strategies: “Demonstrating national identification has therefore become the means by which this ‘other’ reveals its humanity to the native.” Therefore, according to Nicholls, the increasingly hostile attitudes shown towards immigrants in both France and the United States have made it extremely difficult for immigrants in those countries to advance expansive and inclusive rights claims (Nicholls 2013, 84-85). Following this same line of reasoning, migration scholars have argued that, in highly hostile environments, immigrant activists and their allies are far less likely to
make bold and inclusive claims – claims that appeal to human rights and the rights of a person as such, independent of their status in the receiving society. Thus, they have concluded that the most successful campaigns and protests are those that center their frames on ‘native’ cultural values such as family and hard work (see for instance Bloemraad, Voss and Lee 2011, 5; Milkman 2011). As I explain below, this assumption is in part misleading because it leaves out the role of ideology and alliances among non-state actors. The outcomes of mobilizations, I argue, are the result of complicated dynamics and interactions among multiple actors with different goals.

The migration literature also points out that while many supporters act on behalf of immigrants, others put more emphasis on the organization of immigrants themselves, encouraging them to participate in their own struggles (see my own work XXXX 2016a). At the same time, immigrants themselves can be the first to promote their own struggles, and they sometimes come into conflict with other actors that try to shape and influence the direction of these struggles (Siméant 1998; See also my own work, XXXX 2016b). In particular, immigrant activists have often contested the tendency of many of their allies to adopt paternalistic attitudes towards them, and to use their struggles in opportunistic ways (Cissé 1998; Mantovan 2007; Huerta 2008; BSA, Nigro & al. 2012). One tendency that has often been highlighted is that of allies to speak on behalf of immigrants, thereby silencing their voices instead of letting them speak for themselves. This often hampers the ability of immigrants to engage as equal partners in their own struggles (Cobbe & Grappi 2011; XXXX 2016b). These attitudes have also triggered internal debates and conflicts among ally groups with different ideological positions (Siméant 1998; Nicholls 2013; Pojmann 2006; 2008). For this reason, more research is needed to examine the conflictual nature of alliances among immigrant and native organizations, and how these conflicts often undermine the ability of immigrants to shape their own struggles.

**The Social Movements Literature**

Social movements scholars tell us that collective action is the result of the interaction between structural and agential dynamics (della Porta and Diani 2011). Structural dynamics refer to institutional factors (particularly the role of the state) and economic factors (particularly the role of markets, and of capitalism more generally) (see Gentile and Tarrow 2009). Changes in institutional and/or economic arrangements are believed to be the triggering factors that produce mobilizations and protests. They are at the heart of why individuals and collective actors devote time and energy to mobilizing in order to bring about change (della Porta and Diani 2011). Agential dynamics are crucial to explaining why and how people mobilize and whether those mobilizations are successful or not. In particular, alliances and conflicts among organizations, as well as the ability to construct collective identities and to agree on mobilization approaches, play a key role in the ways that struggles are carried out, and have a significant influence on whether or not they will succeed. Among these factors, “[f]rames are particularly crucial to social movement dynamics because they serve to guide individual and collective action” (Benford 1993, 678). Building on Goffman’s (1974) definition of ‘frame’ as a “schemata of interpretation,” migration scholars such as Sidney Tarrow (1992), Robert Benford (1993), David Snow and Robert Benford (1998) and Robert Benford and David Snow (2000) have shown the relevance of the verb framing for conceptualizing the signifying work or meaning of social movements. In their own words, Benford and Snow (2000, 614) explain that the verb ‘framing’ “denotes an active, processual phenomenon that implies agency and contention at the level of reality construction. It is active in the sense that something is being done, and processual in the sense of a dynamic, evolving process. It entails agency in the
sense that what is evolving is the work of social movement organizations or movement activists.” They add: “The resultant products of this framing activity are referred to as ‘collective frames’.”

**The Immigrant Organizing Literature**

Scholars who have focused on immigrant organizing from the perspective of immigrants as workers highlight the importance of strong alliances and the empowerment of immigrants themselves in the process of building coalitions ‘from below.’ In their study of migrant worker activists and their supporters in the UK, Germany, France and the US, Adler, Tapia and Turner (2014) suggest that, in order to understand migrant worker mobilizations, we need to look beyond the larger institutional framework and examine the organizational level of those movements. They point out that campaigns for status regularization and better working conditions are more likely to succeed when large and strong alliances between mobilized migrants, trade unions and civil society organizations are made. Their research suggests that, in addition to examining the role of the state and state institutions, we need to look at the nature of alliances among immigrants’ supporters.

Huerta is one such scholar who has examined the organizational level of immigrant workers’ movements. In contrast with those scholars who argue that migrant rights organizations should adopt ‘narrow frames’ in order to identify with the national values of the receiving society, this author argues that the Los Angeles-based organization ‘Janitors for Justice’ has been successful and has endured over the years precisely because it uses “the model of trade union intervention in social life that is effective in a period of neoliberal globalization” (2008, 691). She adds that the organization “combines models of trade unionist struggle with models of social struggles” (see also Adler, Tapia and Turner 2014 and Milkman 2011 on this point). She suggests that organizations ensure the presence of trade unions in both the workplace (factories, call centers, the buildings where they clean) and in places of residence (neighborhoods and the venues where workers socialize, such as places of worship, schools and so on), “so [as] to ensure contact with those who are being encouraged to engage in practices of trade union resistance” (Huerta 2008, 691). Justice for Janitors, Huerta concludes, should be considered a model of immigrant worker organizing for three reasons: (1) it uses an ‘expansive frame’ that links social struggles with labor struggles; (2) it guarantees strong alliances, networks and coalitions among the groups involved, including immigrant communities; and (3) it seeks to empower immigrant workers themselves, allowing them to shape the movement by directly engaging in the mobilization process.

**An Organizational-Level Approach to Explain Immigrant Mobilizations**

Building on the social movement and immigrant organizing literatures, I depart from the dominant perspective in the migration scholarship presented in section 2.1. I argue that when we look at mobilizations of immigrants and their allies, we need to go beyond the role of the state in shaping alliances. Furthermore, we need to be more cautious about considering ‘narrow frames’ as the only successful approach for migrant movements. Successful outcomes include at least three dimensions: (1) the creation of viable, long-lasting alliances between immigrants and their supporters; (2) the creation of mobilization frames that resonate beyond the specific goals of the actors involved in the mobilization; and (3) the direct involvement of immigrants themselves in the mobilizations that concern them. We also need to examine the ideological and strategic considerations that shape alliances, conflicts, and the dominant mobilization frames. In examining these mobilization frames, I build on the work of social movement scholars and argue that we need to look at: (1) how immigrant movements understand the challenges facing migrant workers in the receiving society; (2) how immigrant movements intend to improve the working and living
conditions of migrant workers in the receiving society; and (3) how well their ‘mobilization frame’ resonates with people outside of their movement (see Snow and Benfort 1998). Finally, the degree to which immigrants are empowered in their own struggles is crucial for understanding the success or failure of a particular movement. Over and over again, the literature points to the tendency among those who claim to be allies to silence the voices of immigrants themselves (Huerta 2008; Cappiali 2016b; Siméant 1998; Nicholls 2014). We need to understand the role of immigrants’ subjectivity, and how they succeed in making their voices heard among their supporters (Pojmann 2006; Cappiali 2016; Marchetti 2012).

Methodology

This study draws from fieldwork that I conducted in Italy between 2013 and 2014. My empirical research centered on ethnography in several Italian cities for a total of 14 months between February-November 2013 and May-June 2014. For this article I deliberately selected primary and secondary sources collected during this fieldwork that were relevant to the purpose of this article. I used the support of eighteen in-depth interviews with Italian and immigrant activists (see Appendix 1), informal conversations with key organizers of ‘A Day Without Us,’ field notes, archival data (such as articles from national and local newspapers and analysis of the official websites of the organizations involved in the event). I also analyzed material produced by the organizers of the event, including pamphlets, websites and blog entries at the national level and in the two cities of Bologna and Bergamo (see Appendix 2). I also utilized books and material produced by academics who belong to the anti-racist movement in Italy. Following studies on social movements (Della Porta 2014), I triangulated these methodological sources to reconstruct the key moments of the organization of the event and the different positions of the actors involved.11

The literature on social movements has shown the importance of ethnography and the combination of different qualitative methods to study actors and their actions (Della Porta 2014). Building on this literature, I privileged a highly inductive and actor-oriented analysis. In this study, I combined various qualitative research methods with semi-structured interviews. These latter are considered the most useful way to grasp the perspectives that individuals and groups have on their actions, and how they relate to the material and symbolic resources offered by other actors. At the end of my fieldwork, I used the software NVIVO to upload and analyze the data. The software allowed me to gather in the same program all the visual, auditory and textual documents (including the interviews and the field notes) collected during the fieldwork, as well as websites and other important electronic documents. I analyzed the material around the three main themes that I have identified in the theoretical section of this article (see Appendix 3). In what follows I present the analysis of my findings.

Putting ‘A Day Without Us’ in Context

In Italy, two immigration laws have contributed to make the lives of immigrants working in the country very difficult: Law 189/2002, also known as the Bossi-Fini Law, and Laws 125/2008 and 94/2009, also known as the Security Package (Pacchetto Sicurezza). Approved by two right-wing majorities (in which the presence of the anti-immigrant party, the Northern League, was strong), this legislation has made immigrant workers highly vulnerable and has contributed to the implementation of institutional racism, which encouraged a differentiated treatment of immigrant workers, who are considered as second-class citizens (Mometti and Ricciardi 2011). Among other things, this legislation exposes immigrants to exploitation and poor labor conditions (Oliveri 2015) and makes them particularly vulnerable because of the constant threat of being deported. In the face
of these challenges, immigrants and their supporters have mobilized over the years in response to the worsening of immigrants’ juridical, economic and social conditions, and have called for the improvement of these conditions all over the country (Mometti and Ricciardi 2011; Oliveri 2015; Marchetti 2012). In particular, following the financial crisis, between 2010 and 2011, several immigrant organizations and their allies at the national and local levels protested against institutional racism and workers’ exploitation in many labor sectors and parts of the country (BSA-Nigro et. al. 2012; Oliveri 2012; 2015; Cappiali 2015; 2016a).

Following this trend of mobilizations, on March 1, 2010, civil society organizations launched the initiative, ‘A Day Without Us: The Strike of Migrants’ (Oliveri 2015). In Italy, this initiative was launched on November 29, 2009, and named after a similar mobilization organized by civil society organizations in France (La journee sans immigres: 24h sans nous). The French event was inspired by a similar mobilization that took place in the United States in May of 2006, in which millions of people, mostly Latinos and their supporters, came out in support of the rights of immigrants and undocumented workers (Bloemraad, Voss and Lee 2011, 3). In Italy, civil society groups mobilized in opposition to the recent legislation that severely restricted immigration into the country, and worsened the living and working conditions of immigrants already living there and suffering from the effects of the 2008 financial crisis. They also aimed to sensitize the public to the immigrant struggle, by highlighting the contribution that migrant workers make to the economies of those countries (Mometti and Ricciardi 2011; Cobbe and Grappi 2011).

A Conflict-Laden Mobilization

The organizers of ‘A Day Without Us’ in Italy started the mobilization when an anonymous writer wrote a blog post titled, “The First of March 2010: The Strike of Migrants” (Il Primo Marzo 2010: Lo Sciopeoro dei Migranti). The author of this post wrote: “What would happen if the four-and-a-half million migrants who live in Italy decided to cross their arms for one day?” The provocation went viral on the web and was welcomed by numerous civil society organizations and grassroots social movements, all of which identified with the anti-racist movement in Italy and which were made up of both Italian and migrant activists. By February 2010, fifty thousand people had joined the Facebook page that organizers had created for the event, and at least sixty local committees had been created.

The coalition of these organizations created the National Committee of the First of March 2010 (Comitato Nazionale Primo Marzo 2010, henceforth referred to as the National Committee) and several local coalitions all across the country. The then-vice president of the Labor Commission of the Italian Parliament demonstrated his solidarity with the initiative: “I find the motivations of the initiative very convincing: immigrants want to demonstrate not only that they exist, but that they are indispensable, through their presence and their work, to the social and economic activities of the country.” The organization of the event was very complicated from the beginning, due to the difficulty of putting together the different non-state organizations working on immigration-related issues in Italy. Two main conflicts emerged during the four months spent in preparation for the event (between November 2009 and March 2010). At certain points, these conflicts were so acute that they threatened to undermine the favorable outcome of the event and made organizers uncertain until the day of the mobilization. Below I present a brief reconstruction of these two conflicts, by showing the role of ideological conflicts among non-state actors and the use of competing frames.
First Conflict: The Strike of Migrants vs. The Unity of Workers

The first conflict emerged between the National Committee and the two main traditional trade unions in the country, the more left-wing CGIL (Italian General Confederation of Labor—Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro), and the CISL (Italian Confederation of Trade Unions—Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Lavoratori), a trade union of Catholic background composed of members with different ideological affiliations. These trade unions refused to formally endorse the event, arguing that a migrant strike would prove too divisive for Italian society. Instead of sensitizing the Italian population to migrant issues, they argued, a strike would provoke anger and resentment towards immigrants.

The major friction emerged between the National Committee and the main left-wing trade union, the CGIL, which was expected to participate, being one of the most powerful left-wing actors in Italy and a key actor on the issues that concerned immigrant workers in the country. The CGIL labeled the strike of migrants an “ethnic strike” in opposition to the “unity of all workers.” As the spokesperson of the Office of Foreign Workers of the CGIL of Bologna declared:

We have not joined because we think that we need more than a slogan and a strike that involves only migrants to overcome the problems of migrant workers. What we need is to involve all workers and sensitize them (Spokesperson in charge of the Office of Foreign Workers, CGIL, quoted in Galeotti 2009/2010, 141).

The members of the National Committee expressed their regret for the position taken by this key left-wing trade union, especially because, without its support, the impact of the event would have been diminished. In contrast to the line of the CGIL, Stefania Ragusa, the president of the National Committee, asserted that a strike of migrants was fundamental to show how important migrants were to the Italian economy. She declared:

There will be a strike only in a few cities […] where (local) trade unions have welcomed the request that arrived from below. For the rest, the big trade unions have not supported us. Yet, no one has ever thought about organizing an ethnic strike. It would be beautiful if in Italy we could go back to when there were strikes for all the rights, and not only those linked to labor contracts. We want to give people the opportunity to think about the importance of immigrants for Italian society. When rights for some people are denied, it is the entire society that becomes weaker.

Overall, while demonstrations were organized in most places, the strike was coordinated only in a few cities where more radicalized local trade unions decided to support the call from below or where radical-left organizations were very strong.

Second Conflict: The Strike vs. The Demonstration Dilemma

The second open conflict emerged between the moderate and the more radical members of the National Committee. Disagreements were triggered by the first conflict: in the face of the lack of support from traditional trade unions, and in particular the CGIL, the main organizers were divided on whether to risk organizing a strike instead of a demonstration. According to the more moderate side, the demonstration would have been safer in terms of success. Since trade unions in Italy are those organizations juridically entitled to declare the strike, and because they are the key organizations able to reach workers in their workplace and to call the strike, their absence in the organization made the success of a strike significantly less likely. On the other side of the conflict,
groups of collectives and networks linked to the Italian radical left strongly supported the idea of a strike, as a means to break with ‘unsuccessful’ strategies of the past that tended to victimize the migrant population and organized events on their behalf (Galeotti 2009/2010, 80-84; see also Cobbe and Grappi 2011).

The *strike versus demonstration* dilemma exposed visible ideological differences among members of the anti-racist movement and exhibited competing mobilization frames. As an accord was difficult to reach, some radical-left organizations created a new coalition, called the Coordination for the Strike of Migrant Labor (*Coordinamento per lo Sciopero del Lavoro Migrante*, from now on the Coordination) (Cobbe and Grappi 2011, 55). The group included radical-left organizations such as the Migrant Coordination Organization of the Province and City of Bologna (*Coordinamento Migranti della Provincia e città di Bologna*, henceforth referred to as the MCO), which was a key actor in the national debate. Two months before the event on January 1, 2010, the Coordination published a document titled, “For the strike of migrant labor,” arguing in support of the strike as the only adequate response to the difficult situation of migrant workers in the country (Galeotti 2009/2010, 74).

We, migrants and Italians, men and women, belonging to the co-ordinations, collectives and networks of Bari, Bologna, Brescia, Mantua and Basso Mantovano, Milan, Padua, Rome and Turin, support the struggles of migrant workers that in France are preparing the strike of migrants for the first of March. After the historical experience in the US of the “Day without immigrants,” held on the first of May, 2006, the centrality of migrant labor is imposing itself in Europe. [...] a strike of migrant workers, supported by Italian workers, would represent the adequate political answer against precariousness and racism. We think that the strike of migrants must be constructed together with the French workers because the situation of migrant labor is the same everywhere in Europe. We know how difficult and important the strike of migrants is. [...] We must have the courage to consider migrants the protagonists of their lives. It is time that migrant laborers dare to strike.

In this text, as far as the mobilization frame mobilized by the radical left is concerned, three main points deserve particular attention. First, the group focused on the centrality of ‘migrant labor’ – that is, a political category developed by members of radical-left groups in Italy to highlight the fact that migrant labor is used to create precariousness and exploitation across Europe. In their view, the strike of migrants was not simply a symbolic protest, but a strategy that would make visible the role of immigrant labor in the state’s system of exploitation. Second, the document highlights the need to move beyond anti-racist demonstrations and forms of solidarity, and to join other groups in Europe to promote a general strike. In this respect, the Coordination put forward an alternative mobilization frame with respect to that of the National Committee. This latter group mobilized around a frame that emphasized that immigrants have human rights and that they deserve better working conditions because they contribute to Italian society. By contrast, the Coordination promoted the idea that immigrant workers are key actors in the labor force *beyond* the boundaries of the nation state and that their action is crucial to disrupt the system of exploitation that relies heavily on immigrant labor. Finally, the organizers advanced the idea that the struggle must be organized not *on behalf of migrants*, but *with migrants*. For this reason they challenged the other actors who were promoting a demonstration, which they defined as an obsolete form of solidarity and a way to undermine the self-determination of immigrants (Cobbe and Grappi 2011, 56).

In the following section, I offer two distinct examples of how different ideological affiliations and competing discursive frames have shaped the mobilization at the local level.
Left-wing Bologna: A Strike For Migrants, With Migrants

The case of Bologna visibly shows how immigrant mobilization brings about different understandings of both the immigrant situation in Italy and the multifaceted role of ideology and political conflicts among immigrants and their allies. The Committee of the First of March of Bologna (henceforth referred to as the Committee of Bologna) was composed of three main actors: (1) a civil society group comprised of the two main radical left-wing organizations in the city, and guided by Cécile Kyenge, a key migrant leader and member of the Democratic Party who was nonetheless acting on her own behalf without the involvement of the Party; (2) the Ya Basta! Association of Bologna, linked to the social center TPO (Occupied Multipurpose Theatre—Teatro Polivalente Occupato); and (3) the MCO, linked to the social center MX24 (for further information about these organizations see my own work XXXX 2015). Bologna was one of the few cities in Italy to organize a strike of immigrants from below, without the support of trade unions. As Galeotti spotlights, “The sensitization started from below by word of mouth through informal networks, excluding the usual logic of proclaiming the strike from above, by the traditional union organizations” (Galeotti 2009/2010, 80). The strike was possible thanks to two main factors: first, the involvement of the radical left-wing organization MCO, a key member of the National Coordination for the Strike of Migrant Labor; and second, the great participation of immigrants. One of the spokespersons of the MCO explained that while other members of the Committee of Bologna focused on advertising the event, the MCO concentrated on mobilizing workers for the strike, with the partial support of delegates from the most radicalized branches of the left-wing trade union, the CGIL-FIOM, which represents the metalworkers (Galeotti 2009/2010, 80). The organization of the strike was favored by the “double affiliation of migrant activists,” many of whom were both members of the MCO and delegates of trade unions, mainly but not exclusively of the CGIL-FIOM (Galeotti 2009/2010, 80; see also interviews with N1, N2 and N3). One of the spokespersons of the MCO added:

The initiative started from some immigrants who used to do political activities with us and who had been part of our organization for several years. These people were also union delegates and they involved other union delegates… we organized a day [an assembly], February 14 [2010], to discuss these things. That day, many union delegates intervened and at that point the strike became something real, because in the workplace people started to launch this idea (Spokesperson of the MCO, Interview by Galeotti 2009/2010, 151-152).

Notwithstanding these first initiatives, given the lack of support of traditional trade unions, the outcome of the strike was uncertain. As a member of the MCO explained,

In the morning [of the first of March 2010] we were in contact with workers. We experienced it as something that was growing, with situations in which immigrants were calling and asking us what to do. […] immigrant workers were at the threshold of the workplace… they were in little groups of 10, 15, or 20 and did not want to go to work, but because they were deprived of union coverage, they did not know what to do, and in certain cases we did not know what to do either. […] it was a situation in which [immigrant] workers themselves conquered what they wanted. In Bologna at least this was the case (Spokesperson of the MCO, Interview by Galeotti 2009/2010, 152).

Thus, one noticeable aspect of the event was the fact that, in Bologna, the strike was organized by immigrants and their supporters from below. The organization of the strike was possible because
the MCO was able to replace the union by supporting the strike through their networks (Galeotti 2009/2010, 81). Also, the double affiliation of many immigrants with both the MCO and the radicalized branch of the CGIL--namely, the section of the metalworkers, the Fiom-Cgil--facilitated the participation of immigrants themselves. Hence, many immigrant workers who were unionized in traditional trade unions (including the two main trade unions, the CISL and the CGIL) went on strike against their own organization and this contributed to shape the outcomes of the mobilization in the city (see also Galeotti 2009/2010, 81; see also my interviews in Bologna N2, N3 and N4).

Strong ideological conflicts had also emerged among radical left-wing organizations, emerged fact that became apparent in the declarations that the MCO released in the aftermath of the mobilization. As one of the spokespersons of the MCO said:

The strike was not a taken-for-granted itinerary. […] The problem of most grassroots organizations is that they represent immigrants as the weakest link among the workers and thus they depict them as substantially unable to strike. We resisted these practices and this is how we arrived at it [the strike] (Spokesperson of the MCO, Interview by Galeotti 2009/2010, 152).

The same spokesperson added that they were the only organization ready to acknowledge “the strategic position” of immigrants in the workforce and “to bet on the self-determination of immigrants” (Spokesperson of the MCO, Interview by Galeotti 2009/2010, 152). According to him, the MCO had done all these things, but most radical-left actors in Italy lacked an adequate understanding of the processes at work, and were thus unable to recognize the self-determination of immigrants, which he argued came into full light during the organization of the event. This point of view was also shared by the immigrant activists members of the MCO (Interviews N1, N2, N3, N4 and N6).

Other groups in the city strongly criticized the radical left for fueling the conflicts instead of finding a common ground to build stronger coalitions with other groups. This was the critique made by Italian and immigrant members of the CGIL (Interview N5), for instance, as well as more moderate civil society groups, including members of some of the key immigrant associations in the city, who also attempted to have a voice in the organization of the event but without success. This point of view was also shared by many immigrant activists who did not adhere to the ideological stand of the radical left (what I have called the ‘diagnosis’ of a movement) and who did not share their strategies (or their ‘prognosis’) (Interviews N 5, N6, N7, N8 and N9).

Catholic Bergamo: A Demonstration For Migrants, Without Migrants

Like in Bologna, in Bergamo, the organization of ‘A Day Without Us’ was full of conflicts. However, the way in which the organization of the event developed was very different here than it was in Bologna. The organizers were two main groups with very different political orientations. The Committee of the First of March of Bergamo (henceforth referred to as the Committee of Bergamo) was formed by the anti-racist movement in the city and led by the Communist Refoundation Party (Partito Rifondazione Comunista), the CGIL-Fiom and minor grassroots trade unions of the radical left. These actors, however, were particularly weak in this city. By contrast, the other group in Bergamo, the March 28th Network (Rete 28 Marzo), represented some of the most powerful organizations in the city. It was composed of the main trade unions (the CISL and the CGIL), as well as a number of organizations linked to the Church (the Ruah Cooperative and the Santa Rosa da Lima’s Secretariat for Immigrants).
For a few months, the two groups attempted to organize the event together. They opted for a demonstration instead of a strike and attempted to involve the migrant communities through their associations. They both agreed on the idea of representing the immigrants in the city, but apparently could not agree on the modalities of the demonstration. However, on February 5, 2010, the negotiations ended. The March 28th Network wanted to distance itself from “any instrumental use of the protest” for political purposes by the anti-racist movement led by the Communist Refoundation Party, and they declared they wanted to avoid bringing the flags of the political parties and the trade unions to the demonstration (Interview N12). They argued that a strike of immigrants was not a good idea because it would be an “ethnic” protest that could widen the distance between migrant workers and the Italian population (workers in particular). Thus, the organizations of the March 28th Network supported a demonstration “without a strike.” On the other hand, the Committee of Bergamo pushed for a politicization of the demonstration and sought support for the strike among immigrants.

A key member of the CGIL, Martino Signori, opposed the separation of the two organizations, pointing out that they had a common cause independent of the traditional ideological divide:

The subject of immigration is too important. It shouldn’t divide us and it should not create two different demonstrations. Our goals are the same: the abolition of the Bossi-Fini Law and the Security Package and the end of the institutional racism that is emerging in our country. […] Let it be only one demonstration!\textsuperscript{xv}

After negotiations and conflicts between the two organizations, two distinct processions were organized.\textsuperscript{xv} One of the priests in charge of the Migrant Office of Caritas confirmed this point:

There were many Italian and migrant organizations. Everyone was there. The demonstration showed the difficulty of bringing everyone together. The biggest conflicts were with the Communist Refoundation Party and other anti-racist organizations, who were demonstrating separately with their flags (Interview N12).

During our interview, a spokesperson of the office of the CISL in Bergamo in charge of migration policies told me:

Our objective [with the March 28th Network] was to empower immigrants and make them protagonists. We involved the other trade unions and the migrant associations. We did not want to be seen as acting only as the CISL, but as a larger group. We organized meeting after meeting. At the end, what we wanted to avoid happened: the Communist Refoundation Party and the migrant coordination organization of the CGIL-FIOM came to the demonstration with their flags (Interview N10).

This view was also shared by the spokesperson of the second main trade union in the city, the CGIL (N11).

In the aftermath of the demonstration, one of the members of the Committee of Bergamo declared the event a success, despite the many conflicts that took place behind the scenes. He wrote:

Notwithstanding obstructionism [by the March 28th Network] […] , somewhere between fifteen-hundred and two-thousand people adhered to a happy and civil demonstration […] . A great
number of people, new citizens and Italians united. A relevant number for Bergamo, [a city] that is one of the strongholds of the anti-immigrant party, the Northern League.\textsuperscript{xvi}

On the other hand, a spokesperson for the Communist Refoundation Party declared:

During the demonstration, the church-based organizations created a problematic de-politicization of the demonstration. They raised a conflict with the network we had been able to construct around the demonstration. That event made explicit their contradictions. The form of anti-racism they promote is compatible with the system (Interview N13).

However, in response to my questions on the subject, a few representatives of the immigrant communities in the city criticized both groups, because their ideological conflicts impeded the creation of a coalition in the city and prevented immigrants from participating substantially in the organization of the event.

In addition to the blatant conflict between organizations in the city, the demonstration was organized for immigrants without immigrants. Immigrants and migrant organizations did not take part in the organization of the event. We were completely marginalized in the decision-making of the mobilization. My comrades of the Communist Refoundation Party are not different from other groups. They have very paternalistic attitudes. They always see us as poor devils, as people who can’t speak for themselves (Interview N15).

During the demonstration, several immigrants were present as members of the main organizations (Interviews N14 e N15). But as they did not take part in the organization of the event, there was very little participation from below and immigrants were unable to shape the mobilization, which was organized mainly on their behalf (Interviews N13, N14, N15, N16, N17 and N18).

Taking Stock of ‘A Day Without Us’

The Short-Term Successes

The organization of a ‘A Day Without Us’ in Italy was considered by the organizers as a success.\textsuperscript{xvii} The event saw the mobilization of three hundred thousand people and the participation of many cities from the North to the South of the country, including major cities such as Milan, Turin, Trieste, Bologna, Rome, Naples, and Palermo (Cobbe and Grappi 2011). It also saw the participation of many immigrant workers who were able to make their presence in the country visible.\textsuperscript{xviii} Overall, the National Committee, composed mainly of more moderate actors involved in the organization of the event, declared itself satisfied with the sit-ins, processions, and permanent strongholds that it helped to organize.\textsuperscript{xix} Members of the Coordination—the more radical stream of the mobilization—also considered the mobilization a success (Galeotti 2009/2009, 81; Cobbe and Grappi 2010, 55). They praised the fact that the migrant strike was organized in cities where radical left-wing actors and some radicalized territorial trade unions were particularly strong - cities such as Brescia, Bologna, Bari, Mantua and Basso Mantovano, Milan, Padua, Rome and Turin. In a provocative document titled, “How to recount the First of March” (”Come si racconta il primo marzo”), the Coordination declared that the protests were the product of both Italians and migrants opposing the exploitation of migrant labor – exploitation that had been made possible by the
existing legislation on immigration, and that had produced a great deal of institutional racism (Galeotti 2009/2010, 85). The second key point that emerged in the document was the presence of immigrants, their self-determination, and also their role as a transformative force due to the “strategic position” of migrant labor within the labor force:

The strike…has propagated a force: it has allowed many anti-racists to descend into the streets, not in solidarity for once, but together with immigrants. This marks a step ahead with respect to the self-determination of immigrants […] and shows the political potential of this self-determination (quoted in Galeotti 2009/2010, 85).

However, these are all short-term favorable outcomes. From a long-term perspective, I argue, the First of March 2010 cannot be considered a success.

**Long-Term Failures of The Mobilization**

Despite the important participation of civil society groups, the organization of the event shows how difficult it was to create and sustain an advocacy coalition in favour of mobilized immigrants. This was due in part to ideological divisions, as well as the failure on the part of the organizers to grasp the importance of building strong coalitions. In particular, conflicts among moderate and more radical actors resulted in important cleavages that strongly undermined the possibility that similar mobilizations would be carried out in the future (on cleavages and ‘frame disputes’ see Benford 1993 and Martinez 2011, 127). Additionally, organizers were unable to give meaning to the struggle beyond the day of the mobilization itself. They were indeed unable to frame the mobilization in such a way as to transform a ‘spontaneous’ collective action into a ‘sustained’ movement (see Bloemeraad, Voss and Lee 2011, 4-5 on this difference). This also limited the resonance of the event as it was unable to substantially sensitize the larger Italian population.

Finally, in many cities across the country, migrant worker groups were only minimally involved in the organization of the event. Instead of being empowered in the process, migrant workers were increasingly marginalized. Together with paternalistic attitudes, strong conflicts among immigrant allies also impeded the ability of immigrants to mobilize on their own behalf. This was particularly visible in the city of Bergamo, but it was also a more general problem in other cities. The three key factors listed above also explain why the mobilization was not able to proceed in the following years. ‘A Day Without Us’ was organized again every year from 2011-15, but participation was very low the first year and almost non-existent the following years.

My analysis of the two cities highlights the fact that conflicts among local non-state actors can result in different mobilization outcomes within the same national context. In Bologna, the strong presence of various left-wing civil society organizations, both moderate and radical, allowed for the organization of a demonstration and a strike. In particular, the radical left-wing organizations supported a strike without the support of the trade unions, enabling the involvement of more radicalized immigrants in the organization of the event. Overall, the event had an important impact in the city, especially with respect to the involvement and visibility of immigrants themselves. This fact allowed for other mobilizations to take place in the following years. In Bergamo, the strong presence of church-based organizations (the dominant actors) and of two main trade unions (the CGIL and the CISL), coupled with their conflict with the radical left (a much weak actor), resulted in the organization of a demonstration without a strike. Conflicts among these organizers resulted in the organization of two processions in the cities with different groups and flags. Also, the migrant groups were not heavily involved in the organization of the event. On the contrary, they were highly marginalized from the decision-making process as a result of ideological
conflicts among their ‘native’ allies. Overall, the configuration in Bergamo resulted in the failure to organize other events in the city after 2010.

Contribution

The migration literature highlights the increasing difficulties that civil society organizations face in creating platforms in favor of immigrants’ inclusion in increasingly hostile and precarious environments (see also Nicholls 2014; Ambrosini 2013). Among other things, this literature emphasizes the role of the state in shaping alliances between ‘native’ organizations and immigrants in the struggle for greater recognition. Drawing on the immigrant organizing literature, my study contributes to this literature by suggesting that mobilizations are the result of negotiations among actors, and that their interaction plays an important role in creating the bases for sustained collective action. For my analysis, I adopted an organizational-level approach to examine why and how ‘native’ allies can contribute to the failure of the mobilization in the long run. My analysis of the organization of ‘A Day Without Us’ shows that ideological divisions and the competing mobilization frames of non-state actors at both the national and local levels shape alliances in dynamic ways and can strongly undermine the impact of immigrant mobilizations. Finally, I pointed out that ‘native’ allies and supporters often see immigrants as ‘objects of their discourses,’ rather than as equal partners in the struggle for greater rights and recognition. This tendency is reflected in the continuing practices of these ‘native’ allies to talk on behalf of, rather than with immigrants – a practice that has the effect of silencing those whose voices most need to be heard (Cobbe and Grappi 2011; Cappiali 2015).

An additional contribution of my study is that it takes into account variations in the national-local dynamics at play. The literature on immigrant social movements shows that mobilizations are often characterized by a great variety of responses from both immigrants and their allies, and that these responses are different depending on specific national and local contexts (Cappiali 2016a; Andrews and Biggs 2006; Monforte and Dufour 2011). I showed that the organization of ‘A Day Without Us’ took place in cities across Italy (Cobbe and Grappi 2011) and resulted in different local outcomes. As an illustration of this, my analysis of mobilizations in the two cities of left-wing Bologna and Catholic Bergamo showed that conflicts at the local level are in part the reflection of conflicts at the national level, and in part the result of their own specific local power configurations and dynamics.

Building on the findings of this study, I argue that scholars need to devote more attention to the internal organization of migrant mobilizations, both in Italy and elsewhere. In Europe and the US, as well as in other places, increasing precariousness of status and work for immigrants have sparked new forms of protest, as immigrants and their allies demand that states respect the fundamental rights of immigrants (Adler, Tapia, and Turner 2014; Oliveri 2015; Anderson 2010; Cappiali 2015; 2016a). However, while a few campaigns have been successful, most of them have encountered setbacks and pitfalls (Adler, Tapia, and Turner 2014; Voss and Bloemraad 2011; Zepeda-Millan 2016; Nicholls 2013). In this respect, we need more research on the conditions that make a successful mobilization possible. Furthermore, we need more investigation into why and how allies prevent immigrants from participating in their own struggles and, ultimately, in the receiving society at large. This aspect is often mentioned in the literature but is very rarely systematically explained. Yet, increasing research suggests that allies contribute, often unwittingly, to the externalization and marginalization of the migrant population in the struggles that concern them (see for instance Cappiali 2016b).
References


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1 The marginalizing of the migrants in the struggles that concern them is not a recent phenomenon. See for instance Siméant 1998; Cissé 1999; Huerta 2008; Pojmann 2006; 2008; Cappiali 2016b; Marchetti 2012.
2 My analysis of the mobilization at the national level and in the city of Bologna relies in part on the unpublished thesis by Francesca Galeotti (2009/2010). I borrow mainly from the primary sources collected by the author and use them to support my own interpretation of the event. All translations from Italian into are my own.
3 Moreover, a number of influential civil society organizations became involved, including Amnesty, Arci, Acli, Legambiente, Emergency and Amref, as well as a number of grassroots and radical trade unions, such as Cobas and CGIL-FIOM. The event was also endorsed by several left-wing parties.
5 On the dilemma of European trade union strategies about how to organize and support immigrants’ inclusion in their organizations and in the larger society, see Alberti, Holgate and Tapia 2013 for the case of the UK and Connolly, Marino and Martínez Lucio 2014 on the cases of the Netherlands, Spain and the UK.
7 For a reconstruction of this conflict, see also Grappi and Cobbe, 2011.
8 This national debate was also happening at the local level in many cities in Italy, including Bologna, where the radical left movement was particularly strong (see section on Bologna).
11 These two radical left-wing organizations are key actors in the area of immigration in Bologna. For an overview of the different organizations of the radical left involved in the realm of immigration in European countries, see Cosseron 2007.
Figure 1. Demonstration that took place in the city of Bologna (see archives of the MCO)
Appendix 1: List of interviews

Bologna
N1. Spokesperson of the MCO, Italian (M), 19 July 2013
N2. Spokesperson of the MCO, Senegalese (M), 15 May 2013
N3. Spokesperson of the MCO, Senegalese (M), 17 May 2013
N4. Spokesperson of the MCO, Pakistani (M), 3 June 2013
N5. Spokesperson of the office of the CGIL in charge of migration policies the CGIL, Italian (W), 30 November 2013
N6. Unionist member of the CGIL-FIOM, Senegalese, 13 November 2013
N7. Cultural mediator and president of the association AMISS, Albanese (W), 19 April 2014
N8. President of the Federation of Associations of Philippines in Bologna, Filipina (W), 2 July 2013
N9. President and founder of the association *Universe*, a volunteering organization composed of immigrants and Italians, Cameroon (M), 19 June 2014

Bergamo
N10. Spokesperson of the office of the CISL in charge of migration policies, Italian (M), 13 November 2013
N11. Spokesperson of the office of the CGIL in charge of migration policies (M), Italian, 14 November 2013
N12. One of the priests in charge of the Migrant Office of Caritas, Italian (M), 12 November 2013
N13. Spokesperson of the Communist Re-foundation Party, Italian (M), 14 November 2013
N14. Unionist member of the CGIL-FIOM, Senegalese (M), 13 November 2013
N15. Activist member of the Communist Re-foundation Party and the CGIL-FIOM, Moroccan (M), 14 November 2013
N16. Director of the Agency of Integration of the city, Italian (M), 5 September 2013
N17. President of Bolivian Association, Bolivian (W), 30 November 2013
N18. Moroccan Association, Moroccan (W), 15 November 2013

Appendix 2: Selected websites
http://ljsi.over-blog.com
http://www.lajourneesansimmigres.org/fr/
http://primomarzo2010.blogspot.it
http://www.meltingpot.org/Primo-Marzo-2010-Un-giorno-senza-di-noi.html#.VvCXe1IUEdc
https://coordinamentomigranti.org
http://comibo.altervista.org
www.alternainsieme.net

Appendix 3: Guiding questions for the empirical analysis of the mobilization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Questions empirically investigated</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Who are the actors involved?</td>
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| (1) The role of alliances and conflicts | • What are their ideologies?  
• How do they understand the issues of immigration and integration?  
• What coalitions are made? |
| (2) Mobilization Frames | • What are the frames used by actors involved in mobilizations?  
• Which ones prevail?  
• Why? |
| (3) The role of immigrants | • What is the role of immigrants in mobilization?  
• What was their role in building the collective identity of the mobilized organizations? |