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Past Storylines and Present Moves:
A Temporal Approach to Migrants' Collective Action

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Terra di passo, di sella, di slitta,
mal s'addice alla fretta
Sa che tutto passa e tutto lascia traccia.[1]
(Cronaca montana, PGR)

1 Land of pass, of saddle, of sled, ill suited to haste, knows that everything passes and everything leaves a trace.

Abstract

Against all odds, Western societies have registered a steady increase in migrants' mobilizations, especially over the past couple decades. Against this background, migrants' collective action can no longer be regarded as an exception and, rather, has come to epitomize one key challenge that movements face in contemporary society, namely that of bringing diversity together. This research explores migrants' collective action to understand how extremely heterogeneous constituencies coalesce into collective formations that mobilize as migrants. This study adopts an interpretivist approach to social reality and relies on qualitative methods. Empirically, the research focuses on the Italian context and investigates three groups active at the urban level, mobilizing around migration in Naples, Rome and Bologna. Drawing on Social Movement studies and Critical approaches to migration, the research wishes to complement existing scholarly works by adopting a temporal lens for the study of migrants' collective action. The approach proposed focuses on biographical trajectories and on collective memory building with the aim of retracing the invisible processes occurring in-between times and spaces of visible mobilization and beyond the experience of migration alone. Temporality is here approached via three main working concepts: the biographical time of participants, the construction of a collective memory at the group level, and the process of collective identity building. In turn, the ways in which time is appropriated by participants – via the selection and organization of biographical accounts and the construction of a shared social past – inform the processes of collective identifications both at the strategic level of public representation and at the in-group level of political belonging. Finally, the research shows how negotiations occurring around the construction of the past and the conflictual re-articulation of externally produced discourses constitute a fundamental step for the coalition of very heterogeneous constituencies.

Contents

List of abbreviations

CAS	*Centri di Accoglienza Straordinaria* (Extraordinary Reception Centres)
CGIL	*Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro* (General Italian Confederation of Work, Union)
CMB	*Coordinamento Migranti Bologna* (Migrants Coordination Bologna)
CUB	*Confederazione Unitaria di Base* (Base Unitary Conferedation, Union)
DL	Decreto Legge (Law Decree)
DEMA	Democrazia e Autonomia (Democracy and Autonomy, Party)
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MIT	*Movimento Identità Trans* (Trans Identity Movement)
MMRN	*Movimento Migranti e Rifugiati Napoli* (Migrants and Refugees Movement Naples)
NUDM	*Non Una Di Meno* (Not One [Woman] Less Movement)
OPG	*Ospedale Psichiatrico Giudiziario* (Judicial Psychiatric Hospital)
PAP	*Potere al Popolo* (Power to the People, Party)
RDMF	*Rete di Donne Migranti e Figlie* (Network of Migrant Women and Daughters)
JVP	*Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna* (People's Liberation Front, Party, Sri Lanka)

Introduction

> And so one learns to foresee the other in one's moves, precisely because someone who perceives you as a person is rare and unique. As a racialized person, it happens way more often to be looked at stereotypically, than to find someone who actually relates to you as an equal. So this is it. To take account and to foresee others became a responsibility, a choice, and a political practice. (I-7)

The Italian term "prevedere" means to foresee, predict, or anticipate, and paves the way for me to delve into this research project. It was used by a woman I met in Rome, with whom I spent some time during the research activity. She used it to express her understanding of political engagement as being an effort to build relational spaces that are wide enough to anticipate the recognition of others in the future. Indeed, the ability to foresee calls into question a present-day action that is projected in the future. It is a latent and down-to-earth type of engagement, an interminable weaving of relationships, that bridges singular and collective experiences. This action of mutual recognition calls into question the future, and yet is closely tied to the articulation and reorganization of the past.

Human time, as Paul Ricœur calls it, allows us to bring close to us occurrences that happened long ago and to perceive as distant in time events that have just taken place. It involves our capacity to feel close to far-away worlds and be strangers in our own places. It calls into question the ability to rearticulate our relationship with the present, the past, and the future: to select, displace, and organize the events and stories of the past in ways that make us feel part and parcel of broader communities. Of all the countless occurrences of the past, it is those that we remember and give prominence which tell us a great deal about our actions in the present. But more to that, they are able to convey the extent to which we are embedded in the social relations that over time have produced and transformed us. The imagined community *par excellence* is the national community, bounded by its territorial limits. Questions of time, memory and founding myths play a key role in these imagined formations, which are themselves increasingly put under pressures of social transformations, in no small part due to migration.

This research work, for its part, aims at observing forms of social change connected to migration, by exploring the ways in which a sense of political belonging can take different

shapes from those related to territorial boundaries, moving from the reorganization of stories, events, and pasts that contribute to building new spaces for legitimacy, action, and community ties. This research investigates instances of collective action around migration and focuses in particular on the forms of agency that migrants put in place. The analysis adopts a temporal approach to shed light on the processes of construction of collective identifications across very heterogeneous constituencies that mobilize in a hostile social environment.

The spaces for identifications that legitimize transformative actions are small niches that come to be constructed through a temporal recomposition. The question of temporal recomposition is inspired by the definition of agency adopted in this work, and originally proposed by Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische as "an internally complex temporal dynamic" (1998: 964). The authors notice how "as actors move within and among these different unfolding contexts, they switch between (or "recompose") their temporal orientations – as constructed within and by means of those contexts – and thus are capable of changing their relationship to structure" (1998: 964). This research focuses on the temporal recomposition – in particular in relation to the past – that happens when migrants engage in collective action. Temporality is here regarded from the perspective of the biographical time of people engaging in collective action and from the point of view of collective memory, to understand how migrants' groups build a shared social past and new affective and mnemonic communities. These two understandings of temporality are put in dialogue with processes of collective identification, exploring the tensions between novel configurations of political belonging among participants and needs for strategic and public representation of migrants.

This manuscript is structured in two parts. The first part deals primarily with the background to the research. In chapter one the research focus is introduced, and the questions that this study wishes to answer are connected to the relevant literature and discussed in relation to the theoretical contribution proposed. In chapter two, I outline the epistemological and methodological stances of this research work and I discuss ethics in relation to the research methods deployed, in order to elaborate on the practical ethical implications of the research. In the same chapter I also present the methods for data collection and data analysis, as well as a section in which the challenges of conducting

ethnographic fieldwork during the Covid-19 pandemic are addressed. In chapter three, I focus on the case selection ratio and I present the three cases considered. The second part of the manuscript delves into the empirical analysis. Moving from the micro-level of life histories, chapter four displays a narrative analysis of political biographies of migrants engaging in collective action. Chapter five deals with the dilemma of the lack of a shared social past in migrants' groups and focuses on the analysis of practices of memory work at the group level. Chapter six addresses the existing tension between collective identifications for public and strategic purposes as well as the forms of political belonging that exceed migration and are useful to sustain in-group ties. In the conclusions, I discuss the main takeaways of this research work and its shortcomings, proposing viable paths for future research.

Part I

Chapter one

A temporal approach to migrants' collective action

1.1 – Setting the stage

Casting anchor rather than growing roots. Such is the metaphor that Bauman uses to portray contemporary migration, taking up a suggestion by François de Singly (Bauman 2011: 429; de Singly 2003: 108). The action of dropping and weighing anchors features contemporary migration not only as scattered across multiple places, but also as characterized by a fragmented temporality. In this regard, the third wave of modern migration, which he refers to as "the age of diasporas", poses new questions of belonging and remembrance, such as "what is it that each of us calls home and, when we think back and remember how we arrived here, what stories do we share?" (Bauman 2011: 430).

The forms mobility take in the age of migration are all but linear and definitive, and so are the processes of belonging and identity building that go hand in hand with it (Castles, de Hass and Miller 2014; Crawley and Skleparis 2018; Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004; Robertson 2018; Armith 2021). The paths of migration are scattered, drawing back-and-forth tracks and circular motions, increasingly alternating mobility to temporary installation, before setting in motion again. In this regard, away from monodirectional understandings of migration, Crawley and Skleparis (2018: 49) discuss the need to "engage with the complex economic, social and political realities of the 'in between'". These key features of contemporary global mobility, in turn, instate novel social configurations, calling into questions new and old forms of identification and belonging.

Scholars working on migration have addressed the question of growing social complexity in contemporary societies, by focusing on migration-driven diversity and borders-produced diversity (Hall 2016). Observing an increasingly diversified migratory population reaching the United Kingdom around the turn of the millennium, Steven Vertovec developed the

concept of super-diversity, to describe "a dynamic interplay of variables among an increased number of new, small and scattered, multiple-origin, transnationally connected, socio-economically differentiated and legally stratified immigrants" (Vertovec 2007: 1024). Super-diversity was coined as a descriptive concept to grasp the intertwining of multiple differences, beyond the ethnic one, and to expose the political challenges related to the ways in which "people construct and implement conceptions about the nature of groups and identities" (Vertovec 2023: 3). Thus diversity, in Vertovec's account, is articulated from the point of view of demographically-driven factors inherent to migration itself.

Other scholars, speaking from a Critical perspective, emphasize the production of difference through border dispositives. Undoubtedly, the sophistication of borders aimed at control, deterrence and differential inclusion constitutes a central response to contemporary migration. Borders proliferating beyond nation-states boundaries have the double effect of producing differences and shaping political subjectivities. In this regard, Susan Hall (2016) claims that the concept of super-diversity should be connected to the brutal migration milieu that increasingly produces "violent social stratifications" (Hall 2016: 1564). In the last couple decades, the room for imagining a European political space characterized by forms of belonging detached from nation states has dramatically shrunk. Indeed, it is in the framework of globalization, of the global financial crisis and, more recently, of the so-called 'long-summer of migration´ (Hess and Kasparek, 2017), that the differently inclusive border regimes gradually reinforced. This has led scholars to interpret the multiple forms of the border as a method for generating difference, focusing on the material technologies and on the legitimazing narratives upon which these regimes rely (Balibar 2002, 2003; Isin 2002; Mezzadra 2015; Mezzadra and Neilson 2013; Sigona 2014; Tazzioli and De Genova 2016). To elaborate on the task that borders perform, Etienne Balibar refers to the "*polysemic nature* of borders" which is not merely meant to "give individuals from different social classes different experiences of the law, the civil administration, the police and elementary rights, such as the freedom of circulation and freedom of entreprise, but actively to *differentiate* between individuals in terms of social class" (Balibar 2002: 81-82).

An increased social diversity, both inherent to migration and produced by border regimes, of a kind and degree that "cuts across economic, political, social and cultural terrains as well as macro- to micro-scales" (Vertovec 2023: 2) has not prevented the emergence and diffusion of collective action enacted by migrants themselves (Tyler and Marciniak 2013;

Nicholls and Uitermark 2017). Against this background, the emergence of forms of migrants' collective action raises important questions that are simultaneously specific to the often-neglected contentious character of migration and more broadly connected to processes of social change. In this respect, a great variety of social movements increasingly face the challenge of building cohesion across diversity, in ways that affect the fields of belonging and identity, the fostering of alliances and community ties, and the articulation of movements' frames and strategies (Flesher Fominaya 2010; Giugni and Grasso 2015).

1.2 – The research focus

Migrants' collective action and, in particular, forms of agency put in place by migrants, constitute the focus of this research. This work dialogues with Critical approaches to migration and with relational approaches to the study of Social movements. Migrants' mobilizations and movements in solidarity certainly epitomize the challenge of bringing different constituencies together. Scholars of social movements who recently started to focus on migrants and solidarity movements have specifically stressed the challenge of building alliances across migrant and non-migrant constituencies. In this respect, questions on the potentials and contradictions of solidarity building, differences in power relations and access to resources, issues of entitlement and voicing of lived experiences have been addressed (Santos 2020; Siim and Meret 2020; Doerr 2018; della Porta ed. 2018; Giugni and Passy 2001; Cappiali 2017; Zamponi 2018b). Considerably less attention has been devoted to differences that are inherent to the migrant component itself (Steinhilper 2021; Cinalli 2016), often underestimating the heterogeneity that is both internal to migration and produced via border dispositives. Far from referring to a homogeneous group, the term migrant can be used to describe virtually anyone, with the exception of native sedentary populations, as scholarly works criticizing methodological nationalism have effectively shown (Amelina et al. 2012; Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2003; Büscher and Urry 2009). This research work delves into the internal differences of the category of migrant, highlighting how forms of coalitions across constituencies from different generations and waves of migration, different origin and diasporic communities, gender and legal status are far from obvious and linear. Moreover, this research work shifts the perspective from external definitions of migration to internal uses of the term "migrant" by participants who mobilize

as such. Mobilizations undertaken by migrants are large in number and different in type (Tyler and Marciniak 2013), encompassing struggles in the workplace, for housing rights, for residence permits and access to citizenship, struggles for freedom of movement at borders, struggles to counter racially based violence, for equal rights and social justice. Although interconnected, these are different struggles that relate in various and contradictory ways to the adoption of the term migrant as a form of collective identity. Some avoid using the term as a common denominator; usually, mobilizations in the workplace and in relation to housing rights, even when driven in large part by a migrant component, eschew the use of the term migrant as a form of public self-representation in favour of broader definitions such as "workers" and "residents". Other struggles openly engage with migration and articulate a discourse on migrants as political subjects. This research focuses on the latter case and investigates instances of groups that mobilize as migrants. The decision to mobilize as migrants is, once again, far from linear and while it responds to exigencies for public representation, it should not be taken as an all-encompassing definition of participants. Quite the contrary, the temporal approach proposed in this research hopefully contributes to de-essentialize the often unquestioned understanding of who migrants are considered to be. One key feature of the public discourse on migration relates to the ever-present state of emergency and crisis according to which migrants are defined (Ramji-Nogales 2017; Tazzioli and De Genova 2016). Along these lines, the proliferation of political and scientific discourses on migration and the associated media hype contributed to crystallize an understanding of the term migrant that locks people into a sort of eternal present. In other words, a person remains first and foremost a migrant, as well as a social and political subject, whose very existence is tied to the moment of migration that he/she is continuously brought back to. In many respects, this is true not only in relation to the media hype, but also with regard to the scientific discourse, and the two often reinforce one another. In this sense, Carling refers to the tendency of traditional immigration and integration studies to regard the year of arrival as "the year zero", that is, the moment in time at which it all starts, a tendency that has only started to change as transnational perspectives on migration have been put forward (Carling 2012: 138). Drawing on reflexive choices that bring together methods and working concepts giving primacy to temporality, this contribution critically engages with the common-sense definition of migrants.

Along these lines, the main research question asks:

How do extremely heterogeneous constituencies coalesce into collective formations that mobilize as migrants?

The research explores migrants' collective action as a counterintuitive form of collective action, which brings together very heterogeneous constituencies that mobilize as migrants against all odds. Migrants' agency remains largely underexplored to these days, as a result of predominantly structural explanations in theories of mobilization and social change and integrationist paradigms in Migration studies. Migrants' collective action has long been regarded as an exception by scholars of Social movements. In this respect, Walter Nicholls noticed how "Social movement scholars would predict that the prevalence of hostile discourses, the lack of political opportunities, and enhanced repression would dissuade undocumented immigrants from engaging in contentious mobilizations to make rights claims" (Nicholls 2014: 24; Steinhilper 2021). For their part, Migration studies have generally neglected the unsettling political character inherent to migration and downplayed the conflicts engendered by migrants. However, a growing corpus of literature from across Critical approaches to the study of Migration and Borders and relational approaches to Social Movement studies have started to counter this tendency. Starting from the 1990s, scholars from across Autonomy of migration (Mezzadra 2004; Mezzadra 2010; De Genova ed. 2017) and Critical Citizenship studies (Isin 2008; Isin and Nielsen eds. 2008) started to counter this tendency. Consistently, scholarly works highlighted the inherently political and subversive dimension of migration and on the constituting of migrants' political subjectivity in relation to border regimes (Mezzadra and Nielson 2013; Tsianos and Karakayali 2010; De Genova 2010b) and to citizenship regimes (Rygiel and Nyers eds. 2012; Ataç et al. 2016; Stierl, 2012). In particular, the Autonomy of Migration perspective emphasized how the proliferation of borders functions as a system of differential inclusion which is continuously re-articulated in response to migrants' movements (Mezzadra and Nielson 2013). At the same time, the act of border crossings came to be conceived as politically charged and generative of new political spaces (Papadopoulos and Tsianos 2013). Along these lines, Stierl writes that "there is an unpredictability of migration, a stubbornness, an inherent recalcitrance that subverts, mocks, or over-comes attempts at (border) control and the figuration of "the migrant" in policy which seems to always violate human diversity,

inventiveness, and potential" (Stierl 2017: 210). Critical Citizenship Studies, on the other hand, moved from a genealogical study of citizenship as alterity. In his work, Engin Isin shows how citizenship dialogically incorporates the other and, in this sense, he states that "the focus on otherness as a condition of citizenship assumes that in fact citizenship and its alterity always emerged simultaneously in a dialogical manner and constituted each other" (Isin 2002: 3-4). On these grounds, scholars stressed the performative dimension of citizenship focusing on the moments of "becoming political", occurring whenever outsiders through acts of citizenship overturn "those same strategies and technologies of citizenship" originally imposed upon them (Isin 2002: x; Isin 2008; Isin and Nielsen eds. 2008; Nyers 2010; Nyers and Rygiel 2012).

In quite recent years, scholars of Social movements started to bridge these Critical approaches to migration to the study of collective action. This research work focuses in particular on Relational approaches to Social movement studies, which emphasize the centrality of networks that sustain collective action and give primacy to interactions between individuals and organizations that are grounded upon processes of shared identity (Diani 1992a; 1992b).The research, thus, wishes to address migrants' collective action and the forms of agency within it from a processual and a temporal perspective, and aims to contribute to this growing corpus of literature by complementing it with a time-sensitive approach to the study of migrants' collective action.

1.2.1 – Migrants' movements and resistances

As a result of an imbalanced propensity towards structural explanations of collective action, it is only quite recently that scholars of Social movements started to pay attention to forms of migrants' collective action, no longer treating them as exceptions. While heightened pressures of citizenship and deportation regimes certainly amplify the risks faced by migrants engaging in collective action, these have not prevented migrants from mobilizing. Quite the contrary, migrants' rights mobilizations sparked starting from the 1970s in several Western countries, recording a significant increase in the last couple decades (Anderson, 2010; Ataç, Rygiel, & Stierl, 2016; Nicholls and Uitermark, 2017; Tyler & Marciniak, 2013). It is in this framework that Tyler and Marciniak refer to a burgeoning of migrants' visible protests, "as a result of the intensification of border security measures across the globe"

(Tyler and Marciniak 2013: 143). Similarly, Nicholls and Uitermark notice how migrants increasingly engaged in "assertive, highly visible, and sometimes disruptive political actions like protests, occupations, and hunger strikes" (2017: 3) within an increasingly hostile climate engendered my governments' attempts to secure their borders.

Along these lines, the case of France and the sans-papiers movement was among the first to be investigated (Siméant 1998; NcNevin 2006). Although a migrants' rights movement broadly intended sparked already at the beginning of the 1970s in France, the *sans-papiers* movement gained momentum and visibility between 1996 and 1997. What had originally emerged as a struggle for regularization by undocumented migrants, became a movement that challenged the very foundations of citizenship. As McNevin writes, the sans-papiers "contested a particular account of political belonging through which they were positioned as outsiders" (McNevin 2006: 135). Similarly, the migrant rights movement that emerged in the United States was at the centre of academic attention (De Genova 2010a; Nicholls 2013; 2019; Zepeda-Millán 2014; 2016; 2017). During the spring of 2006, around five million migrants, mostly Latinos, participated in an unprecedented protest wave. Migrants and supporters mobilized against the Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005, a restrictive law that further criminalized undocumented migrants and anyone offering assistance to them. On the steps of this movement, a few years later, the DREAMers movement of young undocumented migrants played a key role in transforming the immigrants' rights debate in the US (Nicholls 2013). As Nicholls and Uitermark notice, the movement's ability to gain wide public support "hinged upon a concerted effort to demonstrate cultural and economic conformity" (2017: 10). According to the authors, this strategy impacted negatively on other migrants' ability to make claims, especially those unwilling or unable to comply with the conformity brought forward by highly educated immigrant youth.

More recently, in the framework of the so-called long summer of migration, scholars started investigating forms of migrants mobilizing along the migratory routes and of movements organizing in solidarity with migrants (Ataç and Steinhilper 2016; Ataç et al. 2015; Ataç, Rygiel and Stierl 2016; Stierl 2016; della Porta ed. 2018; della Porta and Steinhilper 2021). Consistently, a number of works started focusing on solidarity and its transformation in a context of growing criminalization (Agustín and Jørgensen 2019; Ataç, Rygiel and Stierl 2021; Baban and Rygiel 2017; Bauder and Juffs 2020; della Porta ed. 2018; della Porta and

Steinhilper 2021; Meret and Siim 2021). The migration flows reaching Europe around 2015 have invested in particular Greece and Italy as countries of first arrival, in accordance with the Dublin regulation. Exploring the Greek case, Oikonomakis (2018) highlighted the transitioning character of solidarity in relation to the general political climate. In particular, he stressed the role of the EU-Turkey agreement in 2016 as a watershed moment in the transformation of solidarity movements in Greece. In Italy, forms of solidarity along the borderline and in urban contexts were enacted by a number of different actors, from movement collectives to NGOs, to religious groups. Zamponi (2018) noticed the gradual transformation of humanitarian responses into ever more politicized forms of solidarity.

Signalling the general lack of attention to forms of contention enacted by migrants themselves (Cinalli 2016; Steinhilper 2021), some scholars have just recently started to explore different forms of action, from protests in urban settings, to episodes of contention at the borders, often adopting the analytical category of acts of citizenship (Monforte and Dufour 2011, 2013; Stierl 2016; Ataç and Steinhilper 2016; Ataç et al. 2015; Ataç, Rygiel and Stierl 2016). Although the political dimension of migration is defined along various theoretical axes that only partially overlap, and the empirical forms investigated sometimes differ, scholars from across Critical Border and Citizenship Studies and from Social movements Studies have increasingly engaged in an intense dialogue having migrants' agency at its core. Spatiality and geographies of resistance have been central for the exploration of migrants' agency. This has to do with the fact that migration has been primarily regarded as a spatial process (Griffiths et al 2013).

1.3 – From space to time: paving the way to a time-sensitive approach

Scholars importantly singled out borderlines, camps, migratory routes, and cities as key sites where forms of visible and invisible resistances are engendered by migrants and mobilizations around migration spark. Remarkable works focused on the role of national frontiers, borders more broadly intended, and camps along the migratory routes as sites in which forms of resistances are always at play. These have often been interpreted as forms of (in)visible subversion of border regimes (De Genova 2010b; Papadopoulos and Tsianos 2013; Tazzioli and Walters 2016; Tazzioli 2020). Other scholars highlighted the role of cities as incubators of wider and more visible mobilizations (Isin 2002; Martínez López 2016). The

focus on spatiality has been key to an understanding of migration as a primarily relational phenomenon: scholars emphasized the concurrent transformation of border regimes and migration flows, cities and migrants' mobilizations. In this framework, space is never understood as a passive background (McNevin 2006; Isin 2002), but rather as a field of struggle in which power relations are constantly at play.

In particular, several scholars drew attention to the urban context. According to Isin, the city is a machine that produces difference and, at the same time, it is the space in which citizenship is called into question and challenged by outsiders (Isin 2002). De Genova (2015) introduces the idea of the "migrant metropolis" as the urban space in which migration, marginalization and racialization are actively co-constituted. Other scholars stressed the role of urban environments as spaces that enhance the visibility and facilitate scale shifting in migrants' struggles (Miller, Nicholls and Beaumont 2013; Nicholls and Uitermark 2017; Steinhilper 2021). Along these lines, the need to move away from nation-centred discourses and institutions, to pay attention to micro and meso-level mechanisms occurring at the urban level has been emphasized. In this regard, Nicholls and Uitermark refer to cities as places of encounter, where newcomers meet groups and solidarity networks that play a key role to sustain migrants' collective action. Cities, in this sense, "offer a comparatively wide array of oppositional networks and institutions that can flank and reinforce immigrants' counterpublics." (Nicholls and Uitermark 2017: 4-5). Along the same lines, with a spatially sensitive micro-level analysis, Steinhilper shows how volatile and weak ties can be temporarily forged among migrants on the move, those who want to stay, and local activists (Steinhilper 2021). These relational processes are relevant, especially considering the inhospitable political climate that is often built around migration. In this regard, rather than open political opportunities, Nicholls refers to niche-openings as "legal, political, and moral ambiguities" (2014: 24) that can be favourable for some groups of undocumented migrants with specific legal and cultural attributes over others. Finally, cities have been singled out as places where hostile dominant adversaries can become more visible, favouring processes of formation of social boundaries and providing common grounds for identification (Nicholls and Uitermark 2017). While the focus on spatiality undeniably provides a solid ground for the exploration of migrants' collective action, I maintain that a focus on time is necessary to complement the existing literature. This research aims at delineating a time-sensitive approach to migrants' collective action, in the direction of re-tracing the singular and

collective lines that anticipate and follow the often ephemeral forms of migrants' collective action.

Scholars engaging with the study of acts of citizenship, border crossings and migrants' mobilizations variously emphasized the volatility of migrants' agency. Consistently, studies have focused on the short timespans encompassing these ephemeral forms of agency. This has resulted in a quite limited exploration of the times in-between more visible forms of protests and resistance. Inherent to this, however, is the risk of portraying migrants as political subjects with no social inertia, and their agency as emerging out of nowhere and doomed to disappear just as fast. Moreover, the subjective dimension of time and temporality has equally been neglected. If, in fact, spatial perspectives helped us gain insights on the ways in which spaces come to be co-constructed by migrants' struggles, we still know very little about how temporalities are mobilized by migrants to motivate and sustain forms of engagement.

The general underestimation of time is true also for Migration studies more broadly: as Griffiths and colleagues notice (2013) the lack of attention to time constitutes a "significant oversight given that 'migration' and the associated concept of 'community' refer to dynamic processes rather than static descriptors" (2013: 2). In line with recent attempts in Migration studies to pay closer attention to the dimension of time (Griffiths et al. 2013; Robertson 2018; Armith 2021; Chacko and Price 2021; Donnan et al. 2017; Baas and Yeoh 2018), this research adopts a temporal approach with a view to complementing the existing corpus of literature on migrants' collective action with an emphasis on time and temporalities.

Studies focusing on the temporal dimension of migrants' agency from across Critical Border and Citizenship studies, as well as from the perspective of Social movement Studies, are still very limited in number. Some scholars focused on the temporal dimension of borders to emphasize how territorial and spatial border regimes intertwine with temporal dispositives that hold migrants in a state of suspension and uncertainty. Along these lines, scholars emphasized how borders produce temporal discontinuities in relation to the "meanwhile" of national time (Anderson 1983) and to the structure of the labor market (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013). In this respect, De Genova writes how the government of migration does not simply operate through spatial technologies but also intervene "in ways that are fundamentally dedicated to the temporal processing of distinct mobilities" (De Genova ed. 2017: 8). A few empirical studies shed light on various ways in which borders perform their

function through temporal dispositives. Melanie Griffiths, for instance, investigates the temporal uncertainties of immigration detainees and refused asylum seekers. She effectively shows how time is deployed as a power tool in immigration detention centres and in asylum procedures, exploring the temporal tensions that these migrants are subjected to (Griffiths 2013; 2014). Similarly, Carolina Kobelinsky notices how the asylum system is characterized by a temporality that is blocked and dependent, and migrants are forced into periods of suspension and endless waiting times (Kobelinsky 2010). Ruben Andersson (2014) explores how borders intervene on migrants' lifetime through extended periods of waiting, but also by actively seizing migrants' time through serial expulsions, forced displacements and containment. Along similar lines, Martina Tazzioli (2018) investigates the EU border strategy following the implementation of the Hotspot approach in 2015, emphasizing the role of temporal borders to regain control over unruly migrant movements (Tazzioli 2016). In this respect, she writes how "the lens of the temporality of control enables seeing that time is not only object of mechanisms of control - control over time - but also a mean and a technology for managing migrant - control through time" (Tazzioli 2018: 15). Fontanari (2017) notices how the European border regime oscillates between moments of control and abandonment, resulting in a temporal fragmentation of refugees' life times between the extremes of containment and hypermobility. McNevin and Missbach (2018), for their part, draw attention on how the temporal techniques of border control, such as waiting periods and indeterminacy, are reinforced by calls for humanitarian improvements of reception conditions for migrants. Their work effectively shows how care and border security come to be intertwined in a process of humanitarianisation of waiting.

Considerably less attention has been devoted to the role of time and temporality in forms of resistances and collective struggles enacted by migrants themselves, aside from few exceptions (Tazzioli 2020; McNevin 2020; Periolini 2022). The work of Anne McNevin has long focused on forms of political belonging that exceed the territorial boundaries of nation states. In this sense, she writes "if the spatial basis of political community were to be constructed and naturalized in terms other than territorial ones, then our understanding of citizens and outsiders, irregular migrants amongst them, would necessarily be cast in different terms" (2006: 136). In her exploration of non-territorial forms of political belonging, her recent work focused on time (McNevin 2020). In particular, McNevin emphasizes how looking at citizenship with a temporal lens can help to "historically

relativise nation-state citizenship itself, and to illustrate patterns of resistance to forms of political belonging that were presented as the obvious fact of collective political life" (2022: 554). In her recent work, Martina Tazzioli (2020) highlights how there are virtually no studies engaging with the legacies and genealogies of the different forms of migrants struggles beyond their ephemeral times. In this sense, she calls for a more attentive consideration of the temporality and she proposes to reflect on the vanishing spaces of mobility and struggles engendered around migration, focusing on "the temporality of solidarity" and considering how certain legacies of past struggles are re-activated in the same spaces across time, via processes of memory (2020: 138). A similar attention to collective memory is proposed in Marco Perolini's analysis of the solidarity and migrants' movement in Berlin (2022). His work explores the ways in which the O-Platz movement is collectively recalled by activists over a decade later, Perolini shows how collective memory can work as a bridge across different movement phases and how past mobilizations can be remembered to drive aspirations for present-day struggles. The few studies available all remarkably emphasize how temporalities, memories, genealogies and legacies of migrants' struggles call into question issues of political belonging beyond territorial entities and are key to move "beyond punctual moments of political visibility" (Tazzioli 2020: 140).

1.4 – Outline of a temporal approach to migrants' collective action

This research proposes to adopt a temporal approach to the study of migrants' collective action and the forms of agency emerging from it. With a view to answer the question of *how extremely heterogeneous constituencies coalesce into collective formations that mobilize as migrants*, the research outlines a temporal approach grounded in the conceptualization of agency as a primarily temporal and relational concept. This work adopts the analytical articulation of agency inspired by the work of Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische (1998), who advanced an interpretation of agency as an "internally complex temporal dynamic" (1998: 964). The authors distance themselves from individualistic and opportunistic conceptualizations of agency which are at the core of most Western-based understandings of freedom and progress. They propose an articulation of agency having internal time at its core and, in this sense, they write: "as actors respond to changing environments, they must continually reconstruct their view of the past in an attempt to

understand the causal conditioning of the emergent present, while using this understanding to control and shape their responses in the arising future" (1998: 968-969). Agency, in their view, holds both a reproductive and a transformative dimension. More often than not, a focus on the past, and a recurrence to memory has been associated with the reproductive side of agency. Emirbayer and Mische refer to it as the iterative dimension of agency, "the selective reactivation by actors of past patterns of thought and action, as routinely incorporated in practical activity, thereby giving stability and order to social universes and helping to sustain identities, interactions, and institutions over time" (1998: 971). This work wishes to highlight those instances in which the deliberate selection and organization of certain pasts serves transformative purposes.

Along these lines, a temporal lens is well suited to explore collective formations as the result of processes in which actors transform their relationship with time (internal/subjective) and in time (external/objective). This temporal lens is especially useful to approach the specificities of migrants' collective action. Indeed, the path leading to migrants' mobilization is fragmented into the multiple geographies, times and backgrounds of participants. When participants' trajectories condense in a certain moment in time, usually a moment of visible mobilization, that moment is often described as the mere result of present extraordinary circumstances. On the contrary, the core assumption presented here is that there exists a temporal dimension to the forms of migrants' collective action that is worth exploring. A temporal approach is key to retrace the latent processes occurring in-between times and spaces of visible mobilization. This is especially relevant for the volatility of migrants' collective action: a temporal approach avoids reducing forms of protest, acts of citizenship and contentious border crossings to exceptions, trapped in the present and doomed to disappear as fast as they appeared. For the scope of this research, temporality is articulated around three main lines: the biographical time of participants, the construction of a shared memory and the processes of collective identification. Consistently, the main research question is articulated into sub-questions organized around these three thematic cores.

(i) How do participants select and organize their pasts into political biographies that sustain their decision to activate?

Migrants are at the core of highly divisive debates and are often stared upon with an objectifying gaze. This locks migrants in a sort of eternal present: one remains first and foremost a migrant, whose very existence is tied to the moment of migration, to which he or she is continuously brought back to. Biographical accounts, instead, expand the temporal span considered beyond the moment of visible mobilization and beyond the experience of migration itself, to include a multiplicity of pasts and spheres of life. This question importantly explores the ways in which participants retrace and construct their trajectories as political biographies, by actively selecting and organizing certain past histories, which generally extend beyond migration and activism alone. The ways in which these pasts are selected and organized is key to understand how participants build legitimizing and enabling narratives, which motivate and sustain engagement. In this regard, the main working concept adopted here is the one of narratives. Scholars have variously emphasized the close link between narratives and temporality. Echoing Paul Ricœur's masterpiece *Time and Narrative* (1984–1988), Francesca Polletta (1998: 139) notes how the distinctive character of narratives stems precisely from their temporally configurative capacity. An understanding of biographical accounts primarily as narratives shifts attention from objective time to human time. As Ricœur writes, "the world unfolded by every narrative work is always a temporal world. […] time becomes human time to the extent that it is organized after the manner of narrative; narrative, in turn, is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal experience" (1984: 3). Accordingly, the life histories collected are conceptualized as political biographies, that is, specific types of life narratives that follow trajectories to present forms of activism by selecting and organizing past occurrences and signifying them as political.

(ii) How do groups that lack a shared social past and common longstanding political traditions get together and mobilize through practices of collective memory building?

The second sub-question shifts the focus from the micro-level of political biographies to the meso-level of migrants' groups. The heterogeneity inherent to the migrant constituency and the variety of geographies, backgrounds and motivations that sustain the decision to mobilize make it so that groups mobilizing as migrants face the primary challenge of building a common ground upon which they can rely at the collective level. This constitutes

a dilemma insofar as migrants who participate do not immediately share a common social past, as they are not socialized within the same mnemonic communities nor do they refer back to common longstanding political traditions. With this question, the process of collective memory building is explored. In other words, the work of temporal recomposition is here investigated to understand how participants build new mnemonic communities. This calls into question the debate around "memory in movements" (Zamponi and Daphi 2019) and focuses on the relational side of memory, less concerned with the products of memory and more focused on the construction of group ties, through practices of memory work. While memory is often associated to rituals and evoked as the inevitable weight of the past on present forms of collective action, in this specific case, the construction of a shared social past constitutes a necessary and enabling condition for collective action.

(iii) How do participants signify the term migrant at the collective level and how do they negotiate the tensions between internal forms of belonging and external exigencies for strategic identification?

While the analysis of political biographies expands the temporal scope of participants' trajectories beyond the experience of migration itself, the groups selected still mobilize as migrants: the last sub-question addresses this dilemma. Struggles around the public representation of migrants and necessities for mutual recognition within groups do not always go hand in hand. With this question, the ways in which this tension is negotiated by groups and participants is investigated. The key working concept here is collective identity. The research looks at identity as a concept "under erasure" (Hall 1996). Hall expresses dissatisfaction with the concept, although he admits its necessity. On the one hand, following deconstructivist scholars, we can no longer refer to identity as an essence that remains stable and true to itself over time. On the other hand, Hall recognizes that the narrative and fictional character of the identity process "in no way undermines its discursive, material or political effectivity" (1996: 4). Making specific reference to the use of the term migrant, De Genova (2005, 2010a) notices how it is a type of "we" that has "nothing positive in common […] except the negative relation to the machinery of the state, which reduced [migrants] to rightless denizens and de facto 'suspects'" (De Genova 2010a: 104). Therefore, a migrant is considered to be a person who has a negative relationship with

the state. Further, De Genova defines “migrant” as ultimately a negative identity in itself, and claims that “there is nothing positive, essential, or cohesive about it which could coalesce around any sort of distinct “group” or “population”. He adds that it is crucial to avoid at all costs the trap of endorsing culturalist notions of a generic ‘immigrant experience’” (2010a: 104), which he also refers to as immigrant essentialism (De Genova 2005). The research focuses on collective identity as a process located at the meso-level of communities and groups (Melucci 1989; Escobar 2007). However, it acknowledges that most works focusing on a socio-cultural understanding of identity do not address certain questions that concern (a) the links between participants’ singular and collective identities and (b) the links between inward-oriented identities for belonging and recognition and outward-oriented identities for public representation in response to externally produced discourses. The analysis delves into the ways in which the term migrant is filled or voided with meaning, how it is used as a collective identification for strategic purposes and the extent to which it provides the ground for a deeply felt form of political belonging. Finally, the analysis considers how alternative or complementary identifications are associated or decoupled from the category of migrant.

The thread that links political biographies, memory and collective identifications is time, encompassing both an analytical and a methodological perspective. However, the three thematic cores explore different facets of temporality:

(i) the biographical time, to understand how certain pasts are activated and organized in order to motivate and sustain forms of engagement in the present;

(ii) collective memory, to explore how a shared social past is built across participants who are not originally socialized within the same mnemonic communities;

(iii) processes of identification, to investigate the ways in which novel configurations of political belonging are built among participants and negotiated with external strategic exigencies.

These different temporal lenses are useful to investigate migrants’ collective action as a phenomenon with a temporal depth of its own. This approach sheds light on the ways in which singular and collective temporalities are activated by migrants who participate in

collective action, showing how biographical and collective reconstructions of the past motivate migrants' engagement in collective action. Along these lines, it is relevant to consider how past experiences, events, relationships and skills are selected among others and organized into novel configurations, forging temporalities that motivate political engagement. A focus on both singular and collective temporalities at play is key to understanding the premises upon which novel mnemonic communities are grounded, drawing attention on the ways in which migrants reconfigure their political engagement beyond the spheres of militancy and the experience of migration alone. Moreover, this approach provides insights on the processes and practices through which new mnemonic communities come into being, on the ways in which these constitute novel configurations of political belonging that go beyond territorial boundaries, and on the ways in which these engage contentiously with super-imposed discourses around migration. Finally, migrants' collective action epitomizes the challenge of coalescing notwithstanding heterogeneity, a challenge that many other movements are also facing in an increasingly complex social world. The temporal approach proposed in this work contributes to make these processes of coalescing visible.

Chapter two

Methodology and Research Ethics

2.1 – Epistemology of research

The epistemological stance of this research is social constructivism. Accordingly, ontological questions are bracketed and remain widely offscreen, while reality is taken to be known exclusively through stocks of knowledge that are the result of thick interactions among subjects within specific contexts (Berger and Luckmann 1966). The focus is on subjective perceptions of reality which, under certain conditions of time and relations of power, come to be treated as objective facticity that remains largely unquestioned for shorter or longer periods of time. The subjective dimension equally applies to the researcher and participants, as well as the relationship between them. This epistemological ground has important implications for the ways in which social actors produce knowledge to make sense of and face reality in their everyday life, what role social researchers play in producing yet another layer of knowledge on the social phenomenon analysed and what kind of interactions there exist between these two levels. To put it in Pierre Bourdieu's words, "sociologists cannot be unaware that the specific characteristic of their point of view is to be a point of view on a point of view" (1999: 625).

The methodological choices reflect the interpretative nature of the research, which is designed as a qualitative in-depth observation of the social phenomenon analysed, aimed at gathering rich data. The research takes the shape of a multi-sited ethnographic study conducted in three different cities across Italy. The process of data collection relies on periods of prolonged immersion in the field and on the construction of relationships of trust with the participants throughout the different phases of the research. The effort of building bonds of trust with research participants is simultaneously challenging for ethical and

methodological reasons. Along these lines, the question of the position from which the researcher looks, questions, collects, and analyses data becomes altogether a focal epistemological and ethical point. Some contributions from feminist theory are particularly effective to disentangle these key questions. Donna Haraway (1988; 1997) approaches positionality primarily as an epistemological question when she uses the metaphor of the modest witness to describe the neutral researcher who moves from his own invisibility to explore the social world in presumably objective terms. "This kind of modesty […] - she writes - is the virtue that guarantees that the modest witness is the legitimate and authorized ventriloquist for the object world, adding nothing from his mere opinions, from his biasing embodiment" (Haraway 1997: 24). Modesty is a moral style that conceals a power relation with the social world, which in turn is regarded as an inert object of investigation. Accordingly, neutrality is defined as the "power to see and not be seen, to represent while escaping representation" (Haraway 1988: 583). The critique of allegedly neutral positions in social research is not coupled with a full dismissal of objectivity, but rather with a reconfiguration of it. By rejecting an understanding of the social world as an inert and passive object of research, the researcher recognizes the relational and plural nature of the process of social investigation. In this framework, objectivity means situated knowledge, as "the only way to find a larger vision is to be somewhere in particular" (Haraway 1988: 590).

2.1.1 – Between micro and meso: a multi-level analysis

The sociological approach that possibly went further in assigning centrality to relations, both as an inherent characteristic of social research and as its object of research, is the transactional one. Also known as relational sociology (Emirbayer 1997), this approach proposes a perspective shift from the centrality of social actors to a focus on the social relations that exist among them and that contribute to producing them in the first place. In this respect, social actors are conceived as unable to pre-exist the complex set of social relations that over time and in different spaces have contributed to produce them. Such a perspective informs both the theoretical and the methodological level. I here focus on the methodological implications and, in particular, on the question of the unit of analysis. A

relational approach to social reality allows *sui generis* levels of inquiry on a continuum from macro to micro (Emirbayer 1997: 294) providing a valid theoretical backing to studies that investigate the connections between different levels of analysis that are usually treated as separate and discrete. Within the scope of this research, the type of data collected include (a) biographical accounts, broadly referable to the ways in which personal storylines take on a political purport and/or intersect past and present political experiences (b) accounts and observation of collective experiences of migrant activism. Rather than investigating these data as ascribed to two separate levels of analysis, the research wishes to understand how the microlevel of individuals overlap and relate to the meso level of collective formations, and how the two contentiously interact with the macro-level. This research work is more prominently concerned with the micro level in relation to political biographies (chapter 4) and the meso level in relation to collective memory building (chapter 5), while the macro level is only marginally touched upon in the last empirical chapter (6) in exploring the existing tensions around representation of migrants in the public sphere. Thus, the micro and the meso level are here kept in constant dialogue with one another at each step of the research, in order to shed light on the conceptually gray area that connects these two analytically different levels. Moreover, the decision to engage with a multi-level analysis holds implications for categories such as 'activist' and 'migrant', that are central for this research work, and yet are not treated as solid and unquestioned terms. By moving across different analytical levels, the research approaches these categories as in-built in the processes of political participation and migration, and inevitably situated in the temporal, spatial and relational coordinates that shape them in the first place. In this sense, collecting political biographies entails to try and move along the timeline of the people interviewed so as to rebuild the lines of encounters, experiences, places, ideas that they perceive as key determinants and that make them ultimately transindividuals (Balibar and Morfino 2014; Read 2016; Balibar, 2020).

2.2 – Reflexivity, positionality, and the ethics of doing research with migrants

Migration is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, extensively studied, continuously exposed to external representation, as well as a contested and polarized issue in public

debate. All of which demands that some clarification be provided over the choice and the use of the terms within the scope of the research. Broadly speaking, this research focuses on different forms of agency that are relatable to migration, performed by both migrants and people with a migration background. The use of the term migrant in this study hinges upon two main reasons. The first and most important one is that the choice of the term migrant echoes the term that the groups involved in the research use to describe themselves in the public sphere. In fact, the term migrant recurs in all three group names. Furthermore, the choice of the term migrant with no further categorization attached reflects the need to avoid assuming state-related vocabulary as an unquestioned fact. Rather, the research critically engages with the regulatory nature of the categorization surrounding migration. A critical stance towards such categorization as a state-led dispositive for migration governance aims at denaturalizing the effects produced by the proliferation of these categories. The discursive production around migrants' legal nomenclature certainly has an impact on the forms migrants' collective action takes. Within the scope of this research, the term 'migrant' refers to a highly heterogeneous social category that includes people with different national origins, gender, and socio-cultural background. For the most part, participants in the research are members of the lower classes and subjected to social stigma and multiple forms of discrimination, and are often non-recognized as rightful members of the body politic in Italy. For these reasons, conducting research with migrants calls into question a number of compelling issues that touch upon different ethical levels, all of which call for a reflexive approach.

In 'La misère du monde' (1999) Pierre Bourdieu and other scholars developed a core methodological section '*Comprendre*' in which they move from the assumption that social research is primarily a social relation that, as such, is embedded into social structures and has to take them into account. These scholars point at the need to develop reflexivity as a method that operates as a permanent practice of perception and control of the effects of social structures affecting the process of research. Reflexivity thus concerns the moment of data collection as much as the work of transcription and analysis of the data. Bourdieu and colleagues draw attention on the fact that social research is grounded on carefully built relationships of trust and, as such, the nature of collected data recalls that of confidential accounts, private dialogues that the researcher – not without an emotional cost – makes publicly available: "how can we not feel anxious about making private words public,

revealing confidential statements made in the context of a relationship based on a trust that can only be established between two individuals?" (Bourdieu et al. 1993: xi). Feelings of anxiety and inquietude are used to describe the sense of discomfort experienced in carrying out the task of turning private confidences public while trying to remain faithful to the authenticity and complexity of the accounts collected on the field. Undoubtedly, a broad spectrum of contradictory emotions is embroiled in the process of research. The variety of relationships established during fieldwork and the blurred and moving line of the professional-personal divide is described in Ryen's work when he makes references to "nuances in friendship, niceness and instrumentality" (2011: 38) as the diverse, and at times overlapping, facets that characterize the ties built in the field. When building relationships with research participants, it has been important to clarify not only the purpose of the project, but also to openly discuss the problems related to my position as a white female researcher conducting research with migrants. One of the key contradictions emerging from both the literature and the fieldwork refers to the fact of having a voice that is often denied to the people who are involved in the research process, both in general terms and in the form of a counterclaim to the research outputs.

Along these lines, in the specific case of researching migration, the scope of the research ethics is not confined to questions of data safety, but rather expands to issues of representation of social reality and extractivism. The question of representation of subaltern groups has been famously addressed by Spivak (1988). Research on migration contributes to the piling up of external representations concerning migrants who, instead, hardly ever get to speak for themselves. While the question of existing representations around a given social phenomenon is too complex an issue to be solely ascribed to the responsibility of individual researchers, it still raises compelling questions over the forms of knowledge production and reproduction that are here treated as an open contradiction. Throughout the research process participants shared their singular and collective stories, their worldviews and values which, however, are not reported here with the pretension to speak on behalf of respondents. The analysis and interpretation of the data collected falls exclusively under my responsibility. Yet, questions of representation have been openly addressed in the process of data collection and the ways in which respondents are presented here is the result of a relational negotiation that attentively considers respondents' demands over the forms representation should not take. In particular, open

requests have been made to avoid victim-like types of representations, emphasizing experiences of traumas over the singular and collective struggles that participants engage into. Moreover, several respondents raised concerns over the short-term opportunistic relationships that researchers established with them in the past. The fact of having directly experienced forms of extractivism makes them understandably reluctant to engage in the research. In this context, the decision to spend a significant amount of time exclusively to get to know people and participate in their activities without advancing demands has been a necessary ethical condition. Before conducting interviews, various discussions and debates were held both with singular participants and during group meetings, to question my position as a researcher, the forms and practices of restitution, and the ways in which the research could be of any use for participants' struggles.

Notwithstanding the existing challenges, the fieldwork has been a surprisingly enriching path, characterized by encounters and slowly built relationships, which demand for constant mediation between academic and bureaucratic exigencies and the uncontainable world of changing circumstances. By spending time as a participant observer, I grew closer to many participants. In particular, it can never be stressed enough the importance of the relationship with the so-called gatekeepers, who for the entire duration of the fieldwork shared a great deal of time with me, allowed me to get to know the people and the context, took care of me and showed great interest in the research, by engaging in challenging debates. As a great deal of trust has been granted to me, the fear of not being loyal to it and the feeling of inquietude that accompanies the act of transcribing, analysing and turning confidential conversations into publicly available information remains a major preoccupation and a contradiction that has to remain open to discussion.

For what concerns data safety, all research participants have been informed of the purpose of the project, and have freely agreed to take part in the research; all interviewees have been made aware of their possibility to withdraw from the project and make their data no longer available at any time. The data collected are kept anonymous for all interviewees. Data protection calls into question the ways in which we treat the data collected, in particular considering how the data shared with the researcher might turn into potentially harmful information for the interviewees and others, once they are published. This is especially the case for interviews with migrants who do not have a regularized legal status. In this sense, data safety is key to avoid the use of research outcomes for repressive

purposes. As it is widely acknowledged, activists are often the target of repression from police forces and public institutions. In this respect, migrant activists are two times exposed, as the achievement of regular residence permits is largely dependent upon those same institutions that are in charge of public order enforcement. This research is committed to guarantee safety to all people involved, throughout the whole research process. This entails that pieces of information that might constitute in any way a threat to the safety of participants are kept private, even when they provide relevant scientific insights into the phenomenon under study.

2.3 – Methodology and methods

The research takes the shape of a multi-sited ethnography, conducted with three groups in three cities in Italy, namely Naples, Rome, and Bologna. Following Madden (2010), the fields are defined as part geographical, part social, and part mental constructs:

"The conceptualisation of the interrogative boundary, that is, the question that impels the ethnographer, overarch geographic considerations and tie diffuse, loose, separate, mobile or distant places together into a single ethnographic field of enquiry." (Madden 2010: 53).

For the data collection, I conducted intense fieldwork activities, spending periods of around six months in each city, getting to know the urban context, and participating in the everyday life of the groups. The initial phases of the fieldwork have been intermittent, as I had to negotiate the conditions of my presence within the group, share the objectives of the project and discuss with activists the forms of restitution and the ways in which my presence as well as the research could be of some use for them.

2.3.1- Data collection

The two key methods for data collection are participant observation and life history

interviews; I also conducted semi-structured interviews with Italian activists and key informants, and collected and analysed relevant documents.

- Participant observation was conducted for a total of a six-months period – although not continuous – in each city. The data have been collected by compiling an ethnographic diary with fieldnotes, recorded files, and pictures. Early in the process of data collection, I relied on numerous informal conversations with informants who allowed me to gain relevant knowledge on the movement area and the urban context. Later in the process, after accessing the spaces of the groups and participating in the activities as an observer, I started gathering data on internal practices in the form of fieldwork notes, interviews on the history of the group, on their achievements and claims, and on their everyday life activities. In particular, in Naples I attended around 30 helpdesk days, 5 internal meetings, various days at the local immigration *Questura* (police headquarter), and 3 demostrastions. In Rome and Bologna the fieldwork was conducted during the Covid pandemic, for this reason one-on-one or small group meetings were privileged. In Rome I attended around 20 small-group meetings (with two or three people at a time), 5 internal meetings, 5 public initiatives, and 1 protest. Similarly in Bologna, I attended around 20 small-group meetings, 5 internal and public meetings, and 1 protest. Participant observation was especially useful to collect first-hand data on internal and public meetings, activities, forms of direct social actions, mobilizations and general activities of support to migrants. In particular, participant observation facilitates a focus on practices of everyday life. As O'Reilly (2012) emphasizes, ethnography is especially suited to grasp the conscious and unconscious layers of practices:

  "Practice also often involves doing things without being aware of it, in the context of constraints and opportunities of which people may not be conscious. It is essential, therefore, to find ways of studying the practice of daily life and understanding it without relying solely on the views of agents. Ethnography that pays attention to both wider structures and the thoughts and feelings of agents, within the context of action, is thus an ideal approach to research practice." (2012: 10)

Participant observation is a key method to get the closest possible to an understanding of events, activities, and struggles from the perspective of the people involved in collective action and, at the same time, observe the implicit and unquestioned aspects of everyday practices (Balsiger and Lambelet 2014). Participation in person facilitated the construction of forms of proximity with the people involved in the research and transformed the process of investigation into a deeply absorbing experience, in which the context and its contradictions often emerge as self-evident rather than in the form of an explanation. Observation allowed me to collect data on the great deal of non-verbalized elements that matter for the research. Among these, the ways in which social spaces are lived, filled and voided, the forms of interaction across different constituencies, the role of memory in everyday life politics, the practices of memory work, and the forms of identification upon which a sense of belonging is built.

- Life history interviews are the second main method for the collection of data. They constitute a key method for the temporal approach investigated in this research. Edward Said (1978) uses the words of Anwar Abdel Malek (1963: 97) to point out that the construction of the Oriental 'other' does not only rest on an imaginary work but is also built on a dehistoricized account of the 'other', which generally relies on a monolithic historical narrative, produced within Western cultural environments. Thus, the choice to collect biographical accounts that exceed both the experience of migration and the experience of activism alone go in the direction of locating the phenomenon analysed in a broader and more complex time perspective, that expands both horizontally and vertically (Portelli 1991). The idea is to methodologically enlarge the temporal span considered with a view to avoid essentialist understandings of who migrants engaging in collective action are. Rather, life histories allow us to explore the complexity of political trajectories, grounded in a variety of different spheres of life. The interviews are organized into a non-chronological scheme, where initial questions tackle present activities carried out at the group level and later questions move backwards in the past and towards singular

experiences that inform present-day decisions to engage in collective action. This structure proved quite workable, as it did not mimic the scheme used by territorial commissions for the request of international protection, and prevented forms of direct intrusiveness into past experiences that respondents might not be willing to share. As life histories are a time consuming and emotionally challenging method, some interviews were carried out in two parts, depending on the necessities of the interviewee. The data collected range over a life-time span to reconstruct the political biographies of migrant activists, and their related perceptions of decisive moments, turning points, crucial encounters, and the feelings attached to them. Life histories proved especially useful to look into the processes of continuity and change in relation to past experiences and to gather evidence on events and processes that otherwise remain under the radar. Interviews were collected in the later stages of the fieldwork activity with migrants and people with a migration background who are involved in the groups with different degrees and roles. In particular, for each group considered I interviewed leading figures, rank-and-files activists and bystanders or former participants, so as to get insights on different levels of engagement in general, and in relation to the specific group. To get in touch and select the potential interviewees I initially relied on gatekeepers that provided me with a list and the contacts of possible interviewees, and I subsequently I integrated these contacts with snowball sampling. As it is shown in the Tab. 1, I conducted a total of 18 life history interviews: respondents vary greatly in terms of origin, time and type of migration, gender, and participation in past political experiences. Such variety constitutes a key dilemma addressed in the research, and calls into question the ways in which heterogeneous constituencies coalesce.

Table 1 - List of life history interviews

Place	Number	Sex	Country of origin	Direct experience of migration*	Approximate number of years since migration	Previous political experience**	Groups of belonging
Naples	I-1	male	Sri Lanka	yes (adult)	11	no	MMRN/JVP
	I-2	male	Ivory Coast	yes (young adult)	3	yes	MMRN
	I-3	male	Mauritania	yes (adult)	2.5	yes	MMRN
	I-4	male	Senegal	yes (young adult)	11	no	MMRN/ DEMA

Rome	I-5	female	Peru	yes (young adult)	12	yes (Italy)	RDMF
	I-6	female	Peru	yes (as a child)	15	no	RDMF
	I-7	female	Italy/Eritrea	no (born in Italy)	–	yes (Italy)	RDMF
	I-8	female	Italy/Albania	no (born in Italy)	–	no	RDMF
	I-9	female	El Salvador	yes (adult)	3	no	RDMF
	I-10	female	Mexico	yes (adult)	2	yes	RDMF
Bologna	I-11	male	Senegal	yes (young adult)	32	yes	CMB
	I-12	male	Senegal	yes (young adult)	30	yes	CMB
	I-13	female	Senegal	yes (as a child)	20	no	CMB
	I-14	female	Moldova	yes (young adult)	20	yes (Italy)	CMB
	I-15	female	Turkey	yes (university student)	10	no	CMB
Life histories conducted with bystanders or during the mapping phase							
Milan	I-16	female	Rojava	yes	–	yes	CUB
Bologna	I-17	male	Italy/Ivory Coast	no (born in Italy)	–	yes	La casa del mondo
Bologna	I-18	intersex	Libya	yes (adult)	6	yes	MIT/CMB in the past

MMRN: *Movimento Migranti e Rifugiati Napoli*; JVP: *Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna* (People's Liberation Front, Party, Sri Lanka); DEMA: *Democrazia e Autonomia* (Democracy and Autonomy, Party, Italy); RDMF: *Rete di Donne Migranti e Figlie*; CMB: *Coordinamento Migranti Bologna*; CUB: *Confederazione Unitaria di Base* (Base Unitary Conferedation, Union, Italy); MIT: *Movimento Identità Trans* (Trans Identity Movement, Italy).
*Direct experience of migration: the interviewee has migrated to Italy during his/her lifecourse, as opposed to an experience of migration mediated through the family (children of migrants).
**Previous political experience: refers to any previous political experience either in the country of origin or in Italy.

- Semi-structured interviews have been carried out with key informants and with Italian activists participating in forms of collective action in solidarity with migrants. Interviews are especially useful to get insights on the contexts and circumstances in which a given social phenomenon emerges (Miller and Glassner 2016). Interviews with key informants addressed in particular the history of migration and of the movement areas at the urban level. Interviews with Italian activists focused on the role of solidarity movements and actors in relation to the development of the groups considered. I conducted a total of 17 semi-structured interviews, a part of them includes the interviews conducted for the mapping phase in different Northern cities in Italy.

- **Document collection** of fliers, website and social media presentations, related newspaper articles and press releases. This type of data is especially useful to gather information on public representations. These include the image that the groups convey externally, such as strategic self-representations to communicate with the broader public, and representations provided by other actors, such as media, institutions, opponents and allies.

2.3.2 – Data analysis

One of the key aspects of ethnographic analysis is its iterative character (O'Reilly, 2012; Madden 2010). The analysis is a continuous process that runs along the different stages of the research activity, and resembles a spiral more than a circular or a linear process (O'Reilly, 2012). In this sense, while trying to disentangle the analytical process, one needs to be aware that the interpretive process begins when taking notes and elaborating the interviews' canvas. It is thus for purposes of clarity that the analytical process is here unpacked into three stages that can be summarized in coding, interpreting, and writing.

The first stage of data analysis can be referred to as data organizing: in early stages of data analysis, the coding process moves from a deductive to an inductive approach, and vice versa. The former is guided by the operationalization of the key concepts – political biographies, memory, and forms of belonging and collective identification – while the latter allows unexpectedly relevant themes to emerge from the data. This might include relevant issues raised by interviewees or elements that become visible through participant observation, which were not regarded as initially relevant. The early stage of coding was helpful to refine the research questions and to single out relevant and recurrent themes. At a later stage, the coding process was useful to distinguish two main analytical levels, one focused on narratives and the other on practices. Narratives are related to the analysis of life history interviews, and refer in particular to the processes of meaning-making that lie at the heart of migrants' political trajectories. The analysis of practices, on the other hand, focuses on all non-verbalized and implicit everyday life activities, thus shedding light on the

ways in which urban and political spaces are lived, on how relational ties are built, on the forms political belonging takes within groups. Practices, following Wenger's work, can be defined as:

"all the implicit relations, tacit conventions, subtle cues, untold rules of thumb, recognizable intuitions, specific perceptions, well-tuned sensitivities, embodied understandings, underlying assumptions, and shared world views. Most of these may never be articulated, yet they are unmistakable signs of membership in communities of practice…" (Wenger 1998: 47 in O'Reilly 2012: 8).

After the first analytical step of data reduction, the interpretation of data aims at connecting the codes to the key working concepts. At this stage, the analysis moves to a higher level of abstraction, with the aim to respond to the research questions. In this vein, the coded data are connected to questions of temporality and political trajectories (chapter 4), processes of collective memory building and affective communities (chapter 5), and questions of collective identification and political belonging (chapter 6). In particular, the analysis of narratives is connected to questions of temporality and to the ways in which participants reconstruct their paths towards political engagement. Narratives are also key to an understanding of how participants make sense of their decision to mobilize and of the grounds upon which a sense of belonging is built within groups. Moreover, the analysis of narratives can be equally applied to the investigation of external discourses, produced by institutions and media. Practices, on the other hand, are more closely connected to the processes of shared memory building that are put in place at the collective level. In this regard, the analysis of practices sheds light on the everyday life activities that can be conceived as practices of memory work for the ways in which they contribute to build, integrate and perpetuate a shared collective past. Furthermore, the analysis of practices sheds light on the forms of non-verbal belonging and identification that emerge at the group level.

Finally, the writing stage refers to the translation of the analytical work into a written ensemble. Following the oral form of interviews and conversations that characterizes the

phase of data collection, and the transcription of the data collected, a comprehensive elaboration of a written analysis constitutes the last phase of data analysis. For this step, practical decisions that pertain to the form of the final work are made. Among these, the prominence attributed to certain issues over others, the angle from which the work is presented, and the inherent limitation deriving from the translation of a complex relational experience into a manuscript.

2.4 – Fieldwork during the pandemic

A hallmark of this research experience, and one of its main challenges, has been conducting the majority of the fieldwork activity during the Covid pandemic. In this section I will briefly discuss the ways in which the pandemic marked the rhythm of the research activity and the implications this had for the data collection. I accessed the field in Naples in September 2019 and I had almost fully covered the case of the Movimento Migranti e Rifugiati Napoli (translated as Migrants and Refuges Movement Naples, from now on MMRN) when Covid pandemic sparked in March 2020. During the first months of lockdown, I conducted a thorough analysis of the data collected in Naples, which helped me define more clearly my research focus. In the summer of 2020, I started contacting the activists of the Rete di Donne Migranti e Figlie in Rome (translated as Network of Migrant Women and Daughters, from now on RDMF). The fieldwork in Rome was conducted in the middle of the Covid emergency. Although the socio-sanitary context was extremely challenging to conduct ethnographic research, I opted to maintain an ethnographic methodology as originally planned, while reducing the geographical scope of the research by eschewing the comparison with the Spanish case. This decision on one hand reduced the risks related to planning research activities in a different country in a moment in which it was impossible to foresee the duration of mobility restrictions across Europe. On the other, it allowed me to collect first-hand data on the ground in a moment of intense social strain, having privileged access to migrants' informal networks, which could hardly be investigated via online methods. Inevitably, Covid-related mobility restrictions disrupted the usual ethnographic research process, characterized by long-term periods of immersion in the field. Between September 2020 and June 2021, the fieldwork in Rome was interrupted several times,

following the introduction and up-lifting of mobility restrictions. If ethnographic research is already demanding in itself, the unpredictability around the Covid pandemic increased the level of stress under which the research was conducted. More to that, many participants in the Roman case are migrant women who work as caregivers, which raised a number of concerns related to the sanitary risks and to the material risks of losing one's job as a result of the contagion. This generally led to an extreme precaution in planning one-to-one meetings with participants and collective encounters, and to the frequent referral of planned research activities. In the summer of 2021, after conducting a mapping phase in various Northern Italian cities, I started making contacts with the Coordinamento Migranti Bologna (translated as Migrants' Coordination Bologna, from now on CMB), where I started the fieldwork in autumn of the same year. What became clear while conducting the research in Bologna is how the Covid pandemic had not only affected the fields of health and mobility, but also disrupted everyday socializing activities, thus also breaking the habit of everyday life political activities. Many meetings were held online, especially those of migrant women, and generally speaking political activities were slowly starting to resume. The gradual exhaustion of the time available for conducting fieldwork, together with the above-mentioned limitations, certainly penalized the process of data collection in Bologna compared to the other cases. In the final stages of fieldwork, in March of 2022, I returned to Naples for a follow-up of the activities conducted by the MMRN and to balance the data collection, by integrating them with the issues and activities that emerged in particular during the Covid pandemic.

Chapter three

Case selection and case presentation

3.1 – A multiple case study

The interpretive nature of the research aims at gathering rich data and producing thick descriptions of the social phenomenon analyzed. Along these lines, the qualitative approach adopted moves more in the direction of theory-building than hypothesis testing studies. For these reason, the set of cases under investigation presented below are not intended to constitute a sample, in some ways representative of a specific population and are thus not selected following a randomized ratio. Rather, the cases are chosen based on a purposive selection procedure that singles out theoretically relevant instances (della Porta 2014a). As a consequence, the findings presented in the empirical chapters are not regarded as definitive, encompassing, and generalizable, but rather aim at providing an in depth analysis of quite exceptional instances which can be better observed and understood through a qualitative appraoch (Small 2009; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Lofland and Lofland, 1995). This type of selection procedure is intended to allow deeper levels of exploration of specificities that are paradigmatically prominent in the cases selected.

3.1.1 – The Mediterranean area

The project was initially conceived as a comparative research between Italy and Spain. However, in the face of Covid-related restrictions to mobility I opted to expand the number of cases in Italy, where I had already started the fieldwork and where I could count on a relatively easier access to the field in terms of mobility. Italy is here simultaneously regarded as a case of a Southern European country, strongly targeted by the austerity measures that followed the economic breakdown of 2007 and as a key site of the Mediterranean border

zone. In this regard, while the cases selected are located in Italy, the national context is less relevant per se and more representative of a broader Northern Mediterranean area that has been directly affected by multiple restrictive responses to the economic crisis and to increased migration flows transiting via the Balkan and the Mediterranean routes from the Arab revolts on. The selection and conceptualization of Italy as part of an area which is geographically (North Mediterranean) and politically (South European) topical, rather than as a bounded nation-state is key to avoid the limitations of methodological nationalism. As several scholars of migration emphasize, there are significant pitfalls in exploring migration and migration-related phenomena assuming nation-states as natural and unquestioned entities (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2003; Amelina et al. 2012).

The Arab uprisings between 2010-2012, the collapse of the Lybian state with the fall of Muammar Gaddafi's regime, and the long-lasting civil war in Syria paved the way for an increase in migration flows accessing Europe through the Mediterranean and the Balkan routes, reaching an unprecedented apex in 2015. Indeed, during the so-called 'long summer of migration', Italy has been the second main entry gateway to Europe after Greece, crossed by migratory flows that were mostly directed towards Central and Northern European countries. Due to its location along the Southern European border, Italy has been especially affected by the Dublin regulation III (Regulation No. 604/2013), which holds border countries responsible for handling the influx of asylum seekers into the European territory. Moreover, in response to this growing in-flow, the European border regime has equipped itself with increasingly pervasive temporal and spatial dispositives of mobility control.

All of these concomitant factors, enhanced by widespread mediatic coverage, alternatively fostering narratives of invasion and victimhood, migration turned into one of the most polarized issues at the national and at the European level. More to that, right-wing and far-right actors have used migration as the signature number of their political campaigns. Not only did these actors actively sustain opportunistic representations of migrants as scapegoats for broader societal and economic constrains to gain leverage, but they also insisted on the unbreakable cultural differences that separate natives from migrants, strengthening a monolithic and exclusionary idea of national identity. Stirred by far-right local movements, these anti-immigration stances impacted upon more liberal political actors' discourses, who were the first to pave the way to ever more restrictive migration

policies entering the institutional domain (Richardson and Colombo 2013; Castelli Gattinara 2018). Italy is thus taken to be an example of a socio-political context in which migration has acquired a central contentious role in the country's political agenda and public debate and where migrants have been the target of increasingly restrictive policies and discriminatory acts.

3.2 – A purposive selection: migrant collective identity, heterogeneity, urban context

Against this background, numerous and composite movements in solidarity with migrants organized to counteract these visions and policies (della Porta 2018; Zamponi 2018b). The cases selected correspond to three groups partially or exclusively composed of people with a migration background, who are active at the level of the local movement area in Naples, Rome and Bologna. Rather than discrete and bounded entities, these collective formations are conceived as assemblages of different participants and forms of participation. The ratio that guides the selection relates to three main features that remain similar across the three cases:

(1) An explicit use of the term 'migrant' as a collective identification in the public sphere

Migrants' collective action emerges in a hostile political and mediatic environment, in which the term migrant has come to be charged with a negative connotation and is usually appointed by external actors. In this regard, the choice implemented by these groups to use 'migrant' as a public and collective identification is worth being explored as a counter-intuitive choice. All three groups considered use the term migrant as a form of strategic representation in the public sphere. However, as De Genova rightly points out "to be migrants—and to be "illegal" migrants, in particular—is a strictly relational, and in this sense, negative, identity (constituted in and through a social relation that is finally contingent)" (2010: 110). What remains to be explored, then, is how in the face of a weak connecting label participants come together.

(2) The group's internal heterogeneity in terms of migration background

The second common feature across the three cases is the group internal diversity in terms of migration background. All cases selected include heterogeneous constituencies in terms

of origins, forms of migration and direct or indirect experiences of migration. Diasporic communities and other groups that are characterized by higher degrees of homogeneity have been excluded from the selection. This parameter is strictly connected to the previous point, as it allows to explore how extremely heterogeneous constituencies coalesce into collective formations in spite of diversity, using the term migrant as a collective denominator. The question of bringing together very heterogeneous participants in terms of background and political traditions resonates with a key challenge that also other movements are facing in increasingly complex societies.

(3) The urban context as the geographical setting of the groups considered.

Finally, all cases are selected within major urban contexts, in which broader movement areas mobilize and relate in different ways to the groups selected. The existing literature has emphasized the importance of cities as incubators and magnifiers of migrants' collective action, for the proximity to existing networks already active at the city level (Hmed 2008; Siméant 1998; Nicholls and Uitermark 2017). Moreover, scholars of migration have relied on a critical geography perspective to emphasize the importance of moving beyond national framework and national borderlines as the only geographically relevant sites for migration. Increasing relevance is attributed to the role of local and translocal scales, and to the displacement of borders within the national territory (Greiner and Sakdapolrak 2013; Sassen 2013). Consistently, I selected three urban centres in Italy, geographically located in the North, the Centre and the South of Italy. The three are characterized by different migrant populations both in quantitative terms, with the North of Italy accounting for a larger presence of migrant population, and in qualitative terms, with different communities of origin inhabiting different areas of the Italian territory. The three cities considered have different sizes both in terms of population and territorial dimension, with Rome being the largest, followed respectively by Naples and Bologna. More to that, the three cities correspond to very different socio-economic contexts, which have an impact on the type of challenges migrants face and, consequently, on the direction collective action takes. In spite of the differences, however, all three cities work as catalyzers of collective action, as a result of the dense movement networks that are already active at the urban level and that facilitate migrants' participation.

As mentioned above, the selection is not intended to be representative of mobilizations enacted by migrants and people with a migration background in Italy. Migrants have been central players of different struggles both in urban and in rural contexts, in the field of work and social rights, as well as in struggles for civil rights and citizenship. In many of these mobilizations, the main collective identity that stirs mobilization is the one of "worker", "poor", "racialized", rather than the one of "migrant" on which this study lingers. This selection procedure is directed to draw attention on the ways in which collective actors build new forms of political belonging by bringing together heterogeneous constituencies and on how they negotiate the tensions between forms of deeply felt belonging and more strategic forms of public identification. While this first guiding principle – how actors relate to 'migrant' as a collective identity – is more focused on the construction of meaning at the movement level, the second selection feature is more strictly related to the actual composition of the group in terms of heterogeneity. The juxtapposition of these two levels sheds light on the processes through which different constituencies come to mobilize under a homogenizing category, and how this is sustained by a work that is carried out inside the groups, which invests questions of tie building, political belonging, negotiation of a shared past and the construction of new affective and mnemonic communities.

Table 2 – Case presentation

	Movimento Migranti e Rifugiati	Rete di Donne Migranti e Figlie	Coordinamento Migranti
Place (urban)	Naples	Rome	Bologna
Year	2016	2019	2004
Organizational form	Movement collective	Informal network	Movement collective
Link to movement area	Strong (ex-OPG)	Critical	Strong (NUDM, ∫connessioni precarie)
Composition	Mixed (Italian, direct and indirect experience of migration, mixed family)	Separatist (women with direct or indirect experience of migration)	Mixed (Italian, mostly direct experience of migration, indirect experience of migration)

Migrant composition	Mostly direct experience of migration (many from 2015 wave)	Direct and indirect experience of migration (different waves and forms of migration)	Mostly direct experience of migration (different waves and forms of migration)
Origin	West Africa, Indian subcontinent, other	Latin America, East Africa, other	Mostly West Africa, North Africa, Easter Europe, Turkey, other
Gender	Mostly men / new women's group	Only women	Mixed
Issues and values	Reception condition, residence permit and citizenship rights, work rights, anti-racism, communism.	Intra-group solidarity ties, anti-racism, decolonial feminism, living and working conditions.	Work rights and work struggles, residence permit, reception conditions, migration and gender, anti-racism, autonomous Marxism.
Age	≃ 20-35	≃ 20-50	≃ 25-65

Keeping the three criteria discussed above constant, the cases selected are then diverse along many other axes. These differences are only briefly presented in Table 2, and will be discussed more extensively in the case descriptions below. They refer to: the urban location (even if the urban context remains constant), the year of formation, the organizational form and the link to other movement actors, the composition and, specifically, the migrant composition, the gender composition, the origin, the central issues and values of the groups, the age of participants. Below, I briefly go through the relevant differences that are distinctive to each group.

The three groups selected started mobilizing in different periods, which correspond to different salient junctures. The CMB dates back to 2004 and started mobilizing in response to the so-called Bossi-Fini, a restrictive law on Immigration (Law n. 189/2002, Modification of the Law on the matter of Immigration and Asylum). The MMRN emerged in 2016 in the context of the "long summer of migration". In this framework it is interesting to notice how the group does not only refer to migrants, but includes also the term "refugees". This choice is related to a widespread use of the term in the public discourse and, most importantly, to the procedure for the recognition of asylum seekers in which migrants were directed. In the early stages of group formation, Italian activists and migrants met as a result of protests enacted by refugees and asylum seekers that sparked within various CAS (extraordinary

reception centres). The RDMF is the most recent case that started gathering in autumn 2019 and became visible in June 2020, during the BLM protests that sparked after the killing of George Floyd by a police agent in Minneapolis. Once again, this group refers to migrant women and daughters, emphasizing a family type of tie which, in this case has a double meaning: on one hand, it refers to the possiblity of re-building chosen family-like type of ties that sustain in-group solidarity and, on the other hand, it refers to the willingness of bringing together different generations of migration that usually face quite different challenges.

The groups then differ in terms of organizational forms and in terms of links to other movement actors and ties to the broader movement area. The RDMF is organized as an informal network that emerged from a critical stance towards the broader movement area. Both the MMRN and the CMB are more similar to movement collectives. The former holds a strong tie to the ex-OPG social centre, while the latter used to be related to XM24 social centre in Bologna in the past, and has later developed an autonomous path.

In terms of composition, the cases in Naples and Bologna include both participants with an Italian origin and with a migration background. The Roman case, on the other hand, is exclusively composed of people with a migration background. The gender composition of the group is mixed in the case of Naples and Bologna. In Naples there was a majority of male component in the initial phases of mobilization and a women component that joined in the following years. The Roman case is different in terms of gender composition since it is separatist along the lines of gender and migration background.

In terms of main claims and values, the MMRN emerged from the organization of micro-protests occurring within reception centres in 2015 and early 2016, and later focused on the struggle for the residence permit and on broader claims for social justice and anti-racism. The RDMF works as an intermittent horizontal solidarity network, responding to the material needs of migrant women in terms of jobs, housing, and education. Moreover, the group works to outline a new discursive articulation around racialized subjectivities in Italy, having decolonial feminism and anti-racism as their main normative references. The CMB is nowadays especially active on workers' rights in the logistics sector and struggles in the workplace. It also mobilizes on reception centre conditions, residence permit and citizenship rights, and the interplay of gender and migration-related discriminations.

Finally, the CMB has the wider timespan in terms of age of participants (≃ 25-65). Similarly, the RDMF includes people with a wider age span (≃ 20-50). The MMRN includes a narrower age span (≃ 20-35, with a few exceptions).

As it is often the case in qualitative research strategies, the steps of data gathering, data analysis and concept building do not develop in a linear process. Along these lines, the case selection followed a back-and-forth motion, in such way that "each case provides an increasingly accurate understanding of the question at hand" (Small 2009: 24; Yin 2002). The research process started off from the exploration of the MMRN case in Naples, as it represented a quite outstanding case of migrants mobilizing at the urban level in the South of Italy by the time I began this research.

Subsequently, I selected the RDMF, in particular for its organizational and compositional characteristics in terms of both gender and migrant background, i.e. a self-organized network of migrant and migration-background women only. The selection of a case in the North of Italy required a longer process due to a number of reasons: first, the fact that I was at a later stage in the research,and second, the emergence of Black Lives Matter protests and the new groups emerging to mobilize against racial injustice. For these reasons, I decided to conduct a mapping phase in the North of Italy to take some time to explore various options in different cities, in particular I considered Florence, Turin, Milan, Genoa and Bologna, that ultimately led me to the selection of the CMB. The latter case was selected based, on one hand, on the three criteria that remain constant in the selective ratio and, on the other hand, for the focus on the struggles in the workplace and the long history of struggle, which allowed me to include a temporal span of twenty years of migrants' mobilizations.

The following sections delve deeper into the description of the cases selected and work as a bridge connecting the first part of the manuscript to the empirical chapters. Below, I will present the cases in Naples and in Rome, then I will briefly report the mapping phase that led me to select the CMB, which I will present in the last section.

3.3 – Case 1: Movimento Migranti e Rifugiati Napoli

The first case selected is the MMRN, located in Naples within the ex-OPG Je So' Pazzo social centre. During the initial phases of the project, when the research process was at its start, I selected the MMRN after a number of informal conversations and key informants' interviews which identified the MMRN as a very active group with a strong migrant component. I started the fieldwork in Naples in September 2019. In order to access the field gradually and simultaneously make it a useful time for initial data collection, I decided to go on and off to Naples in correspondence with relevant public events organized by the MMRN, in which I participated as an observer to start taking contacts with activists and key informants at the city level. After this initial intermittent phase, I stayed in Naples for a longer period of time starting from the late months of 2019 until February 2020. In March 2020 the fieldwork activity was abruptly interrupted by the spread of the Covid pandemic; I later returned to Naples for a month in March 2022, after having concluded the fieldwork in Rome and Bologna. In Naples, I followed the activities of the MMRN, doing participant observation and conducting interviews with both key informants and activists.

I conducted three interviews with key informants and several informal conversations with activists and members of associations active at the civil society level, I gathered data on the urban context in which the group mobilizes. This phase allowed me to get a clearer picture of the urban migration context and history and to collect data on the most prominent migrant communities in terms of population and political activation. I conducted four life history interviews with migrants engaged in collective action, and two semi-structured interviews with other activists of the group with an Italian origin.

During the two months of fieldwork I also participated as an observer to several different activities carried out by the movement collective, gathering data on internal and public meetings, on the legal desk for migrants, on the mobilization organized on December 7th 2019, on the activities of support to migrants at the immigration police headquarter. This approach to the field allowed me to get closer to the MMRN and to directly experience the challenges encountered by participants on a daily basis. Moreover, this favoured the strengthening of a relationship of mutual trust, which allowed me to conduct life-history interviews and to have important informal conversations, useful to elucidate the meaning of specific situations as well as context and experience-related processes of signification that otherwise would have remained obscure.

3.3.1 – Organizational structure and ties to the local movement area

The MMRN started to gather in the early months of 2016. The group is active on a number of different issues related to migration and asylum, and it is part and parcel of a broader political project: the occupied social centre ex-OPG 'Je so' Pazzo'. At the time when I conducted fieldwork, three to four hundred migrants participated in the mobilizations, different types of meetings with twenty to one-hundred migrants were held, and over six thousand migrants had been followed by the legal desk in the previous three years. The social centre ex-OPG Je so' Pazzo is a political project which was set up one year earlier, in March 2015, when a group of student activists decided to squat the former penal psychiatric hospital located in the popular neighborhood of Materdei, in the city centre of Naples.

The MMRN is internally organized into three assemblies: the plenary, the cadres meeting and the coordination meeting. This structure allows to coordinate the MMRN activities with the wider political project of the social centre and to include participants with different degrees of commitment and political experience.

The plenary is a long multilingual meeting with a broad participation that is convened on rare occasions, before public demonstrations or when key issues need to be discussed collectively. The number of migrants participating varies depending on the period, but it usually gathers over one hundred migrants. In these meetings, participation is characterized by high levels of turnover. These are crucial moments for the socialization of migration-related issues across very different constituencies. The cadres meeting is composed of twenty to thirty migrant activists and a few Italian born activists. Cadres meetings are called to discuss the political line of the group and to identify the claims to advance via public mobilizations and other activities. Migrants participating in these meetings share either a previous political experience or a political formation achieved via a longer period of engagement in the group activities. The coordination meeting is composed of Italian born activists and six migrant activists who participate as referees for the MMRN, it gathers to organize the mutualistic activities which take place within the social centre, such as the legal desk and the Italian school, and to coordinate with the rest of the social centre activities and political vision. Finally, this meeting is useful to strengthen solidarity ties to other

components of the working class, keeping track of the various struggles that the social centre is conducting.

3.3.2 – Main activities and lines of struggle

All activities carried out by the MMRN are referred to as forms of struggle, with specific internal objectives and external claims attached to them. Contrary to an understanding of these activities as mere service-provision, activists aim at boosting political participation through processes of identity building and politicization of given issues, and in this sense they pursue a political aim (Zamponi 2019), one that directly copes with the material conditions experienced by migrants.

(i) People's control

All interviewees confirm that the constitution of the MMRN was initially possible thanks to the activity of the *controllo popolare* – people's control – organized by ex-OPG activists, an activity that had been first experimented during the local elections as a tool for democratic accountability. The same was later applied reception centres for asylum seekers: activists entered the centres to meet migrants who denounced the poor living conditions:

> We went and asked: 'How is it going in this centre? What difficulties are you encountering? It was often impossible to ask these questions within the centre, so we invited people to meet us outside. (...) We were able to organize meetings outside the CAS with all the people who lived inside. (…) we noticed that the issues were similar from one centre to the other and therefore they could be generalized. So we started to do plenary meetings, in which one spoke-person per each centre would report. (I-19)

The people's control played a crucial role in the initial stages of the MMRNi: it first served as a tool to detect discontent and persistent forms of protests that were already at play within the centres. In this initial process of socialization, long and complex multilingual meetings were held to allow a shift from fragmented CAS protests to the formation of broader collective claims.

So we invented these multilingual meetings, in which there was an interpreter for each spoken language (…) long and exhausting meetings, but they allowed everyone to understand what was being said and therefore to socialize the problem. When this process develops, then also a mechanism of understanding, of mutual recognition originates, overcoming the limitations of carrying out a struggle among migrants. (I-19)

(ii) The legal desk

While the *controllo popolare* was the main activity in the early stages, by the time I conducted fieldwork in Naples, the core activities had changed, the movement collective was broader and internally more cohesive. The legal desk was conceived to help migrants with the residence permits and, more broadly, to address other related material needs, such as health, language learning, work. The struggle for the residence permit helped enlarging the scope of the MMRN to include migrants that did not live in reception centres, by addressing an issue that impacts upon the lives of all migrant people. This choice increased the number of migrants who came in contact with the MMRN: according to activists' record, over six thousand migrants benefited from the legal desk activities since 2016. The legal desk was organized as a result of a joint decision making process. The activists of the Srilankan marxist leninist party (JVP – People's Liberation Front) based at the ex-OPG, for instance, suggested that a legal desk would be of help to many people and would simultaneously turn into an anti-fraud service, to reduce the risk of migrants relying on fake legal agencies. Once a week, the legal desk opens to the public. Before the start of the help-desk activities, migrant activists hold a meeting with newcomers to tell the story of the MMRN, to emphasize the relevance of the struggle in achieving collective results and to favour a socialization of the grievances shared by migrants and broader sections of the population. Activists frame the struggle for the residence permit as part and parcel of the class struggle:

We created, well actually it is precisely our migrant comrades who were able to engender a mechanism of struggle for the residence permit. But what we always say is that the struggle for the residence permit is exactly a struggle directly connected to the class struggle. (I-19)

(iii) Other activities

The people's control and the legal desk are the main activities conducted by the Movimento Migranti e Rifugati; however, there are a number of other activities carried out at the group level, among them the Italian school, the help-desk for work rights, the people's clinic, which are conducted within the social centre. Similarly, mobilizations conducted at the public level do not address exclusively residence permit issues, but focus also on work rights and housing rights: "Residence permits, houses and work for all" is one of the main slogans in public mobilizations. Anti-racism is also a central issue, that has been publicly addressed during the movement of the so-called Sardine Nere in December 2019 (Black Sardines), a follow-up of the broader liberal movement Le Sardine. The Sardine Nere accused the broader movement to be excessively moderate when demanding the amendment rather than the full dismissal of the Salvini Security Decrees.

3.4 – Case 2: Rete di Donne Migranti e Figlie

The second case selected is the RDMF, active in Rome. At this point of the research process, I was searching for a case that would complement the MMRN along a number of axes: the gender composition, the organizational form, the link to the local movement area. First, in terms of gender composition I meant to include a case that would account for the engagement of migrant women; second, in terms of organizational structure, the RDMF is not conceived as a movement collective, but rather as a more loose and informal network; finally, in terms of ties to the local movement area, the Rete emerged from a critical relationship with the broader movement milieu. The RDMF is an autonomous and separatist group that emerged in relation to a recent wave of mobilization against racism between 2019 and 2020. In this respect, then, the choice of this case aims at including a debate and a form of mobilization that have emerged only very recently in the Italian context, including not only migrants but also people with a migration background and racialized subjectivities more broadly.

I got in touch with the RDMF in July 2020 and, a couple of months later, I went to Rome in person to meet with participants. Entering the field has been in many respects challenging; the difficulties encountered concern the timing of the fieldwork, which was just a few months after the first Covid-related lockdown, that generally slowed and hindered the collective gatherings. Moreover, the RDMF did not have a wide enough space for people to

meet, in fact the only space available within the housing occupation of the Porto Fluviale, was then closed to public activities. Moreover, the Rete is a separatist group along the lines of gender and migration background, so while the fact of being a female researcher certainly helped, the forms and types of interaction between the Rete and myself had to be discussed over several encounters.

In the early stages of the fieldwork in September and October 2020, I went on and off to Rome, in correspondence with public events in order to get to meet activists and participate as an observer. After several informal encounters, the group agreed that I could attend to public meetings and to parts of the internal meetings, during which we would discuss both themes relating to my research and issues that interested the RDMF. Moreover, those participants who had a stronger interest in the research could participate with personal accounts, interviews, and providing other biographical material. However, in November 2020 a new lockdown measure was imposed, abruptly interrupting the research process when I had established good connections with the participants. As a result, the first couple meetings were held online: while these were useful to avoid losing track of the connections and discourses started, in many respects they reduced the richness and complexity of in person encounters. In the months that followed, I started conducting one to one online conversations and interviews with the activists who were available, in particular two out of six life histories were held online. From April to June 2021, I was able to retrieve fieldwork activity in person, concluding most of the data collection there. Finally, I went back to Rome in October of the same year to participate as an observer to a number of relevant events co-organized by the RDMF, among which the hosting of the *Carovana Zapatista*, when a group of people from the Zapatistas Communities visited different movement groups and political spaces across Europe.

3.4.1 – Ties to the local movement area: a critical stance

The relationship between the RDMF and the local movement area is twofold. On one hand, the participation to previous political projects in Rome is a common thread among several activists of the Rete, in particular those with a migration background who were born in Italy. For instance, some activists of the RDMF live in housing squats that are politically organized. As a result, when the RDMF started gathering, several social centres and housing

occupations in Rome offered their spaces as provisional meeting points. Initially the meetings were itinerant, and participants met either in parks or within social centres located in different areas of the city. At a later stage the *Coordinamento per la Casa* (Housing Coordination) offered a space inside the Porto Fluviale housing squat, where the RDMF started to meet regularly.

On the other hand, however, the experience of the Rete itself stems from a critical confrontation with existing movements and political spaces active at the city level. As a respondent recalls, the idea to form a new group stemmed from the need to get together and engage, drawing on the lived experiences of migration and racialization, which were either not discussed in other political spaces or addressed as any other order of the day issue:

> The first assembly was on September 1st 2019, after several encounters at my place, in my own bedroom, where with some other girls we started meeting to talk about how we lived our own experience within our political spaces and movement collectives in Italy, how this 'category' of migrant was addressed. (I-5)

Both in the feminist movement and in the anti-racist movement, the activists of the Rete sensed a certain difficulty in finding a space for their voices to be heard. In many respects, then, it is from this critical and at times even conflictual relationship with the rest of the local movement area that the RDMF stemmed. Along these lines, one of the key activities conducted by the RDMF concerns the discursive construction of a political space in which migrant and racialized women do not have to struggle to make room for themselves.

3.4.2 – Organizational structure

> We always reclaim this thing… for us it is a political choice the one of not wanting to get inside political forms that are already well established. (I-7)

The ties to the local movement area certainly impacted upon the choices that the RDMF made in terms of organizational structure: a self-organized separatist network. Self-organization among people with a migration background aims at deactivating the automatism according to which it is always non-migrant people who help migrants and, simultaneously, aims at establishing in-group solidarity ties. These organizational choice

constitutes the precondition upon which the process of formation of a new political subjectivity is grounded:

If we came to call ourselves Rete di Donne Migranti e Figlie it is because there has been a sort of political choice, not so much on the name itself, but rather a reflexion on who we are. And so at the beginning we were among black women who felt the need to act politically with regard to the condition of the black racialized woman. And then what happened? In fact what happened is that when you make a call to black racialized women, this call reaches the experience of many different people… for instance to be a black woman does not forcibly entail that you are afro-descendent, right? So probably this was not the right path […] we realized that what we actually had in common was to be racialized migrant women, and some of us were not even migrants, but daughters of migrants who however lived under a blackmail. And this blackmail is one that the Italian state imposed upon us since we were born. Take me as an example, even though I was born here, the Ministry of Interior declares that I was immigrated the same day that I was born. (I-7)

The group is organized as an intermittent, loose and informal network. The structure of a network, as opposed to that of a collective, characterizes the group and its decision to keep a low intensity type of participation, contrary to the time consuming experiences of traditional activism. High intensity participation is regarded as problematic for reducing the chances of migrant women to participate and be empowered, to lead decision making processes and to have their own voices heard. Along these lines, the network is usually intermittent, it activates in certain periods and around specific issues. Secondly, the form of a loose network makes it easier for new participants to be involved, as opposed to movement collectives which are often perceived as closed and elitist circles:

The movement collectives, at least for how I know them in Rome, seemed very closed, they do a lot of great work, but I also personally see them as an elite in a certain way. […] So looking at the type of women we wished to reach out to, who are caregivers, janitors, exactly those that you do not find within movement collectives… and they do not have the availability to attend to an assembly everyday. […] On the contrary, a network can grow from different nodes, can have different shapes, and hopefully continue to grow without the idea of being closed. (I-7)

3.4.3 – Main activities and lines of struggle

The RDMF organizes around two main lines: (a) self-consciousness practices, to share the stories of participants' lives with the aim of building a new shared political ground and (b) a horizontal solidarity network, to assist one another on material needs. The activists of the RDMF also participated in public mobilizations: in particular, in correspondance with Black Lives Matter mobilizations in June 2020, the RDMF was among the first groups in Italy mobilize, organizing an anti-racist flashmob. Participants met up in front of the colonialist monument to the victims of Dogali battle – which celebrates the Italian soldiers who died during the colonial war against Eritrea – to express solidarity to the victims of racism and to symbolically expose the colonial foundations of the Italian state.

(i) Self-consciousness practices

One central element of the political activity conducted by the RDMF is organized around long internal assemblies, in which personal stories are shared among participants, in ways that seek to find a common ground across differences and that allow those who take part in the meetings to recognize one another:

> Even with our differences, there is something that unite us. Among these, there is the need to talk about us, among us. I have often heard people talking about my experience, migration, migrant women, violence, racism […] maybe I even liked it, but I never heard a voice in which I could recognize myself. (I-5)

This practice of self-consciousness is useful to socialize experiences across participants and, more broadly, to set the boundaries of a new political subjectivity.

(ii) Horizontal solidarity network

The second main activity put in place by the RDMF aims at fostering a horizontal solidarity network, uniting different generations of migration to "build a bridge between those who arrived before and those who had just arrived" (I-6). This activity has the key objective of favouring self-assistance among migrant women from a material point of view, including paperwork, job searching, information exchange. The RDMF works as an informal network

in which everyone is invited to contribute and in which knowledge and skills are shared to solve migrant women's own problems.

> We are a network of migrant women, we meet to talk about us, to sustain each other, to understand how to live through this reality. […] We make it clear that ours is not welfarism, because it takes very little to end up there. And some women maybe even join us with this idea in mind "they help me, so I go". No! We are not an NGO, we are not the church, we are like you, you are like us. We really want to make it clear, because in our network now there are some psychologists, there was one person doing a master in who-knows-what, and some women were like "oh, doctor" and we said "yes, she's a doctor, but her voice is equal to yours". (I-5)

While the activity of the RDMF generally decreased during Covid pandemic in terms of public initiatives and internal meetings, the solidarity network that already worked informally (through social media, word of mouth, friendship ties) was especially active during the lockdowns, when several migrant women lost their jobs and had a hard time paying the rent and sustaining themselves.

3.5 – Case 3: Coordinamento Migranti Bologna

In July 2021, I conducted a mapping phase that led me to the selection of the CMB through several informal conversations and interviews with key informants, as well as short travels to Turin, Milan and Bologna. I got in touch with various groups active at the urban level in the North of Italy which focused on different lines of struggle, such as migrant workers' rights, housing, anti-racism, and citizenship rights. The mapping phase was useful to clarify the purposive selection procedure and to lead to the selection of the CMB active in Bologna. While this case is similar to the MMRN along certain axes, it also incorportates important differences that constitute relevant starting points for the comparison across cases. First, the CMB is a longstanding group that started mobilizing in 2004, contrary to the cases in Rome and Naples, which are way more recent. Second, struggles for workers' rights are central for the CMB, in particular the struggles engendered within the nearby logistic centre of Bologna, in which several migrants work and where a number of important mobilizations have been taking place. The CMB has a long story of mobilization: in this respect, the following section has no ambition to report an exhaustive description of the history of the group. Rather, it summarizes the approach to the field, the groups'

organizational features, and the main values and lines of struggle from a present-day perspective.

I started the fieldwork in Bologna in September 2021, where I stayed until February 2022. I began the fieldwork activity with some informal conversations and a few interviews with key informants to get some familiarity with the urban context, the recent municipal administrations, and the different groups active at the level of the local movement area. In early September I got in touch with some participants of the CMB, to present my research and to discuss the possibility of joining their group as a participant observer for a few months. Over the following months, I participated in a few collective meetings, started following the group activities and met with participants to get to know them. Only in the later stages of the fieldwork, I started collecting life histories with participants with a migration background. The period in which I conducted the fieldwork was generally characterized by a low level of mobilization, as a result of the enduring effects of the Covid pandemic. I partially coped with this limitation by organizing numerous meetings with singular or small groups of participants. Furthermore, the fieldwork conducted in Bologna was penalized by preoccupations related to the limited time, financial and psychological resources available in the final stages of the research. This required a significant effort to balance my expectations and those of research participants with the inevitable shortcomings derived from the limited resources at my disposal.

3.5.1 – Organizational structure and ties to the local movement area

The CMB is a network of participants with Italian and migration background that started gathering in 2004, in response to the Bossi-Fini law on immigration. The organizational structure has changed over time, as a result of broader transformations in the waves and forms of migration and migration governance over the years. In the initial stages of group formation, relationships were built across participants via shared living spaces, such as squatted housings, and by building ties across the different diasporic communities. At the moment in which the research was conducted, instead, the key socializing spaces were reception centres for asylum seekers and warehouses in the logistic sector, where a considerable number of migrants are employed.

I met these Italian students who were interested in doing something around migration. We met and we talked, until we came up with this idea of creating a migrants' coordination. At that time migrants of various nationalities lived in these squatted centres, abandoned schools… that's where we met, we went around those places, we got in touch with various associations to meet people. Most of these places have been closed now, migrants live more scattered, for this reason it has been more difficult to reach migrants. (…) The new wave of migration has its own problems, they are left in centres that are managed by cooperatives which have every interest in leaving them there (…) and we as Coordinamento [CMB] have recently directed the struggle towards these issues. We went to meet these migrants in the centres where they live or at the freight centre." (I-11)

The CMB holds different types of meetings. A restricted number of participants meet on a weekly basis to organize and follow up the group activities and struggles. Less frequently, usually on a monthly basis, broader meetings are held with a wider migrant constituency which is unable to sustain forms of intensive participation. Finally, women meet in a separate meeting, to address specific issues that concern migration and gender-based discrimination.

In this regard, the CMB holds close ties to the local node of the feminist movement Non Una Di Meno, and some of the women participants are directly involved with the feminist movement. Generally speaking, the CMB has been an active part of the broader movement area for almost two decades and holds close ties to several other movement actors.

3.5.2 – Main activities and lines of struggle

The group initially started mobilizing, together with a national coordination active at the time, for the abolition the Bossi-Fini law.

This law exposes us to blackmail. Because the employer has many more possibilities to make you work outside of the working hours, as he knows that, at the end of the day, it's him who gives you the papers to renew the residence permit. (I-11)

At the local level, the group activity was initially directed towards the struggle for the residence permit. It is at the local level, in particular, that the group achieved some key results which, over the years, eased the overall process for the residence permit issuing.

For example, in Bologna there was a very small room where migrants went to ask for residence permit renewals, so people lined up in the middle of the street, in the cold, snow, rain. We started a struggle on this and in the end they found a bigger place where migrants still go nowadays. (I-11)

Or, again:

Years ago we used to wait for years to travel, without the residence permit you could do nothing. We struggled for this, and in the end the case of Bologna became an example for the rest of Italy. Here, they started accepting the recepit of the residence permit renewal as a token to be granted the right to travel around. (I-11)

Migrants' struggles in the workplace have long been a central focus of the CMB political activities. From its early phases, the group aligned with an autonomous tradition, taking a distance from forms of unionized struggles in the workplace. The question of migrant workers' struggles remains a central issue to these days and the logistic sector is regarded as a key site of struggle. The freight centre has become a hub where many migrant workers are employed, usually with short-term contracts and with little to no training. While I was conducting the fieldwork in Bologna, a 22 year old migrant worker died in a SDA logistic warehouse at his third day of work. Migrant workers and base unions denounced the general lack of security training, often connected to short-term outsourced contracts which put workers under conditions of great risk and exploitment. A few months earliers, strikes were taking place against the Lis Group (Yoox). These strikes were led by migrant women workers and mothers, who were pushed to either accept workshifts changes or leave their jobs. Following months of strikes, the lawsuit came to a positive outcome for the workers. In January 2022, the Court of Bologna issued a decision that established the right of migrant mother workers to have workshifts during the day.

We were fifteen women. All of us mothers, at the end we decided to bring our case to court. Other women sustained us, some of them with older children and also some male colleagues didn't leave us alone. Outside of the warehouse we were around 30 workers, out of 120. Fifteen were mothers, the most desperate ones, because we did not have any other options, we took heart and striked. (I-14)

Furthermore, the CMB has long been putting pressure on the local administration to open a new bus line that connects the city centre of Bologna to the freight centre, to prevent the

numerous mortal accidents that have been happening on the connecting road during the night, when migrant workers have to walk it with bikes and scooters to reach or leave their workplace.

In recent years, the reception centres for asylum seekers have become *de facto* dormitories for migrant workers of the logistic sector. The living conditions within reception centres constitute yet another issue at the core of the CMB's activities. The case of the Mattei CAS is especially relevant in this regard. Activists have been demanding the closure of the Mattei CAS for years. The centre, which over time has performed various albeit similar functions, is a case of bad reception model, based on large numbers of users who are granted very little access to services and rights.

Finally, questions that intersect migration and gender-based discrimination constitute an important key line of struggle pursued by the group. In particular, participants call into question the multiple and intersecting discriminations that affect migrant women. Among these, the question of the access to the residence permit when mediated by the male member of the family is called into question as highly problematic for women who are subject to male violence in the household. On a different level, attention is drawn on the ways in which right-wing actors opportunistically depict gender-based violence as a migration-related problem. These central questions are elaborated during the group's meeting as well as in collaboration with the local node of the feminist movement Non Una di Meno.

Part II

Chapter four

Political biographies: tracing migrants' trajectories to political engagement

In order to understand the present we must learn to look at it obliquely.
Or, to use a different metaphor: we must learn to look at it through reversed binoculars.

Carlo Ginzburg (2008)

4.1 – Introduction to the empirical part

The second part of the manuscript delves into the empirical analysis. The empirical section moves from the analysis of political biographies of migrants who are engaging in collective action. The narrative analysis proposed in this chapter explores participants' trajectories to political engagement, and considers how these are punctuated with references to different past occurrences, which both encompass and go beyond the experience of migration and the domain of activism alone. In particular, the analysis explores those parts of past histories that are particularly selected as significant building blocks of political trajectories, and considers what motivates the choice of participation in the present, examining, among other things, the ways in which the fact of migration is employed or not. Furthermore, the analysis considers how both being a migrant and participation in collective action constitute sites of resocialization that inform respondents' interpretation of reality, which is grounded in different geographical, social and political contexts. The analysis focuses on how the process of (re)socialization across different contexts has an impact on the decision to mobilize and also on the timing and forms of participation. The analysis of political biographies is the starting point for the elaboration of further questions, which are addressed in the subsequent chapters.

Although biographical accounts are the key to accessing the plurality of past histories that inform each participant's singular trajectory of participation, they also emphasize the considerable heterogeneity in the migrant population. In chapter 5, the analysis shifts from the micro- to the meso-level, to investigate how the groups considered cope with the lack of socialization within the same mnemonic communities. In point of fact, the extremely heterogeneous nature of the participants and the resulting lack of a shared social past is a key dilemma for migrants' movement groups. By exploring the practices of memory work carried out at the group level on a daily basis, the analysis focuses on how certain parts of past histories are selected in preference to others and become the groups' collective memory. Practices of memory work are characterized by forms of intense storytelling and are the result of a process of negotiation that over time builds the ties that bind new affective communities.

In the last empirical chapter, the analysis draws on the finding that their experience as a migrant has only a limited impact on migrants' choice to mobilize, and explores how groups portray the category of migrant compared with other collective identities, both in complementary and contrasting ways. The way in which participants simultaneously resort to multiple identities beyond the migrant one provides multiple grounds for mutual recognition among participants who do not primarily identify as migrants and, eventually, promotes sustained engagement and new forms of political belonging. The analysis addresses the question of how migrant groups negotiate the existing tension between the need for a collective identity both to serve internal purposes, for example, cementing the bonds between participants and creating a sense of mutual belonging, and to respond to external goals, which refer to the existing public debate about migration and the associated political struggles.

4.2 – Introduction

This chapter provides a narrative analysis of the life histories collected, which are here conceptualized as political biographies. In particular, the focus is on those parts of past histories selected by respondents and organized into significant building blocks for political storylines. The analysis opens with a short descriptive picture of the sample of respondents in terms of their socio-demographic characteristics to show their considerable diversity. This

introductory description of the data reconstructs the heterogeneous groups that fall under the category of migrant. Subsequently, the analysis moves on to consider the narrative forms adopted by respondents in their life histories. In this section, the focus is not exclusively on the content of the life experiences but, rather, on the ways in which the content is presented narratively. This can take various forms, for example, watersheds, continuities and simultaneity across space, which are relevant for understanding what parts of their past histories the participants select as significant and how they are related to present forms of activism. In particular, biographical accounts allow us to focus on temporalities that extend beyond the moment of migration alone and are based on data that reveal a multiplicity of past histories and life stories that are significant in the reconstruction of political trajectories. Stories of family, communities and past political experiences are the basis on which respondents' political biographies are built, indicating how the triggers for mobilization go beyond the experience of migration and the domain of activism alone. The analysis of trajectories looks into the triggers and changing moments, and the forms of continuity stressing how political biographies are grounded on both emotional ruptures and the search for a sense of familiarity. Scholars of social movements have often emphasized the role of transformative moments in biographical trajectories, in which emotional and cognitive patterns undergo sudden and abrupt changes, concepts like moral shocks and cognitive liberation provide an example in this respect (Jasper and Poulsen 1995; Jasper 1997; McAdam 1982). This analysis emphasizes how the search for a sense of familiarity and belonging plays a role that is just as important in trajectories of political engagement, especially in periods of latency or lower mobilization. A second key element that is addressed in this chapter is the question of political socialization across a variety of different geographical, social and political contexts. Through the narrative analysis the question of how these waves of re-socialization affect the forms and timing of mobilization is addressed. Interestingly enough, both migration and participation in collective action have been singled out as sites of resocialization, however, the two have not been considered together.

4.3 – Conceptualizing life accounts as political biographies

Scholars of social movements who have engaged in the study of migrants' collective action have generally privileged the spatial over the temporal dimension of this phenomenon (Nicholls 2011; Nicholls and Uitermark 2017; Steinhilper 2021). Scholars have addressed space in the forms of spatial ruptures, reconfiguration of borders and urban settings and used these as focal points for the understanding of migrants' collective action, while paying limited attention to time. This has resulted in a reduced capacity to understand these phenomena in processual terms. One way in which this study focuses on a temporal exploration of migrants' collective action is by utilizing biographical accounts, collected through life history interviews.

Although they are not new to Social movement studies, the exploration of biographical data in the form of life histories remain quite marginal in the study of collective action (Jasper 1997; Viterna 2013; Fillieule and Neveu 2018). The micro-level of mobilization has been more often studied via statistical studies, using large survey and aggregated data, lacking a qualitative exploration of the processes, reasons, and trajectories of mobilization (Giugni 2009). Jocelyn Viterna notes how "to date, micro-level processes of mobilization have received little attention in the social movement literature" and insists that "paying greater attention to micro-level processes allows scholars to investigate variations in activist experiences. It also improves our ability to answer such central questions as why movements begin, how they endure, and whether they matter for individual participants and the societies in which they are embedded" (Viterna 2013: 215). Biographical data have been a key factor in understanding paths towards mobilization and recruitment, with special attention being paid to forms of high-risk activism (McAdam 1988; della Porta 1995; Viterna 2013). Scholars have also used biographical data to explore trajectories of demobilization and the consequences of participation (Fillieule 2010; Fillieule and Neveu 2018; Giugni 2004, 2008; McAdam 1989). Moreover, relying on biographical accounts, James Jasper explores the personal motivations and reasons for mobilizations, as well as the benefits and pleasure of participation, insisting that micro-level studies need to move beyond traditions that reduce participation to either individualistic self-interest or collective anger and frustration (Jasper 1997: 214). Studies deploying biographical data tend to provide detailed and rich understandings of social reality, in which multiple levels of analysis intertwine; in line with this, Javier Auyero elaborates a multi-dimensional analysis to shed light on the continuities in everyday life, local histories of protest and contentious action (Auyero 2004).

In an attempt to understand why the micro-level has been discarded for so long within social movement studies, Fillieule lists a number of reasons, among which he cites "the difficulty of moving from static approaches to a true processual perspective" (2018: 2). A key factor in processual approaches is the appreciation that social phenomena are the result of long-term tendencies and emerge within spatial *and* temporal coordinates. Biographical data can help to explore this viewpoint. In particular, biographical data are especially useful for investigating the temporal dimension of social phenomena, introducing time-informed accounts and a focus on temporalities into social research. In other words, biographical accounts involve both objective and subjective understandings of time. Daniel Bertaux, one of the main scholars who has revived the study of biographical data within the social sciences since the early 1980s, emphasizes how life stories, however subjective, can provide a detailed report of occurrences, which according to his ethno-sociological approach, can be used for thick sociological descriptions (Bertaux 2003). As many scholarly works show, biographical data do not simply consist of a person's life span but, rather, give access to information on community, family and other relevant social groups (Lewis 1961, 1966; Bertaux 1981; Bertaux and Thompson 1997).

Other approaches to the study of biographical data have emphasized the subjective side of biographies, dwelling on their narrative character and its close link to time and temporality. In this regard, Alessandro Portelli writes how "oral sources are narrative sources. For this reason, their analysis cannot do without the general categories of literary analysis [analisi del racconto]" (Portelli 2017: 9, author's translation). Echoing Paul Ricœur's masterpiece *Time and Narrative* (1984–1988), Francesca Polletta (1998: 139) notes how the distinctive character of narratives stems precisely from their temporally configurative capacity. Indeed, the specific relationship that exists between narrative and temporality is precisely what drove some scholars to highlight the relevance of narratives for the study of collective action (Davis 2002; Polletta 2006). It was seen as a way to complement other conceptual tools, such as frames, criticized for their all too cognitive focus and presentism. An understanding of biographical accounts primarily as narratives shifts attention from objective time to human time. As Ricœur writes, "the world unfolded by every narrative work is always a temporal world. […] time becomes human time to the extent that it is organized after the manner of narrative; narrative, in turn, is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal experience" (1984: 3). The analysis presented below

focuses largely on the latter type of time, namely, human time and the temporalities associated with it.

Starting from the micro-level of respondents, the analysis retraces their political trajectories and the role being a migrant plays in such paths. Accordingly, the life histories collected are conceptualized as political biographies, that is, specific types of life narratives that follow trajectories to present forms of activism by selecting and organizing past occurrences and signifying them as political. The choice of the term "biographies" refers to the consideration of a wider time span and a plurality of spheres of life other than those strictly related to migration. Indeed, the focus on lifetime trajectories is intended to understand migrants' participation in collective action as a process characterized by temporal depth, contrary to approaches that focus exclusively on the present moment of mobilization. Moreover, this aligns with methodological reflections elaborated within and beyond the field of oral history which conceive the use of biographical sources and life histories as grounded in "the belief that history is made up of ordinary people [...] the conviction that ordinary people have a sophisticated understanding of the world around them, and that this understanding motivates their actions" (della Porta 2014b: 267-268). In turn, the term "political" indicates that the accounts collected are not treated as fully fledged chronological reports of people's lives but, rather, focus on specific traits, events or spheres of life that are selected as relevant by respondents for reconstructing their political storylines up to their activism in the present. This choice aligns with the scholarly works that break with the idea of political agency as reducible to traditional forms of organized political activism and, instead, look at the politics of everyday life as key to gain rich and complex insights on migrants' agency (Bayat 2009; Goldstein 2021).

Scholarly works on political socialization are particularly useful for the analysis of political biographies. In time, scholars of political socialization distanced themselves from the idea that primary socialization explains people's political behaviour deterministically, and proposed alternative approaches that place greater emphasis on the process of socialization during adulthood. It is in this context that more interest in political socialization and social movements emerged (Sapiro 1994). Scholars started interpreting political socialization as a multi-stage process: on the one hand, political trajectories are thought of as the result of structural and long-term tendencies interlaced with both organizations and networks at the meso-level and individual resources and motivations at the micro-level; on

the other hand, the gradual drifting away from monodirectional understandings of political socialization has forced scholars to consider experiences in adulthood as having a socializing effect, rather than being mere products of previous socialization.

In this regard, the lifelong openness model of political socialization (Sigel 1989; Sapiro 1994) is ground-breaking, introducing the idea that certain occurrences in adulthood generate discontinuities that have a socializing effect on individuals' lives. In this regard, Roberta Sigel writes that "experiences during adulthood play a crucial part in this building process precisely because adults are exposed in the course of their lives to many different and often unanticipated political experiences" (1989: x). Based on the idea that primary socialization cannot prepare individuals for all the unexpected occurrences of adulthood, political socialization is then described as "an interactive process by which persons are influenced by their environment and in turn influence the latter" (1989: ix).

Interestingly enough, in the work edited by Roberta Sigel, although migration and participation in social movements are listed in the same section of the book because they are both phenomena that "make demands for resocialization on those who are caught up in them" (1989: 265), they are examined separately. However, in this study, we try to consider the two together, with the aim of understanding how these resocializing experiences influence one another and are made sense of in the biographical accounts of respondents.

Olivier Fillieule proposes an approach grounded in symbolic interactionism for the exploration of political trajectories (2010). Importantly, this insists on the idea of political socialization as a process and on an understanding of movements as socializing agents. In this framework, he articulates the notion of activist careers being helpful in understanding how "at each biographical stage, the attitudes and behaviors of activists are determined by past attitudes and behaviors, which in turn condition the range of future possibilities, thus resituating commitment across the entire life cycle" (Fillieule 2013: 3, 2010). The analysis proposed here engages with Fillieule's processual approach to political socialization. Fillieule's work, however, focus largely on the concept of activists' careers, centering the analysis on the experience of fully fledged activists who would define themselves as such per se. In the analysis below, I try to include and conceptualize more volatile types of engagement, which have rarely been at the centre of scholars' attention, and generally remain an open question that this work will hopefully contribute to answering.

The analysis, then, is aimed at shedding light on how experiences of resocialization throughout life have an impact on political trajectories, in particular, how being a migrant and participation in collective action intertwine. Narratives give access to the shifts in meaning, beliefs and value orientation that trigger participation, as well as to the continuities in different past histories, for example, in relation to family, community, mobilization and work, that convey the multiplicity of experiences on which political activism relies.

4.4 – Heterogeneity in migration: a descriptive analysis

The analysis of political biographies draws on a series of life history interviews conducted between January 2020 and January 2022. The purpose of Table 3 is to visualize a summarized list of information collected at the interviews in order to provide a picture of the considerable heterogeneity of the sample.

Table 3. List of life history interviews

Place	Number	Sex	Country of origin	Direct experience of migration*	Years since migration	Previous political experience **	Groups of belonging
Naples	I-1	male	Sri Lanka	yes (adult)	11	no	MMRN/ JVP
	I-2	male	Ivory Coast	yes (young adult)	3	yes	MMRN
	I-3	male	Mauritania	yes (adult)	2.5	yes	MMRN
	I-4	male	Senegal	yes (young adult)	11	no	MMRN/ DEMA
Rome	I-5	female	Peru	yes (young adult)	12	yes (Italy)	RDMF
	I-6	female	Peru	yes (as a child)	15	no	RDMF
	I-7	female	Italy/Eritrea	no (born in Italy)	–	yes (Italy)	RDMF
	I-8	female	Italy/Albania	no (born in Italy)	–	no	RDMF
	I-9	female	El Salvador	yes (adult)	3	no	RDMF
	I-10	female	Mexico	yes (adult)	2	yes	RDMF
	I-11	male	Senegal	yes (young adult)	32	yes	CMB

Bologna	I-12	male	Senegal	yes (young adult)	30	yes	CMB
	I-13	female	Senegal	yes (as a child)	20	no	CMB
	I-14	female	Moldova	yes (young adult)	20	yes (Italy)	CMB
	I-15	female	Turkey	yes (university student)	10	no	CMB
Life histories conducted with bystanders or during the mapping phase							
Milan	I-16	female	Rojava	yes	N.A.	yes	CUB
Bologna	I-17	male	Italy/Ivory Coast	no (born in Italy)	–	yes	La casa del mondo
Bologna	I-18	intersex	Libya	yes (adult)	6	yes	MIT/CMB in the past

MMRN: *Movimento Migranti e Rifugiati Napoli*; JVP: *Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna* (People's Liberation Front, Party, Sri Lanka); DEMA: *Democrazia e Autonomia* (Democracy and Autonomy, Party, Italy); RDMF: *Rete di Donne Migranti e Figlie*; CMB: *Coordinamento Migranti Bologna*; CUB: *Confederazione Unitaria di Base* (Base Unitary Conferedation, Union, Italy); MIT: *Movimento Identità Trans* (Trans Identity Movement, Italy).
*Direct experience of migration: the interviewee has migrated to Italy during his/her lifecourse, as opposed to an experience of migration mediated through the family (children of migrants).
**Previous political experience: refers to any previous political experience either in the country of origin or in Italy.

This section anticipates the narrative analysis that follows and aims to present the types of heterogeneity displayed by the respondents. Vertovec (2007) is among the first scholars to have emphasized the incredible diversity of migration because this relates to far more than just the country of origin/nationality. Below, I briefly discuss a number of types of heterogeneity relevant to the political biographies collected.

First, as the table shows, there is considerable **heterogeneity in terms of origin**, with respondents from 4 continents (Africa, Asia, Europe and Central and South America) and 13 different countries. However, although the geographical background is diverse, there are clusters of states that share some commonalities in terms of political traditions, and these can represent connecting lines for political engagement in the present. For instance, it is often the case that respondents from the Indian subcontinent and countries in West Africa refer back to Third World communist traditions. In line with Third Worldism, anti-colonial values are shared by respondents who are originally from former Italian and French colonies. Respondents who are originally from Central and South American states often mention indigenous struggles, as well as the Zapatista movement and, more broadly, the anti-colonial ideals at which these struggles hint. Thus, anti-colonial ideals provide common ground for discussion and mutual recognition among people who come from very different

parts of the world. Other respondents refer to recent or present-day struggles, for example, interviewees from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region refer to the Arab uprisings, because they themselves were involved in the revolutions that have taken place in their countries in recent years. Similarly, Kurdish respondents relate to the long-lasting Kurdish struggle and the more recent experience of the Rojava constitution. Finally, respondents from Latin America refer to the feminist movement Ni Una Menos, which spread from Argentina to several Central and South American countries, reaching Europe at a later date. Although the origin of the respondents is undeniably heterogeneous, some common threads can be traced at the political level. In fact, some of the similarities found in terms of political processes, values, struggles and movements provide respondents with a number of shared elements on which struggles in the present are based.

Second, differences in sex and gender construction across different social contexts are relevant for the ways in which migration itself is experienced. As listed in the table above, respondents from two of the groups considered are homogeneous in terms of sex, but for different reasons. The MMRN is mixed in composition, and over time has seen an increase in the participation of women and other minority groups. However, when the interviews were conducted, the male component still dominated. On the contrary, in the case of the RDMF, the separatist nature of the group explains the internal homogeneity of respondents along the lines of sex. Sex, and its associated gender constructions have been variously emphasized as relevant variables in determining the forms and experiences of migration. Among other things, it is certainly relevant in terms of employability; for instance, most of the women interviewed are care workers, and a few work in the logistics sector. On the other hand, men mostly work in the logistics sector and in catering businesses. Another relevant aspect of heterogeneity across the sex divide is concerned with migration governance: residence permits, in particular in cases of families being reunited, are associated with the male part of the family (husband, father), generating an intra-family hierarchy in terms of dependence and access to rights.

The third type of heterogeneity is concerned with whether respondents have previous political experience and compares respondents who do have past political experience with those who only started mobilizing in Italy. There is quite a sharp distinction here between respondents who participated in political activities in their countries of origin and those with no previous political experience. The former started mobilizing in Italy almost

immediately after their arrival. On the contrary, the latter did not generally participate in political activities for two or three years after their arrival.

The fourth type of heterogeneity is the **difference in migration waves**. Broadly speaking, the sample includes three main waves of migration: some respondents arrived during the late 1980s and early 1990s wave from West African countries; the arrival of others corresponds to the so-called *sanatoria* 2009 (regularization law 102/2009); and finally, the latest wave includes interviewees who arrived in Italy from 2015 onwards. Overall, the time difference between the first and the last wave of migration is more than 30 years. Throughout the last three decades, regulations with regard to migration have changed both at the European and the national level[1], and regimes of migration governance have been transformed. Along with this, the types of challenges encountered by newcomers and long-term migrants have also changed.

The fifth type of heterogeneity is the experience of migration. The majority of respondents had direct experience of **migration as young adults**, whereas the rest experienced migration through their family history or as young children. For the former, migration represents a turning point in their young adult lives, whereas for the latter, secondary socialization took place for the most part in Italy. As a consequence, for those respondents who migrated during childhood or are children of migrants, the experience of migration and the culture of origin are mediated by family and community members.

The final type of heterogeneity considered here is the **languages** spoken by respondents. Although most respondents are multi-lingual, the different European languages they speak (French, English, Spanish, alongside Italian), despite being a colonial legacy, constitute a unifying factor that is often used for communicating at the political level.

1 With regard to the national legislation, the Foschi Law (no. 943/1986) was the first to regulate immigration in Italy. The Martelli Law (no. 39/1990) laid the foundations for the current legislation, introducing on the one hand an estimating device based on the needs of the internal market, and on the other a repressive device, regulating the procedure for expulsions. The Puglia Law (no. 563/1995) introduced and regulated the first reception centres, and the Turco-Napolitano Law along with the Testo Unico (no. 40/1998) consolidated the existing legislation on immigration, including introducing a more refined system of Flow Decrees and establishing administrative detention centres. The Bossi–Fini Law (no. 189/2002) regulated immigration in an even more restrictive fashion. Among other things, it introduced the so called "contratto di soggiorno" (residence contract), de facto outsourcing the power to grant residence permits and, ultimately, the right to citizenship, to employers. Subsequently, the legislation developed along two lines: the implementation of various EU Directives relating to repatriation, reception, residence and circulation; and restrictive decrees on matters of public security. These were implemented under the Ministers of Interior Maroni (Law 125/2008; D. Lgs. 160/2008; Law 94/2009) and Salvini (Dl. 113/2018, subsequently modified by Law 132/18, and Dl. 53/2019, subsequently modified by Law 77/2019). The security decrees issued during Salvini's ministry that abolished Humanitarian protection and dismantled the Sprar system (reception system for refugees), were partially modified by Law 173/2020 (Minister of Interior Lamorgese).
As well as the national legislation on the matter, there is the EU legislation on migration (see: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/it/sheet/152/politica-di-immigrazione) and the Dublin Regulation on asylum (see: https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/common-european-asylum-system/country-responsible-asylum-application-dublin-regulation_en and https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/pages/glossary/dublin-convention_en).

Far from being exhaustive, the types of differences presented above are just some of the most relevant for political activism, and are briefly outlined to show the many different ways in which migration is experienced. The descriptive presentation of the data is intended to highlight the heterogeneity that lies behind the category of "migrant". As will be discussed in the section below, the different ways of experiencing migration have an impact on the political trajectories of respondents.

4.5 – Form and content: a narrative analysis

Although migration is certainly a turning point in the biographical trajectories of respondents, the experience of migration itself can vary greatly depending on a number of different factors, some of which have been discussed above. However, the extent to which being a migrant plays a role in the political trajectories of respondents remains to be seen. Drawing on a narrative analysis, this section addresses the question of how respondents make sense of their engagement in grassroots politics as migrants, whether being a migrant plays a central role in their political trajectories and what other occurrences, spheres of life, social groups and spaces act as triggers for mobilization. As anticipated above, narratives have a temporally configurative capacity, which Ricœur refers to as the plot, by means of which "goals, causes, and chance are brought together within the temporal unit of a whole and complete action". (1984: ix). In this sense, understanding narratives entails "grasping the operation that unifies into one whole and complete action the miscellany constituted by circumstances, ends and means, initiatives and interactions, the reversals of fortune, and all the unintended consequences issuing from human action" (Ricœur 1984: x).

To provide an understanding of political biographies, this analysis considers both what contributes to narratives and what the narratives themselves signify, and looks at the relationship between the content of the biographies and the specific temporal configurations they take. Although the content can be quite varied and includes migration, family, community, spaces and other occurrences in people's lives, the forms of temporal configurations are fewer in number (Zerubavel 2003). In particular, in this analysis, the temporal configurations considered are limited to the three main types (not the only ones) detected in the data collected: watersheds; continuities; and simultaneity across space. By analysing the content and form of narratives together, these biographical accounts are

understood as both the available past histories of respondents and the result of the configurative efforts they make to select and organize parts of those past histories into a narrative form that is political. Finally, by exploring the meaning of "political" as a term assigned by migrants to their own life accounts, it is possible to look into the process of political subjectivation and how it affects migrants and others. As the analysis intends to show, the process that enables respondents to move towards political participation, rather than being a movement that catapults its protagonists into the future struggle for social change, is bound to a retrospective re-elaboration of their own past histories.

4.5.1 – Watershed

To explore the watersheds in political biographies entails looking at what occurrences act as turning points in political trajectories, and following on from this, what changes in meaning, perception and interpretation they produce for respondents. In this vein, it is necessary to understand what occurrences in or spheres of people's lives are regarded as transformative and likely to lead to redefinitions of reality and shifts in value orientation, providing the motivation and triggers for mobilization. Watersheds are presented as game changing events, often associated with strong emotional responses. Phrases such as, "from that moment, everything changed" illustrate admirably the idea of a timeline that is abruptly interrupted by a certain occurrence causing a rupture. Watersheds in the political biographies analysed correspond with very varied contexts and very different spheres of people's lives. Indeed, ruptures are singled out in domains as varied as the workplace, the movement milieu, the family, the community of origin, the broader society and, interestingly enough, hardly ever migration.

In the quote below, a respondent (I-14) recalls one occurrence at her **workplace** that preceded her decision to start mobilizing in connection with her labour rights:

> I'll always remember that years before our struggle, in my second year working at [she says the name of the company she works for in a logistics warehouse in Bologna's freight centre], a mother came back from maternity leave, and she was the only one who was brave enough to go up and talk to our boss and she said "Don't you know that I've got a right to work for six hours and get paid for two hours for breastfeeding?" We haven't seen her since, in the warehouse [silence]. (I-14)

In some cases, these ruptures align with periods of intense mobilization, which trigger a sense of involvement in bystanders. This was the case with M. (I-13), who started mobilizing during the Black Lives Matter protests in Bologna. In this instance, we noted how a long-term tendency was suddenly interrupted by a given circumstance. This does not imply that change actually happens all of a sudden, but rather that a quite ordinary event (for example, a speech in a public place during a demonstration) is charged with a transformative power:

For a long part of my life, I tried to be the least intimidating, I tried to avoid confrontations […] I tried very hard not to be that person who physically takes to the streets and shouts in public squares […]. And then I think it was both the call for mobilization of BLM [Black Lives Matter] for George Floyd and something changing within myself. I threw away my mask, I told myself that people would always see me the way they want, that I would never be good enough, that people who saw me as a threat would continue to perceive me as such, and that all things considered it was worth doing the right thing. I didn't want to turn back at some point and say "I was on the wrong side". […] I was in the square, I remember listening to this speech by A., one of our comrades, her story got stuck with me. (I-13)

Interestingly enough, the same respondent indicates how her decision to start mobilizing resulted in a significant break with her family and her community of origin. For her, the two merge into one another. In particular, she ignores her father's – and by extension her community's – instruction to keep her head down in the face of injustices she suffered.

As a child, if we were in public and I spoke too loudly, my father used to shut me up, otherwise people would say that they [Senegalese migrants] were unable to educate their children. He pushed me not to behave "like a black": black people don't read, so read a lot, they aren't good in school, so study a lot, don't say what you think even if that person was doing you wrong […] This happens all the time in our community, which is always trying to avoid any type of problem. (I-13)

As can be seen from the examples above, breaking points in the narration are often simultaneously associated with multiple emotional responses. On the one hand, outrage and other moral responses to a given situation recall what Jasper and Poulsen refer to as moral shock (Jasper and Poulsen 1995; Jasper 1997; McAdam 1982). On the other hand, breaking points are also related to feelings of inspiration and trust, facilitating the construction of solidarity bonds, but also generating breaks with previous groups of

belonging. It is often the case that watersheds transform everyday life occurrences into extraordinary moments; in other words, the ruptures they produce allow respondents to look at the surrounding reality, their past histories and their closest ties with new eyes. In a sense, watersheds hold a political charge in that they produce a shift in the mindset of respondents, who reread their trajectories with a political gaze.

In line with the previous example, E. (I-6) refers to the story of her political activism as a long matrilinear one, punctuated by various watersheds that were a result of choices her female family members made in the past. The story of her political activism goes a long way back in her family history. The respondent recalls the story of her great-grandfather, an important Peruvian shaman, who used his gift selfishly, as opposed to various female members of her family who taught her to use any gift she might have for the good of others. Similarly, at a later stage in her storyline, she mentions that her mother was a source of inspiration in that she took the decision to separate from the rest of the family and her husband and become an independent person. Thus, the respondent's choice to participate in political activity stems both from the continuity with her matrilineal past and the break with the patrilineal side of the family:

> My mother has always been the black sheep in the family […] she fought back against her family, which is very conservative on both sides. […] And so it is for me, even though I come from a very traditionalist family, I was lucky enough that my mother was passionate about reading, and so secretly, since he [the respondent's father] is a truck driver and used to stay away from home for months, she grabbed books and read and read about everything. (I-6)

On the one hand, the examples provided above of collective and community stories, which include multi-layered stories, show how watersheds can be located at the intersection of singular and collective experiences and, thus, extend temporal experiences on a vertical scale. On the other hand, watersheds that are regarded as part and parcel of respondents' political trajectories can punctuate people's lives; thus, stories that precede respondents' lifespans are considered just as relevant, and extend the timescale considered horizontally (Portelli 1991: 21).

Another sphere that is often referred to in relation to watersheds in the political biographies is the movement milieu. Several respondents mention the at times contradictory relationship with the broader movement milieu. In the case of respondents from the RDMF,

this contradiction goes so far as to represent a watershed, conducive to the formation of the group itself. One respondent (I-5) recalls how she felt the necessity to self-organize as a result of a transformative moment during a meeting with other Italian feminists. She highlights the fact that before the moment in question, she hardly ever spoke during meetings. However, from that moment on, she promised herself that she would take action to voice her own and other migrants' concerns:

> Once, during one of those meetings, they were asking themselves how come none of the migrant women they had invited had shown up […] at that time the RDMF [Rete di Donne Migranti e Figlie] didn't exist. And one goes like "well, we've invited them, our space is open" and she said it in such a way […] just like saying "well if they don't come, it's because they don't want to". And then I stood up, I wasn't even marked on the intervention list, and I said in one go: "I'll be very short, let me just ask you a question, have you ever done anything for migrant women to actually be here?" and silence fell and many people said no with their heads. (I-5)

This turning point led to the constitution of a new group in which the lived experiences of migrants and the children of migrants were privileged. In this sense, she continues: "the discourse around migration is not a theme to discuss during the plenary, for us it is everyday" (I-5).

However, migration plays a quite peculiar role in relation to political trajectories. In fact, only rarely is the personal experience of migration mentioned as the catalyst for political activism. This is all the more relevant if we consider that the majority of interviewees mobilize collectively as "migrants". An interesting exception in this regard is provided by a respondent who has experienced migration indirectly through family members. In her account, the emphasis is on the constant misrecognition that both migrants and children of migrants experience at the socio-political level. This misrecognition, sustained by state institutions, turns migration into a political experience that is reclaimed for the struggle:

> Some of us are not even migrants, we are daughters of migrants who, however, live under blackmail. I'm talking about the blackmail that the Italian state puts in place since we were born. Take me, for instance, even if I was born here, I had a residence permit up until my 18th birthday in which the Ministry of Interior declared that I migrated the same day that I was born. As if the *questura* [police headquarters] of Rome was in the delivery room. […] So I call this struggle migrant and I include myself in it. (I-7)

The watershed here corresponds to the date of birth, the point at which she is labelled as a migrant. The image of the police headquarters being in the delivery room is particularly effective in portraying what Sayad refers to as the arbitrary "act of magic" according to which the state decides between naturalization and exclusion from the body politic (Avallone and Torre 2013: 60). Such an externally assigned label is reclaimed by this respondent for the sake of the struggle. Therefore, in this case, the term migrant works as a lens through which both the personal and political trajectories are interpreted and merged.

In the majority of cases, migration is accounted for as being a watershed in respondents' lives, but this is hardly ever related to the choice of engaging in collective action. In fact, the moment of migration itself and the period of time around migration are generally described as extremely difficult, often associated with material strains and traumatic experiences. Some respondents emphasize the need to perform the role of the "good migrant" in the early stages after migrating, others stress the traumatic character of their migration experience and yet others recall the extremely precarious material conditions, also associated with instability and fear, that they lived under in the early days of being a migrant.

When I first arrived I was the classic migrant who has to save money, I was a caregiver, then a cleaning lady, that's what I did. The first couple of years I mostly just played the good migrant, that's how I call it, paying taxes, showing your status, being pleasant, and being a slave, and grateful to be one, cooperating, contributing to the stereotype, the collective image that Europe assigns to us. (I-5)

I arrived in Milan in the summer. It felt very weird, I found myself in a new country, but really my body was here and my mind, my brain was behind, still dealing with all that had been going on at home. […] I asked myself: where do I go now? This thing that I have done [migrating] is too difficult, I started crying in a park in Milan, I missed my family. (I-9)

For the first couple of years I couldn't participate in politics, I wasn't used to the country, I wasn't very stable, I had to find a job.(I-1)

During the first years we slept at the station, platform 12, where the trains stopped at the buffers, to shower there were these places in Piazza Maggiore were we could go, pay, and shower. The first few years have been very tough. (I-11)

When I first arrived my uncle introduced me to my work as street vendor: for the first time I was afraid of everyone, and I wasn't a child, I was over 20. But I was afraid because I didn't know what […] I came from Senegal, the first year they brought me to the seaside, on the beach there were only white people, I remember how I trembled at first, for the first few days I couldn't approach anyone. It was like that for the first phase. (I-4)

What emerges from these quotes is how the biographical availability of respondents is reduced in the early period after migration, and with it the likelihood of them participating in collective action (McAdam 1986). However, this applies in particular to those respondents with no previous political experience. Interestingly, respondents with previous political experience started mobilizing almost immediately after their arrival: this remarkable difference is explored in the following section on continuity.

To conclude, watersheds are a type of time configuration that is used in the narrative reconstruction of political biographies to emphasize those occurrences that provide a trigger for participation and, thus, shed light on emotional turns and motivations. Drawing on the data collected, the analysis shows how watersheds that are relevant to respondents political trajectories go beyond the political and militant domains, and encompass numerous spheres of life and social groups. One of the key points that emerge from the analysis of watersheds is how the experience of migration itself does not seem to provide a trigger for mobilization. Indeed, while respondents tend to identify migration as a turning point in their life, they do not regard it as an enabling experience in itself nor do they associate it with the choice of mobilizing. The following section delves into continuities in the narration. In this regard, Portelli writes:

The dilemma between rupture and continuity does not apply exclusively to the institutional level; in a way, it is the structure of memory itself that needs changes and ruptures to account for the passing of time, but also osmotic longterm mutations and permanences that secure the unity of the subject who remembers. (Portelli 2017: 200, author's translation)

4.5.2 – Continuity

Continuity is a type of time configuration that can be retrieved from the narratives analysed in all those occurrences that are presented as the natural continuation of what existed

before or was done in the past. Sentences such as, “I used to do a certain thing and I still do” or “this is exactly the same as happened back in my home country” are recurrent forms of expressing continuity across a different geographical, social and political space. In the data collected, continuities can be singled out as those narrative configurations that promote an understanding of past and present as almost naturally connected to one another. Here again, the spheres of life from which people draw continuities that lead to their political engagement are multiple in number and varied in content. However, if watersheds emphasize triggers and motivations stemming from an abrupt change and the shifts in meaning that anticipate action, continuities are at least as important in showing how the decision to engage is not just the result of a break with the past. Previous socialization, skills transfer and past experiences that respondents bring with them, which are often associated with a sense of familiarity and belonging, are expressed in forms of continuity. Continuities, then, highlight the connections with the past and convey the attempt of respondents to build a coherent and cohesive self-narration. This analytical lens is especially important for investigating migrants’ collective action, because it helps to extend the temporal span being considered beyond the eternal present in which migrants often find themselves.

As mentioned above, migrants who participated in political activities in their countries of origin, generally started mobilizing shortly after their arrival. Thus, it appears that biographical availability has an impact on political trajectories, and in this sense, sequential approaches to participation are better able to account for the differences found (Klandermans and Oegema 1987; Beyerlein and Hipp 2006; Ward 2016). Beyerlein and Hipp (2006) note how biographical unavailability does not always prevent participation. To solve this dilemma, they model a two-stage mobilization process that accounts for different degrees of proximity to actual participation. They show how biographical unavailability has a strong effect on the first stage of mobilization – involvement of potential participants from zero – and less so in the case of actors who are already willing to protest, namely, the second stage of mobilization. In other words, individuals who are already committed to participation in social movements are likely to participate even in the case of biographical unavailability. Similarly, in the data collected, the decision to start mobilizing is framed as a continuation with the past. However, respondents emphasize their search for a sense of belonging that the movement milieu is able to provide, and regard it as more than just a

commitment to a cause. In fact, for those who were active in the past, movement groups can immediately deliver a sense of familiarity, which is potent enough to push people to engage notwithstanding (or precisely because of) the precarious material conditions they are experiencing. Some respondents highlight the similarity in ideologies to previous groups, and mention former related kinds of mobilization and strategic choices:

I get on well with the ex-OPG [a former ospedale psichiatrico giudiziario, that is, a mental asylum for criminal offenders, now a revolutionary social centre], because they do just like we did, the same ideas to get a party back, a movement, left-wing, communist if we want to be clear. In Mauritania I had the same idea, because our communist party was very strong in the 60s and 70s. But with time many militants started changing their minds and became *sinistra light* [moderate left], we could say. My young comrades and I tried to build a new party, communist for real. The ex-OPG is working on the same thing, has the same way of mobilizing, of struggling. (I-3)

Similarly, another respondent from Bologna, who arrived in Italy in 1992, describes his almost immediate decision to participate actively in the General Italian Confederation of Labour (CGIL) trade union, a decision that was triggered by problems in the workplace and eased by connections and geographical closeness to the local CGIL headquarters:

"After arriving in 1992, how long did it take you to get in touch with the trade union?"

I got in touch with the CGIL [General Italian Confederation of Labour trade union] immediately, because I recognized the things that were going on [in his workplace], and I lived nearby, I knew Roberto Morgantini who, at the time, was responsible for the immigration office in Bologna, inside the CGIL. (I-12)

Other respondents frame their decision to return to political engagement as a matter of personality, leading to an almost inevitable life of struggle:

Ever since I started the struggle I always struggled for the wellbeing of everyone. When faced with an injustice, I would never shut up. I always tried to organize the people who were affected by that injustice. […] The struggles that I did before coming to Italy helped me understand many things. If you shut up, it's hard to get any results. When I arrived here I said to myself, well I thought I had overcome all this […] but here the same things were going on, so I think it's my destiny to do this [struggle]. (I-2)

Another respondent, who describes his participation in the Movimento Identità Trans (Trans Identity Movement), emphasizes the commonality of his lived experience with those of the trans subjectivities that were associated with the group's first generation:

So I got in, I'm part of this story, I'm talking about the MIT [Trans Identity Movement] in particular, I found myself at home, I found myself at home because out stories are intertwined, especially with those of the old generation, who lived the street, and embodied violence […] Those generations have lived, more or less, in different times and spaces, what trans people still experience in the rest of the world. Obviously, I'm not saying that trans people nowadays don't experience discriminations, but it's different, I'm talking about being stopped, filed, arrested, this type of violence. (I-18)

Undoubtedly, continuities and ties with past political experiences are built on different reasons, including values and beliefs, lived experiences and personality traits. Ultimately, however, the common thread in all of these examples is the pursuit of **familiarity**, of a social network that can be related to one's own experiences of the past. The decision to engage immediately in a movement's activities in a new context is connected to the movement milieu's capacity to provide recognition, a sense of belonging and a space in which respondents with a trajectory of activism can confidently share their skills and knowledge. Moreover, this type of continuity resonates with the existing literature on the biographical consequences of mobilization. Along these lines, the decision to mobilize across a different socio-political context can be interpreted as a consequence of previous mobilizations in the country of origin (Bosi, Giugni and Uba 2016).

In the case presented above, the configuration of continuity is a line that moves from the past towards the present. However, another type of continuity line runs in the opposite direction, linking the present decision to activate with the past in a backward-looking move. This is especially true in the case of respondents who did not participate in collective action in their countries of origin. Their decision to engage is not presented solely in terms of a break with the past, but also as a result of continuities, which, however, are constructed ex-post, retracing connections that link the present to the past. In this way, political engagement works as a lens through which it is possible to reinterpret life occurrences, personality traits and family and friendship ties as political. At times, this political attribution is quasi-teleological in giving certain past histories a finalistic character, and in treating the present as the principle around which the whole account revolves. One example of this is

provided by a respondent who frames his whole story of migration and political activism as an inevitable reaction to the incoherence and injustice of the Western world:

> The West found me in my village, in my home. He said, "You boy, who knows nothing, you have to go to my school for me to teach you something." "What do you teach me?" The values, you tell me we're equals, we're humans, we're clever, you teach me democracy, freedom, philosophy, science and all that you want, equality and everything. […] through middle school, high school, university, but at first you found me in my home. Now I come to your home […] and I see very different things. What you taught me at my place, I see all the contrary at yours. How should I feel? And that's why now I have many things to say. (I-4)

Similarly, another respondent retrospectively defines her whole lived experience as ultimately feminist:

> I've come to this conclusion: the struggle goes beyond the terms. What I have lived, my case, is an ongoing struggle. Take feminism, to make an example, I went from struggling in a place full of men at 17, to be treated with respect in certain contexts, violent spaces, to challenging my family and oppose abuses of my cousins against their girlfriends, to coming to Italy. In my opinion, if we consider what we mean by the term feminism, there are a lot of feminist women and we could say they don't know that they are, they don't own this term, and maybe they do a lot more than a feminist who calls herself so. (I-5)

In both these cases, continuity is deployed to emphasize the lived experience of respondents as ultimately political. However, the definition of **political** that emerges is quite detached from the idea of militancy or activism *tout court* that we find in respondents with a longstanding activist trajectory. On the contrary, the understanding of *political* proposed here is inherent in the lives of people who are oppressed. The process of subjectivation results in a reinterpretation of the concept of "political" by embracing a stance that is less relatable to the realm of activism and more attuned to the perspective and needs of those who are directly involved. Moreover, the teleological form of these quotes provides us with a significant insight into the values and beliefs of respondents; in fact, the interpretation of their lives as political constitutes a strong motivation for mobilizing. This resonates with the words of Luisa Passerini: "this is the life that I live, because that's how I told it to myself" (1988: 214).

Other scholars emphasize the dichotomic nature of narratives. Sewell, for example, stresses how narratives bring together a combination of lived life and representative practice (Sewell

1992), and Polletta refers to types of narratives that have the capacity to align actions and identities (Polletta 2006: 12). In other words, people "lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives" (Connelly and Clandinin 1990: 2). In this sense, biographical accounts are turned into political accounts not simply by means of participation, but also through a reorganization of the narrative: scattered events are rearranged around one intelligible scheme, which in this case is political (Ricœur 1984). This constitutes a key point for the migrants' agency explored here. Emirbayer and Mische (1998) refer to agency as analytically located in the flow of time and characterized by both a reproductive and a transformative dimesion. While the authors point out that "the ways in which people understand their own relationship to the past, future and present make a difference to their action" (Emirbayer and Mische 1998: 973), they tend to associate the past to the reproductive dimension of agency, in line with the works of prominent scholars on the role of habitus and routinzed practices (Bourdieu 1977, 1990; Giddens 1979, 1984). I here propose to consider the transformative dimension of agency as related to the past, and in particular to the key process of re-interpretation of the past in ways that legitimize action and open new windows of possibility.

As well as connecting past and present both forward and back as discussed above, continuities are relevant configurations for expressing the transfer of skills and knowledge across contexts. In *The Art of Moral Protest*, Jasper defines activism as a sort of transportable identity carried around by individuals from movement to movement, from group to group (Jasper 1997: 214). In this research, such an articulation of activist identity is especially interesting for the idea of transportability it proposes. As mentioned above, biographies are here conceived of as inherently social accounts at an epistemological level, thus doubting the overly individualistic approach Jasper advances. However, the idea of transportability is particularly useful for touching on another aspect of continuities, that is, the transfer of skills and knowledge. Indeed, continuity as a narrative configuration is often deployed by respondents to refer to all practical and theoretical knowledge they retrieve from their past histories. Thus, skills and knowledge are recovered from past political experiences and the sphere of activism, as well as from other spheres of the participants' lives, such as work, education, family or community. One respondent recalls how he took part in a protest in a reception centre for asylum seekers about the terrible living conditions there. He mentions his past experience in a student union, and how his ability to read the

detail of contracts carefully, helped him realize that the legal standards were not being met and that, consequently, the guests had the right to demand better conditions:

Before signing the reception contract I thoroughly read it. There's not so much of a difference between how I started the struggle in my country and here. Reading the contract, and witnessing what was going on in reality, I realized that the cooperative wasn't respecting the terms. So I said to myself, this thing has already happened to me, I know what to do. […] From there we decided to start a protest to attract the attention of the local Prefettura, which is in charge of controlling the reception centres. (I-2)

The important point to note in this example is how first of all the respondent's knowledge enables him to realize a certain situation is unjust and then provides him with the ability to address it in a practical sense. Similarly, another respondent recalls how she learnt self-organization from the Eritrean diasporic community, which had been active politically in Italy since she was a child. In her account, she stresses the capacity of her community to organize as "one body" and she emphasizes how her participation in that struggle as a child pushed her to try and transfer the same sense of unity to the movements she later took part in:

Look, I certainly have this great luck, from the point of view of the […] let's say now I call it heritage but that's not the word I'd like to use. But certainly a restitution that comes from my reference community. […] the Eritrean community that settled in Italy. I lived how they lived the relationship in the early 1980s, when I was born, and up to now, the relationship with "being a diaspora", and how even within a space that is not their territory they always organized, self-organized, and they always lived in community. Because in those years, when I was born, there was the organization of the Popular Front. So the whole logistics of the Eritrean Popular Front, the struggle for the liberation from imperialism first, and colonialism then, the whole logistics was done in Italy, well everything in Bologna. To the point that in Eritrea children are named "Bologna" but they don't know what the heck […] they never even came to Italy. But Bologna in the Eritrean collective imaginary represents the logistics of the advancement of the Popular Front. So every summer we used to go there, for three months, and there was the political organization […] we gathered with the whole family and we did political activity, just that, political activity, in those three months there were those who organized the food, those who organized a common fund […] There was this thing of feeling as one body, not just in space but also in time, I mean also with regard to the advancement of the struggle in the country. This thing it was my community that gave it to me, the feeling of […] unique body. And so we could say that I myself am a little bit like a carrier [*portatrice sana*] of this when I participate in political spaces. (I-7)

Although in these cases respondents refer to the practical skills of organizing that are the result of past political experiences at the movement or community level, in other instances, the forms of knowledge transferred and shared between participants are related to professional or family backgrounds. One interesting example in this regard comes from somebody who participated in the RDMF. She recalls how her job as a nurse in her country of origin was useful for organizing a workshop on sexually transmitted diseases. It is important to note both that this respondent had no previous political experience and also that having arrived in Italy she was no longer allowed to work as a nurse because her qualifications were not recognized. Thus, her participation works as a form of recognition of her knowledge. The application of her knowledge is presented as a form of continuity with what she used to do in the past:

In my country, I used to train groups of teenagers in the transmission of diseases via sexual intercourse […] I did that because I used to work in the hospital. And so I did here, with the women of our group, and they really liked it, since it's such an important topic. (I-9)

Another example of skills transfer, drawn from a family background, relates to the language difference and the difficulty of mutual understanding. A respondent who migrated as a child recalls how she retrieved her skill to mediate between people with different linguistic backgrounds from the role she had played in her family since childhood. In the literature that focuses on the study of migrant families, it is generally acknowledged that children and adolescents play a role as cultural brokers, assisting their families with linguistic, legal and health matters and cultural problems more broadly (Jones and Trickett 2005; Katz 2014). In her case, these skills, redeveloped as a consequence of migration within the family context, are then transferred and employed during political meetings:

For what concerns the linguistic question, I think that whomever is like me, I mean those of us who have lived here for a long time, or were born here, it is obvious to act as a bridge, translators, because that's what we've been doing since we were children, it's almost something innate in the second and third generations, it's not even your choice […] when you're a kid they tell you "you're better at speaking the language" they place you there and you translate. It becomes a part of who you are. (I-6)

The last two examples show how skills and knowledge can be transferred to a new context by drawing on various parts of past histories, including everyday life experiences in the

family of origin and expertise gained from professional backgrounds. Once again, political trajectories are articulated in relation to spheres of life that both encompass and go beyond the field of activism alone, emphasizing the continuities between everyday life and politics (Auyero 2004).

To conclude, continuities provide a key time configuration for understanding how the political trajectories of migrants, their motivations and the chain of events that led to their engagement can be traced before migration and also beyond the field of activism alone. In particular, this section focuses on the different directions continuity can take – from the past towards the present and vice versa – and discusses how this can help us understand the reasons behind participation and why activism starts when it does. Continuities tend to stress the search for familiarity and the internal coherence of the subject being expressed. On the one hand, this means "doing what was done in the past", and on the other, it involves reconfiguring the narrative of life accounts in ways that emphasize their political character. Finally, continuities can refer to forms of knowledge and skills that have been retrieved from previous fields of activism or other spheres of life and become politically relevant.

4.5.3 – Simultaneity across space

The final time configuration considered in this analysis is simultaneity across space. This narrative form establishes a specific type of connection across different geographical and socio-political contexts, and provides an interpretation of one context through the eyes of the other, and vice versa. Examples of this type of time configuration can be found in the data collected whenever a sort of bifurcation or duplication in the interpretation of a certain occurrence is advanced, for example, "If we were in a different context, things would go differently". Sentences comparable with this constitute an example of the type of narrative form considered here. This simultaneous availability of multiple backgrounds against which to evaluate events and circumstances is connected with the question of adult socialization. In fact, the juxtaposition of two forms of adult socialization, one related to migration and the other to political engagement, generates multiple and simultaneously valid interpretative lenses through which to look at a given context in comparable terms. Thus, simultaneity across space reveals a qualitative difference in the interpretation of social

reality. In other words, it is about the capacity to look at contexts and occurrences in relative terms. In turn, this shapes a different perception of elements such as risk, repression and violence, and has an impact on preferences for alliances and strategic choices. Moreover, it shows how contexts of origin remain key lenses through which a new socio-political milieu is interpreted. This is also true vice versa: participation provides a new perspective from which to understand events in the country of origin. This type of time configuration is facilitated by the transnational connections that characterize migration nowadays (Levitt, 2001; Portes, 2001; Guarnizo et al., 2003; Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004).

At first glance, the higher risks migrants run when participating in collective action should reduce expectations that they will engage. However, as the example below clearly shows, risk perception is not just a matter of rational calculations made in present circumstances, but rather a matter of interpretation and evaluation based on different experiences of the past. One respondent, for example, explains the difference between the risks he ran back in Mauritania, where he would often be taken to jail, and the right to demonstrate that is granted in Italy. For him, this results in a reduced perception of risk:

> Italy is a democratic country where people have the right to speak, demonstrate, they can do whatever they want, except Italians in this period don't want to do anything. We still don't have the freedom to speak, but from time to time we do something. Whenever we organize big demonstrations, they can take people, leaders, to jail. For example, now and then, I was often taken to jail: I was supposed to finish university in four years, it took me seven, because whenever I had an exam I was often in jail. For instance, once I was taken to jail for 10 days, because we organized a demonstration in 2012 against an agreement between Mauritania and China on fishing rights. (I-3)

Several respondents refer to the degree and type of violence they experienced in their countries of origin as unspeakable. In particular, some respondents insist that if articulated, the difference between their experiences at home and in Italy is capable of bursting the bubble in which Western society lives. This was the case of a respondent who took part in the Arab revolts in Libya:

> Many women, many men of all ethnicities, of all nationalities and skin colour, whatever, have been […] those who died, those who survived violence, rape, every type of violence, no one can imagine, not even in a concentration camp, there was the same root of Nazism there. But tomorrow is going to be the 27th [of

January], World Memory Day, and it makes me laugh. We celebrate the Memory day and people have a goldfish memory, just like this [making a gesture to mean tiny]. […] I have got a moral duty, I have the responsibility to tell this story, to open the windows and say "Look, these things are still going on. The Western world has never ceased to make war, just not at home, at other people's houses." (I-18)

More specifically, another respondent draws on his experience from two different socio-political contexts to stress his different experiences in terms of alliances. In the quote below, he refers to the case of the Muslim Brotherhood and to the different stances communists take towards this organization in his home country and in Europe:

Here is something weird, as left-wing militants in Mauritania we fight against the government but also against Islamist extremists. From our point of view, they are equally against the people. Here, instead, our comrades have a good relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood. […] This movement here in Europe has a good relationship with the left, because the left sees them as a minority in Europe and helps them have their right to be different, wear what they want to wear, behave according to their culture. This Brotherhood in the Arab world, in our country, is not a minority, they are a majority, they are not in the government but they have the support of the majority of the people and do a lot of bullshit, against human rights, against women rights, and this is a bit of a contradiction. (I-3)

In the quote above, it is interesting to note how the pronoun "we" and the determiner "our" are used to refer to both groups mentioned, Italian and European left-wing militants on the one hand, and Arab left-wing militants on the other. In this sense, the bifurcation presented here cannot be interpreted as a watershed; rather, this simultaneous reference to multiple socio-political contexts reveals contradictions in relation to strategic choices and making alliances, relativizing the circumstances that are specific to one context.

Time and time again, such contradictions are raised by respondents who belong to communities or groups with a long-term history of struggle, or groups involved in present struggles. One example of this is provided by a Kurdish respondent, who is a trade unionist in Milan. The interview was conducted after the first lockdown during the Covid-19 pandemic. In her account, she stresses how in the struggle for Kurdish liberation, school was vitally important for remaining active in the liberated areas of Rojava even during the worst days of armed conflict. In her role as a unionist, she recalls how she found it difficult and contradictory to deal with the demands of workers to close schools for health and safety reasons, explaining that in Rojava the closing of the school would be synonymous

with the very end of the struggle. This type of narrative configuration is not only useful for shedding light on certain contradictions internal to a given context or organization, but also for articulating public discourses that simultaneously aim to advance migrants' rights in the Italian context and raise awareness of other struggles happening elsewhere. In line with this, the same respondent compares the state of democracy in Italy with the background of democratic confederalism in Rojava, to emphasize the injustices that migrants have to endure:

When democracy is not from below, from the people, we can't actually talk about democracy. I always make this example of the Security Decree, because it's always striking for me. In the land where I come from, no such a thing could exist, it would never be accepted by the people. In Italy, a government and a parliament of 900 members approves a Decree that has a negative impact on all workers and migrants on a national scale. This means that 900 people decide for over 60 million people. Once we make the necessary proportions, we understand that that's unacceptable. In my land, no such a thing would ever exist, as all popular assemblies should approve that, and then all municipalities, and then all cantons' assemblies, up to the seven women in the National Assembly […] this is democracy, this is what a decision made by the people looks like. […] Similarly, it is anti-democratic to decide for migrant people, who are not even represented. They produce 10% of Italian GDP, receive fewer services than what they pay in taxation, and are totally used as a negative propaganda machine by all parties, left and right. For the left "poor them, we need to save them, we're the good ones, we are human", for the right "invasion, job stealers, criminals". So us, migrant people, we are the cigarette in the mouth of any MP, who can say whatever they want, as they please. (I-16)

Finally, sometimes, simultaneity across different political spaces can emerge in the case of a person who first started participating in Italy, but whose participation is triggered by something that is happening in his/her country or region of origin. This was the case of a respondent who arrived in Italy in 2009 and started mobilizing around 2016 at the same time as the mobilizations of Ni Una Menos in Latin America and Non Una di Meno later in Italy. In her account, the two mobilizations – one experienced directly and the other through the media – are juxtaposed, almost intertwined with one another:

The Non Una di Meno movement began in 2016–2017, but I first started to follow it from Latin America. Why? Because I am Latin American, the relationship with your country of origin can vary, but in general you follow the news, watch the *novelas* [soap operas], [...] you keep reading about your country forever. So then in reality, well in virtual reality I could be in Peru, meaning I'm at home and I'm following all that is happening there, right now there are elections coming up, right? So somewhat I start engaging with feminism here, but

through Peruvian news, or the movement in Mexico, I read about how they were organizing and I asked myself: where are they here? (I-5)

Interestingly, in this case, an **external** event or a mobilization happening in the country of origin **triggers** participation. This also happens in the case of migrants' diasporic communities, who experience more intense periods of political activism when national elections are taking place in their home countries, as several respondents from the Senegalese and the Sri Lankan communities confirm. Other political events, such as mobilizations or conflicts, can trigger migrants' political activism both within their diasporic communities and outside, similar to the case reported above. At times, as Eduardo Romanos noted in relation to Indignados (anti-austerity movement in Spain) and the Occupy Wall Street movement (against economic inequality and the influence of money in politics), migrants play the role of brokers in the diffusion of the movements' ideals (Romanos 2015).

To conclude, what all instances of simultaneity across space have in common is the ability to interpret the circumstances and events of a given context in relative terms, by reading them through the eyes of a different context. Along these lines, the analysis of simultaneity across space as a time configuration in the narratives collected sheds light on the specificity of migrants' participation, because it is informed by both the process of adult socialization and by the peculiarity of being immersed in two different socio-political contexts. The double-edged experience that respondents have undergone puts into perspective some of the key elements that determine participation in movements, such as the perception of risk, and fear of violence and repression. These are interpreted by drawing on multiple socio-political contexts, often leading to a perception of risk that is lower in the Italian context, notwithstanding the precarious material conditions that migrants experience. The availability of different socio-political contexts against which to calculate present moves is relevant in the decision-making process with regard to strategic decisions, alliances and even values, often raising contradictions within groups and organizations. Finally, the simultaneous reliance on different contexts means that at certain times, participation in the destination country can be triggered by events or mobilizations that are happening in other parts of the world; in this sense, migrants can play the role of carriers in spreading a movement's ideals.

4.6 – Patterns in political trajectories

With the narrative analysis presented above, the emphasis is placed on a specific form of migrants' agency which relies on active rearticulation of the past, made of a partial selection and a re-organization of events. On one hand, this process allows participants to make sense of their own engagement by including it into a unified horizon of sense. On the other hand, as will be discussed in Chapter 5, this is closely related to processes of collective memory building and the construction of new mnemonic communities, upon which engagement is built. Social movement scholars have variously elaborated on typologies and patterns of political trajectories, relating them to the study of political violence and armed activism, to forms of radicalization, institutionalization, and disengagement, delving into the different motivations that push people to participate in movements and connecting them to historical as well as personal life occurrences impacting upon trajectories (Accornero 2019; Blee 2016; Bosi 2012; Bosi and della Porta 2012; Corrigal-Brown 2011). In an analytical framework that gives primacy to the narrative reconstruction of the past, the tracing of patterns in political trajectories serves the purpose of presenting the data from a different angle and to reflect on remarkable recurrences that emerge from the biographical accounts collected.

The narrative analysis showed how all respondents make sense of their decision to mobilize in the present with accounts that encompass both watersheds and continuities with the past. And yet, the narrative construction is different: participants with previous political experiences largely rely on those past occurrences to explain their participation in the present. Quite differently, participants with no previous experiences of political engagement go through a much more complex re-interpretation of their past as a whole, to come to look at it from a political perspective. Along these lines, certain patterns can be singled out in the political biographies. In particular, the bifurcation proposed here sees, on one hand, participants with previous political experiences or, more broadly, participants who have been exposed to highly politicized contexts; and, on the other, participants who started mobilizing in Italy for the first time. The analysis shows how these alternatives impact differently on the trajectories of mobilization and are especially relevant to understand variations in the timing and forms of engagement.

The trajectories of respondents with a direct experience of participation in the past, as well as participants coming from highly politicized contexts, such as migrants from Kurdistan or the MENA region reaching Europe briefly after the Arab revolts, share a number of common features. These respondents were more likely to start mobilizing within a short period of time since their arrival, thus impacting on the timing of mobilization. The analysis above shows how, on one hand, the search for a sense of familiarity that movement groups can provide to those who mobilized in the past plays a key role in this regard. On the other hand, these respondents generally share a lower perception of risk associated to political engagement, when compared to both native activists and other migrants lacking previous political experience. In turn, this impacts upon the timing of mobilization and on the willingness to expose and take up leading roles within groups. Along these lines, what can be noticed from the data collected is how respondents with previous political experiences are more likely to occupy roles of leadership in the groups considered. The double lived experience of migration and political engagement allows them to bring together different constituencies. This is especially visible in groups, such as the MMRN and the CMB, in which both migrants and non-migrants mobilize.

The trajectories of respondents with no previous political experience who first came into contact with politicized milieus in Italy, are in many respects different. In this case, participants are more likely to start mobilizing a few years after their arrival. This relates to their lack of familiarity with activists' milieus, as well as to their perception of risk which is hightened by an already precarious living condition. Along these lines, several respondents point at their material concens as their primary preoccupations in the early months after their arrival. Moreover, these respondents do not usually take up leading roles in the groups considered. Finally, participants with no previous political experiences are more likely to frame their decision to participate as related to a variety of different spheres of their life and occurrences of the past. In this sense, their decision to participate constitutes in itself a breakthrough in their lives and demands that a much more complex re-interpretation of the past be carried out in order to make sense of the past from a political angle.

4.7 – Concluding remarks

This chapter shows how the experience of migration and the sphere of activism, considered separately, are insufficient for tracing the political trajectories of migrants.

One of the key findings emerging from the analysis of political biographies is how, despite the fact that participants mobilize as migrants, migration experience is hardly ever referred to as a trigger for mobilization. As a consequence, several respondents did not take part in collective action for several years after their arrival because they were trying to establish themselves. Even in the case of respondents who started mobilizing immediately after their arrival, being a migrant does not seem to have been a trigger. Rather, past experiences of mobilization in their home countries and the search for familiarity with their past histories play a prominent role in determining a faster approach to the movement milieu and political engagement. This shows how forms of public representation and collective identities adopted in the public discourse cannot be automatically taken as the key defining features and motivatons for engagement.

Second, in political biographies, what is regarded as "political" is not reduced to the sphere of activism and militancy. Rather, political biographies are recollections based on a multiplicity of spheres of life, from which resources, values, triggers and motivations for participation are drawn. Some political biographies can be more easily related to the concept of activist careers proposed by Fillieule (2010), because they rely on past political experiences and skills developed during previous mobilizations, albeit in different socio-political contexts. Other political biographies cannot be reduced to activist trajectories; this is especially true in cases of more volatile one-off forms of participation. The latter types of narratives reconfigure occurrences from everyday life experiences, such as family and community stories and educational and working environments, in ways that emphasize their political character. These rearticulations provide respondents with alternative sources of inspiration, motivation, experience, skills and, ultimately, a political past on which they can rely. In this sense, political biographies are storylines that are configured and interpreted as political by respondents themselves, and that both encompass and go beyond the domain of activism alone. Concepts such as activist identity or activist careers tend to focus on cases of longstanding activism. The concept of political biographies adopted here accounts for a broader spectrum of experiences interpreted as political and, thus, is useful for understanding other forms of activism, which are quite common in the case of migrants' collective action. Here, I refer to participants who are not fully immersed

in the movement milieu, or those who are only part of it for short, intense periods of time. Hopefully, this will complement the existing literature, which has more often focused on forms of high-risk and/or lifelong activism (Giugni 2008: 1589), by shedding light on other types of political trajectories that are less informed by the movement milieu and more by other spheres of life.

Third, the analysis of narratives stresses the key role played by perception and interpretation in understanding political engagement. The primacy given to the analysis of life histories as narratives sheds light on the agency of respondents in selecting, organizing and, ultimately, re-interpreting their pasts in ways that enable their participation in the present. More to that, rather than tracing trajectory patterns based on objective expectations, the analysis of narratives allows us to look into perceptions and interpretations that are capable of advancing explanations on apparently counter-intuitive decisions, on their timings and forms. In the case of migrants' activism, in particular, these perceptions and interpretations are based on a multiplicity of experiences that encompass different geographical, cultural, social and political contexts and are informed by the process of adult socialization. In this sense, the analysis shows how the different parts of past histories and interpretations of reality lead to contrasting timings in the process of activism, helping us understand more fully why migrants participate when they do. For instance, the research shows how the interpretation of the movement milieu as a familiar environment drives migrants with past political experience to start participating immediately after their arrival, notwithstanding their precarious material conditions. Similarly, the perception of risk and the fear of repression – key factors when making a decision to opt in or out of political engagement – can vary depending on previous experience of violence, which is shaped by different contexts. For example, past political experiences in non-democratic regimes can set a different threshold with regard to expectations of violent responses from the state; these experiences remain true across different contexts and shape participants' risk perception.

To conclude, the analysis of political biographies opens to further questions that relate, first, to the ways in which a shared past is built at the collective level across heterogeneous constituencies and, second, to the ways in which public representation and collective identities adopted in the public discourse are negotiated with more deeply-felt forms of identification. When moving from singular trajectories to a collective ground, one of the

challenges migrants' groups face is the lack of socialization of participants within the same mnemonic communities. Moving on from this dilemma, the next chapter addresses the question of how the collective memory of migrants' groups is constructed.

Chapter five

Building collective memory: the dilemma of the past

5.1 – Introduction

In this chapter, the focus shifts from the micro-level of political biographies to the meso-level of groups mobilizing as migrants. The often volatile participation of migrants in collective action has generally been approached from a spatial perspective, giving prominence to those relational ties that facilitate collective action. And yet, as Emirbayer and Mische (1998) point out, agency cannot be explored without a consideration of the temporal dynamic in which it is embedded. In this regard, they write that "as actors move within and among [...] different unfolding contexts, they switch between (or "recompose") their temporal orientations – as constructed within and by means of those contexts – and thus are capable of changing their relationship to structure" (1998: 964). This work of temporal recomposition has been explored in the previous chapter by looking at singular political biographies and is here addressed from a collective level perspective.

The ability of migrants' groups to compose a shared past configuration is faced with one major dilemma, that is participants lack a common social past to refer back to, as well as shared longstanding political traditions. The chapter delves into the process by which certain parts of migrants' past histories come to constitute the groups' collective memory, how these produce past configurations that constitute the foundations of new mnemonic and affective communities, and the extent to which the collective memories that are built enable or constrain the mobilizing capacity of groups. In this framework, the analysis highlights how a collective memory is built through practices of memory work at play at the group level, shedding light on the role of implicit and relational memory plays in the processes of group formation. Moreover, the analysis delves into the groups' factors that play a role in the process of memory formatino: the passing of time since the moment of

group formation, the norms of the group, and the ties with the local movement area are factors that have an impact on the construction of collective memory. Finally, the analysis explores the ways in which certain everyday practices, rather than constituting practices of memory work, can be interpreted as forms of memory in themselves for the ways they work as carriers of memory.

5.2 – Temporality, memory, and migrants' collective action

To address this dilemma, it is useful to engage on the one hand with the debate about temporality and collective memory within social movement studies, and on the other with the existing literature on migrants' collective action.

The temporal dimension of social movements has often been associated with the discussion about the continuity of movements. Scholars have resorted to temporality for three reasons: to emphasize that forms of duration and path dependency in movements are grounded in macro-historical long-term processes (Sewell 1996; McAdam and Sewell 2001; Jansen 2007; Lazar 2014; della Porta and Diani 2020); to refer to culture as a common stock of world views that endure over time (Taylor and Rupp 1993; Johnston and Klandermans 1995; Swidler 1995; Jasper 1997); and to explore the role of collective identity, free spaces, abeyance structures and countercultures in understanding how movements persist in between waves of mobilization (Melucci 1989; Taylor 1989; Bennett; 1999; Polletta 1999).

The reason for the focus on the continuity of movements is to avoid treating them as emerging out of the blue, with no connections with previously existing networks, repertoires of action, practices or, more broadly, past histories to refer back to. In line with this, in recent years, scholars have started to focus on the role of collective memory in movements, leading to the gradual emergence of memory studies and social movement studies, both of which regard memory as a potential site of struggle and movements as mnemonic actors (Olick and Robbins 1998: 79; Zamponi and Daphi 2019). In this regard, Zamponi and Daphi (2019: 400) write:

> On the one hand, memory studies have become interested increasingly in mnemonic agency, resilience and resistance. On the other hand, social movement scholars' attention to memories grew against the background of the cultural turn and debates about movements' temporality and continuity.

In some cases, scholars have highlighted how newness and spontaneity are strategically deployed by movement actors in order to be perceived as a novelty by potential participants (Polletta 2006; Flesher-Fominaya 2014). In others, the efforts made by movement actors to select and align with certain parts of past histories and to use them as legitimizing tools has been stressed (Gongaware 2003; Jansen 2007; Kubal 2008).

If the focus on collective memory relates to the idea of exploring acknowledged or hidden continuity in movements, it also centres on the capacity of actors to choose certain parts of their past histories over others and to strategically mobilize these in the public sphere. This selective and interpretive capacity is central to the debate about collective memory and movements, not only in terms of strategically driven mnemonic projects that are brought forward into the public sphere, but also with regard to in-group dynamics. This relational type of "memory in movements" (Zamponi and Daphi 2019) that is less focused on mnemonic projects and mnemonic products and more on the relational side of collective memory, and is less verbalized and explicit in form and more concerned with the construction of group boundaries at the level of practices and internal knowledge transmission, remains largely underexplored.

Indeed, much of the literature on the politics of memory has focused on objectified products of memory, such as monuments and memorials (Scott 1996; Vinitzky-Seroussi 2002), crystallized reputations of public figures (Polletta 1998; Fine 2001) or, more broadly, on the construction of memories as cultural products to be mobilized in the public sphere (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Armstrong and Crage 2006; Jansen 2007; Rigney 2016). Considerably less attention has been devoted to the role of memory in the process of group building, with a few exceptions that have considered memory and collective identity (Gongaware 2003, 2010; Farthing and Kohl 2013; Daphi 2017) and the internal choice of repertoires (Kubal and Becerra 2014; Zamponi 2018a). As a result, we still have very little knowledge on the role played by memory in the process of group building (Zamponi and Daphi 2019) and in the transmission of implicit knowledge between members and different generations of a group, in particular in relation to everyday practices and organizational structures that the groups select. As Jedlowski argues, not only do we lack an understanding of the role of practices of memory work within groups and for group formation, but also of the role of practices intended as the result of memory, or as he calls them, practices that

inherently represent the “permanence of the past in a group’s present” (Jedlowski 2001: 40).

The case of migrants’ collective action provides an oblique angle from which to investigate how groups that lack a shared social past and common longstanding political traditions come together and mobilize through practices of collective memory building. Rather than the absence of past history altogether, which is obviously not the case, the groups investigated are characterized by considerable heterogeneity in terms of background and trajectories, which results in a lack of reference to the same past events with consistent interpretations, as well as the lack of a sense of belonging to longstanding political traditions shared by all participants. These latter two are usually frameworks of interpretation and values that are taken for granted within movement areas, which in this respect can be thought of as mnemonic communities (Zerubavel 1996, 2004; Zamponi 2018a). For this reason, scholars have emphasized that it is not always possible for activists to choose which parts of their past histories they prefer, opening a debate over whether the past plays a constraining or an enabling role with regard to movements’ momentum (Jansen 2007). In this regard, McCarthy writes about “memories of past struggles, as well as the conservative mobilizing choices by leaders, who aim to work within the experiences of their people” as limiting the range of possible choices that activists have at their disposal (1996: 150). The role of memory in movements’ momentum is often addressed to highlight that the past inevitably weighs heavy on present forms of collective action. Consequently, the shape social conflict has taken in a given context in the past means that those who mobilize in the present cannot always select the parts of their past histories they would like to, and this can easily turn into a constraining force for collective action. Alongside this, it is generally acknowledged that there are certain limits to the malleability of memory (Schudson 1987, 1995; Spillman 1998). In this respect, however, migrants’ movements pose a challenge, because they constitute a counterintuitive case of collective memory construction. Although mnemonic communities project their shared memories of the past over new waves of mobilizations, in the cases investigated here, it is precisely the process of selection and reconstruction of a number of originally diverse and divergent parts of past histories that is at the core of the analysis in this chapter.

In order to explore the process by which these groups are constructed as mnemonic communities, the chapter investigates how memories are selected and organized at the

meso-level, so as to obtain a better understanding of how certain fragments of political biographies are selected over others and how a collective memory is reconstituted at the group level.

In the specific case of migrants' groups, the composition of a collective memory that functions as a shared past is a necessary condition for the existence of the group itself. In this regard, the process of collective memory construction is here largely regarded as an enabling process, with some exceptions that will be discussed in the following sections. Several different factors are at play in determining what parts of past histories are selected at the group level and how they are assembled. In exploring this process, it can be seen how the collective memory is based as much on forgetfulness and silence, as on remembrance and voice. Thus, the analysis tries to single out those factors that play a role in understanding where the line between voice and silence, and between remembrance and oblivion is drawn.

Therefore, the question of temporality in the study of migrants' collective action is certainly useful in revealing the role of collective memory in the process of group building, and the specific cases analysed here provide insightful examples of how participants who are not originally part of the same mnemonic communities come to be part of groups that select and compose a past for themselves. If, as stated above, the composition of a shared past is a necessary condition for group building and collective mobilization, the focus on temporality is even more important for the study of migrants' collective action. Previously, however, this has been explored almost exclusively from a spatial perspective.

As discussed more in this theoretical chapter, in classical theories of mobilizations and social change, migrants' collective action has been regarded as unexpected and exceptional. Recently, this tendency has been contradicted by an increasing number of research works indicating that migrants' mobilizations are far from rare exceptions (Giugni and Passy 2001; Voss and Bloemraad 2011; Tyler and Marciniak 2013; Monforte 2014; Eggert and Giugni 2015; Ataç et al. 2016). In social movement studies in particular, it is generally accepted that the emergence of movements is contingent on three things: their capacity to mobilize internal resources; the availability of open political opportunity structures; and the framing capacity of movement actors (della Porta and Diani 2020). For these very reasons, migrants' mobilizations have long been studied as exceptions that generally do not have enough internal resources, favourable political opportunities or discursive capacity to have an

effective impact on the new country of residence. As a consequence, they have long been approached at the moment at which they emerge as movements that "appear" out of nowhere, become visible all of a sudden and later disappear leaving nothing behind.

Although the precarious character of certain types of mobilization has long been a discouraging factor for researchers, who have often avoided investigating these forms of mobilizations altogether (Blee 2012), this trend has been reversed in recent years. Scholars have started to challenge this understanding of migrants' collective action by engaging in the study of protests and other forms of migrants' collective action. Recent scholarly works have explored the connections between acts of citizenship, the autonomy of migration and contentious politics to investigate the construction of solidarity alliances and the enactment and transformation of citizenship from the margins (Ataç et al. 2015; Ataç et al. 2016; della Porta 2018b; Steinhilper and Ataç 2019). The majority of these works have focused on what could be referred to as the "spatial rupture" of migration, privileging the spatial dimension of the phenomenon analysed and using spatiality as a conceptual lens through which to investigate how urban areas in particular, but also the proliferation of borders, camps and routes have come to play a key role as spaces of contention in which precarious ties are made and unmade (Monforte and Dufour 2013; Nicholls et al. 2013; De Genova 2017; Nicholls and Uitermark 2017; Steinhilper 2020). These works produced analyses that are very well informed by the spatial dimension, but tend to convey an unsatisfactory bi-dimensional understanding of the social phenomenon analysed. In particular, the volatility and precariousness of migrants' forms of collective action have led researchers to assume that these have no temporal depth/continuity that can be explored. For these reasons, we still lack an understanding of what precedes these more intense or more visible moments of mobilization. Where do these outbursts come from? Are there continuities between them? Do they have a temporal depth that is worth exploring? Investigating the process of collective memory construction will go some way towards answering these questions.

5.3 – Outline of the empirical analysis

In the empirical sections that follow, I will address the process of collective memory construction within migrants' movements as something counterintuitive but also necessary for identity construction, knowledge transmission and, ultimately, for enabling collective

action. Heterogeneous groups of migrants that become politically active can be considered a liminal case for reflecting on collective memory, because the participants in the groups considered do not share the same social past, do not have the same understanding of the significance of certain events and do not have common longstanding political traditions. These factors, which relate specifically to the role of implicit memories in group building, are often taken for granted whenever we look at how and why movements emerge and mobilize.

With the aim of reconstructing the process of collective memory building within groups, the analysis here considers the shift from biographical accounts – examined in the chapter on political biographies – to collective memory at the group level. In other words, at the core of the analysis is the process by which certain parts of biographical past histories are selected over others and come to constitute the collective memory of the group. On the one hand, I analyse the different practices of memory work that are conducted at the group level, and on the other, I single out those factors inherent in the groups that play a role in determining which parts of past histories are selected in preference to others. In particular, the practices of memory work considered are visible within everyday practices conducted at the group level, such as meetings, self-awareness assemblies and help desk activities, which become the contexts in which a process of collective memory building is viable. What emerges as common to all the practices considered is how they rely on intense storytelling activities that favour the construction of affective communities. The analysis later points to some characteristics that are different depending on the group analysed. These are highlighted as relevant factors that direct the in-group process of selection of certain parts of past histories over others: (a) the role played by the time since the formation of the group; (b) the ideological values of the group; and (c) the ties with the broader local movement milieu. The exploration of these practices and factors allows us to investigate not only what parts of biographical past histories filter into the collective level, but also which ones are forgotten, silenced or not treated as a common legacy. In the last section, a complementary question is addressed, introducing the understanding that the process of collective memory building is not based exclusively on the combination of different parts of biographical past histories. Thus, the analysis focuses on how practices adopted at the group level come from a collective past and are themselves the result of previous memory

work. It follows two main lines: what is derived from an already collective past – both in the form of past political experiences and the legacy of previous movements; and how this is reinterpreted according to the specific needs of the present. In other words, the last section investigates how practices and organizational structures chosen by the groups analysed represent both the permanence of the past in the present through forms of implicit knowledge transmission, and a reinterpretation of past legacies based on present necessities. It complements the previous sections by considering how everyday practices are themselves the result of memory work.

5.3.1 – Relevant group factors for the process of collective memory building

In this section, a brief overview of the cases selected is presented (see Table 4), with the aim of highlighting specifically the factors that play a prominent role in the process of collective memory construction.

Table 4. Key features of the groups selected

	COORDINAMENTO MIGRANTI BOLOGNA	MOVIMENTO MIGRANTI E RIFUGIATI NAPOLI	RETE DONNE MIGRANTI E FIGLIE ROMA
Issues and values	Migrant workers' rights, residence permit, autonomy	Residence permit, asylum, workers' rights, anti-racism, communism	Self-determination, anti-racism, decolonial feminism
Year	2004	2016	2019
Migrant/native composition	Mixed	Mixed	Separatist (migrant women 1st and 2nd)
Gender	Mixed	Mostly men/later mixed	Only women

Links with broader movement area	Strong	Strong	Critical

The primary factor relevant for comparing the process of collective memory construction across the three cases is the passage of time since the group's formation. The groups selected started mobilizing in Italy at different times during the last 20 years. All three groups emerged in line with key moments in the history of migration in Italy: the CMB started mobilizing a couple of years after the restrictive law on immigration (no. 189 30 July 2002) was approved (the so-called Bossi–Fini law); the MMRN emerged in a very different context, following the so-called long summer of migration and the protests that emerged in the reception centres; and finally, the RDMF started mobilizing more recently in relation to issues of anti-racism and de-colonial feminism, just before the protests that followed the killing of George Floyd in the USA and the subsequent wave of the Black Lives Matter mobilization that reached numerous countries around the world. The timeline is the most important factor in the consideration of collective memory, because it allows us to explore the different stages of the process of collective memory construction, and how it varies between those groups that were formed some time ago and those that have been formed more recently.

The values and issues at the core of each group's activity are also a relevant factor in determining what parts of past histories are selected as being significant at the group level. In fact, a certain degree of resonance between normative values and biographical accounts is necessary for the latter to become part of the group's collective memory.

The third relevant factor in the construction of collective memory is links with the broader local movement milieu. Whether the group has strong or weak/critical links with this has an impact on the collective stories and knowledge the group can mobilize. The CMB and the MMRN are both mixed groups and include members with both Italian and migrant backgrounds. They also have strong relationships with the broader local movement milieu at the city level. The MMRN in particular is part of a broader political project, the social

centre Je so' Pazzo, which is based in a former ospedale psichiatrico giudiziario (OPG), a mental asylum for criminal offenders. Conversely, the RDMF is self-organized and separatist along the lines of gender and migration background.

This last factor is relevant for obtaining a better understanding of the groups' process of collective memory construction because it indicates to what extent a previously established collective story was available to the group – or at least some members of the group – when it started mobilizing.

5.4 – From political biographies to group memory

The life histories of participants are the starting point for the analysis of the process of collective memory construction presented in this section. The difference in life trajectories and the lack of a shared social past and longstanding political traditions make it especially hard to understand what parts of their past histories participants would choose for collective memory building and how some are selected in preference to others for the construction of a shared social past. In this section, the analysis shifts from the micro- to the meso-level, investigating the process by which certain parts of the biographical accounts collected – and not others – are formed into a common narrative of the past, which is shared by all participants in the group.

Jedlowski notes how the displacement of a subject from one social group to another, as in the case of geographical mobility, can be listed as one of the main factors that results in the modification of the story a subject provides about his/herself (2000: 143). In this sense, along the lines of Halbwachs' work, Jedlowski points out how the memory of the past that each individual recollects is ultimately dependent on the social framework in which this memory work happens. However, in this section, we delve into the groups not just as a social framework/background for the singular memories recollected but, rather, we look into the process of group building considering a very heterogeneous case (migrants' groups) and we ask how parts of different past experiences are assembled into a common past that resonates throughout the group.

To investigate the process of collective memory building, active at the meso-level, we adopt a conceptualization of memory as a dynamic and relational work – one that is constantly developing among participants – rather than it being a result of memory work, an object or

a product of memory. In this sense, there is no real interest in understanding what constitutes the content of collective memory, because this is permanently changing. Instead, the focus is on the processes and practices that facilitate the construction of a shared past. This relational approach to memory is especially suited to understanding forms of collective memory building in migrant groups, in which participation is somewhat volatile for a number of different reasons. In this regard, Bauman refers to migrants' experiences of ever-new social encounters using the metaphor of the anchor, as opposed to the metaphor of uprooting:

> All in all, the metaphor of anchors captures what the metaphor of "uprooting" misses or is silent about: the intertwining of continuity and discontinuity in the history of all or at least a growing number of contemporary identities. Just like ships anchoring successively or intermittently in their various ports of call, so the selves in the "communities of reference" where they seek admission during their lifelong search for recognition and confirmation have their credentials checked and approved at every successive stop; [...] and with every next stop, the past (constantly swelled by the records of preceding stops) is re-examined and revalued. (Bauman 2016: 29)

Indeed, the contemporary phenomenon of migration has been variously described with the terms "multi-stage" or "itinerancy", or portrayed as being characterized by multiple paths rather than being a monodirectional progression between two countries exclusively (Paul 2012; ILO 2015; Parreñas et al. 2019; Parreñas 2021).

In order to understand how certain parts of personal recollections filter into the groups' collective memories, the analysis takes into account various practices that are considered to be practices of memory work carried out at the group level, and considers the similarities and differences between each group's custom methods.

5.4.1 – Practices of memory work

The act of remembering is inextricably tied to a sense of belonging within mnemonic communities, and each individual belongs to multiple groups such as the family, the workplace, the ethnic group and the nation (Zerubavel 1996). Similarly, in his seminal work *The Collective Memory*, Maurice Halbwachs highlights the role of groups, and cites the

emotional ties they are capable of triggering as necessary for memory. He provides an interesting example of a person who was once part of a group with which he/she is no longer as involved as in the past.

> What does it matter that our companions are still influenced by a feeling that we once experienced with them but do no longer? We can't evoke it because we have shared nothing with our former companions for so long. There is nothing to fault in our memory or theirs. But a larger collective memory, encompassing both ours and theirs, has disappeared. (Halbwachs 1980: 32).

The interconnection between memories and emotions is relevant here. If feelings for a group fade, and this goes hand in hand with forgetting, the creation of a "larger collective memory" is necessarily related to the feelings that tie its members to one another. In other words, groups have the capacity to stir reminiscences that hinge on a commonality of feeling or a sense of belonging. The analysis proposed here engages with a conceptualization of groups as affective communities or communities of belonging, thus indicating the relevance of feelings and emotional ties in stirring and reshaping reminiscences. The emotional closeness or distance of participants at different points in time affects the process of collective memory building or dissolving, which is regarded here as a relational and ongoing process (Zelizer 1995). The counterintuitive process of collective memory construction in migrants' groups is inseparable from the creation of communities of belonging. For these reasons, the analysis of the practices of memory work that follows is careful to regard the emotions mobilized by participants as being able to transform relationships within the groups.

The practices of memory work presented here refer to instances of implicit memory, that is, "unintentional and nonconscious recollections" (Zamponi and Daphi 2019: 410), which are defined as such by the researcher and not referred to as memory work by the groups themselves. Practices of memory work are identified as characterized by forms of intense storytelling stirring a sense of belonging across participants. Instances of these practices include the recursive sharing of personal and collective stories which become well-known by all participants, the construction and transmission of the founding myth of the group, the reference to specific events, mobilizations and struggles conducted in the past, the sharing of everyday life experiences common to various participants, such as lived experiences of racism and discrimination.

In Table 5, I list several activities carried out by each group that provide the context for practices of memory work to emerge (Zelizer 1995;[2] Jansen 2007). Among these are self-awareness meetings, help desk activity and political meetings. As can be seen, a great deal of memory work is conducted during everyday activities, in particular during internal meetings. These different contexts in which practices of memory work are conducted correspond to different arenas in which certain characters of memory work emerge more clearly than others, involving broader or narrower parts of the groups and serving slightly different purposes. In the following sections, I address the commonalities and differences in terms of practices of memory work, focusing on the different cases considered.

Table 5. Group activities leading to practices of memory work

Group	RDMF	MMRN	CMB
Contexts for practices of memory work	Feminist consciousness-raising meetings	Help desk activity Meetings	Political meetings

RDMF: Rete di Donne Migranti e Figlie; MMRN: Movimento Migranti e Rifugiati Napoli; CMB: Coordinamento Migranti Bologna.

5.4.2 – RDMF: a case of memory as kaleidoscope and mutual recognition

In the first case considered, the RDMF, migrant women use a traditional feminist practice that emerged in the late 1960s in Western feminist movements, that is, **feminist consciousness-raising meetings**. This practice was originally aimed at delineating a political subject as opposed to one who was focused simply on the experiences of womanhood. In other words, it was an attempt to politicize the personal, not the other way round. In this sense, Ergas (1986) refers to feminist consciousness-raising meetings of the 1960s and 1970s as necessary for the elaboration of myths of origin useful for orienting "interpretations of the past and projections on the future, to consolidate a common memory, capable of conveying the sense of *longue durée* of the subject […] engaging in a 'battle for the possession of the past' (Lillia 1984)". Similarly, migrant women use this

2 For a definition of memory work see Barbie Zelizer (1995), who describes it as processual in nature, unpredictable, partial, usable, simultaneously particular and universal, and material.

practice to socialize common grievances and to draw the outline of a new political subject for the Italian movement panorama, that of racialized women with a migration background. One activist describes the meetings as follows:

> It is this intense storytelling, talking, telling stories, which builds up a positive narrative. We didn't decide to do it that way, it was spontaneous and there wasn't a set time, I entered the meeting and I didn't know how much time I would spend there. (I-10)

Among the reasons given for the early meetings of the group was precisely "the necessity to talk about us, among us" (I-5) in an attempt to define who "us" corresponds to. The early meetings were useful for the migrants to get to know one another:

> Consider that during the first meeting we introduced each other and we started saying "I lived this racism, I lived this other thing" without a pre-determined setting. We all talked, each one described the experience that she had [...] that was our way of getting to know one another. (I-5)

As multiple activists state, there is a double level of construction at play here: on the one hand, the group itself is in the early stages of formation; and on the other, a political subject that is new to the Italian movement milieu is looking for its voice and a space in which to express it. This can be noted by the expressed need to detach at least partially from the broader movement milieu at the local level:

> Politically, we felt the need to meet as a more radical political voice, meaning, no longer as a voice that enters into already existing political spaces to visibilize our own claims, but rather, to begin to question ourselves in our own political space. (I-7)

These meetings, characterized by forms of intense storytelling, provide the context in which practices of memory work are at play. Both the fluidity of the early stages of group formation and the critical relationship with the broader movement milieu mean that the process of collective memory construction is still very much open and susceptible to change. During awareness-raising meetings, participants share parts of their stories that over time become well known by the rest of the group. The women interviewed describe the moment of the assembly as one in which they recall their own past histories, prompted by other people who were strangers until that time:

I told something about me, like something related to what emerged from our discourses, maybe someone referred to their country of origin in a way, and then I talked about the ties that I have with Albania. (I-8)

During the meetings in which I participated as an observer, an oft-occurring sentence was "you just reminded me of…", which built up a commonality of experience emerging from the storytelling conducted during the meetings, rather than from shared experiences. Over time, this type of memory work contributed to building a sense of recognition and mutual belonging among participants, as opposed to forms of disavowal and misrecognition (often referred to as othering) that many activists report they have experienced in wider society:

I clearly remember one day, I'm talking about some 15 years ago, one guy interviewed me in the square [during a protest] and asked me "what does it mean to be black in a context of white people or anyways Italians?" and I looked at him and said "look, when I woke up this morning I didn't even think that I was black, if you hadn't just reminded me". This is to say that I'm always looking at you [white people], and I don't even think about it […] and he was shocked. I genuinely thought about this, in the end if it was for me […] I wouldn't remember. And it's you who remind me of this at all times […] do you see what I mean? (I-7)

The meetings constitute the moments at which participants choose those parts of their past histories that resonate with other members of the group, and in so doing, become emotionally closer. The type of process at play is described by Halbwachs as "remembrances [that] reappear because other persons recall them to us" (Halbwachs 1950: 33). Another way of pinpointing this process in the data is to identify, in a person's recollection, whenever the story of some other member of the group is reported as part and parcel of a common lived experience:

This is my lived experience, I was the migrant while the other two girls, Ruth and Sara, are daughters of Eritrean migrants. And so there was this other lived experience related to being born here [Italy] [...] and we often shared the idea of being simultaneously visible and invisible. Ruth and Sara don't even feel Italians, if you ask them where are you from they'll tell you "Eritrea". (I-5)

This short quote provides an example of how stories can be appropriated as a result of a sense of belonging to a certain community or group and, in turn, how this feeling transforms the ways in which we recollect our past. Although the difference between being

migrants and daughters of migrants is certainly expressed in the quote reported above, it is not given much relevance. Conversely, what *is* highlighted is (a) the shared feeling of being either hyper-visible or invisible, and (b) the fact that the daughters of migrants would rather call themselves Eritrean and, thus, migrants, than refer to themselves as Italians.

The specific characteristics of this group, compared with the other two, are that it is in the early stages of group formation, which leaves a great deal of room for the articulation of a collective past, and its feminist values, which generally favour an understanding of politics as different from lived experiences. These both mean that the stories that become the group's memory are very heterogeneous and related to different spheres of people's lives, rather than being strictly tied to previous experiences of activism. Family, friendship, and diasporic community are often mixed together and variously reported as relevant parts of the group's background:

> At home we used to talk about politics all the time. I was always interested when there were arguments on politics at home, Albanese politics. My parents don't argue on Italian politics, they kind of agree on that, but when it comes to Albanian politics my father is left-wing and my mother is right-wing. So they clash a lot, the same goes for my other relatives […]. And then there's the fact that the majority of my friends have a migration background, in my group in Genova we were basically all foreigners. So we talked about ourselves, what happened at home, what happened to us outside the house in society, these were the things that came up. (I-8)

This quote is just one of many examples of how different spheres of life and different past histories are intertwined in the process of this group's collective memory construction. Another feature that is unique to the RDMF is the types of stories that become the group's shared past, stories that in general put a different slant on the everyday life experiences of participants and other women whom participants consider to be related to the group in some way. In other words, the women are articulating a new political version of their past everyday experiences – what was wrong with them, what they could do to change the situation. There is also a value-oriented factor that determines which of the kaleidoscopic stories become the group's collective memory. This is in contrast to the other two groups considered, in which stories of past actual political activism and militancy are preferred over others and tend to construct a more coherent and homogeneous past.

Another relevant aspect of the process of collective memory construction is that memory is not solely tied to certain contents that are selected in preference to others and readapted at the meso-level; rather it also relates to the emotional responses to specific occurrences, and to the capacity to transmit such emotional responses through storytelling. In the quote below, we read about the memory of an emotion and how it is being transferred from the outside of the group to the inside and from an unknown person to a whole group. During an awareness-raising meeting, one participant recalls a past gathering of students of Afro descent in which she took part several years previously, and she says:

> During this meeting of students of Afro descent in Modena, I saw a girl, much younger than myself, who was talking about her experience of racialization and she was very angry, she was shaken by all this anger. And I thought "I never allowed that anger to myself" and I understood that maybe the moment had come for me as well, I could also tell my story in a different way, and finally feel different. And here we can finally express that rage and love, and take care of one another. (Fieldwork notes)

To conclude, this group's process of collective memory construction is especially relevant for exploring the early stages of group formation in which the process of construction of a shared past is still very much open and subject to change. During awareness-raising meetings, the practice of memory work is particularly visible; participants build mutual recognition from an intense activity of storytelling that allows them to use other people's stories to recollect their own memories. The paradigmatic sentence "you reminded me of that time" provides an excellent example of how the practice of memory work relies on mutual recall to build a common past. Over time, the stories become tied to one another, to the extent that the boundaries between participants' individual stories become blurred and each other's stories become their own. Finally, the specific nature of the group's feminist values, as well as the relative autonomy of the group from the broader movement milieu, results in a process of collective memory building that relies largely on stories based on participants' lived experiences, although told with a more political slant, and does not necessarily value past experiences of activism.

5.4.3 – MMRN: a case of memory as maintenance, resonance, and recursivity

The MMRN is a hybrid scenario in the cross-case comparison provided here. The group started gathering in 2016, following the so-called long summer of migration, and has been active for several years. This implies that the process of collective memory construction is partially open to change; however, some early stage participants already share a past history of collective mobilizations that without doubt has contributed to the creation of the group's collective memory.

The practices of memory work in this case are visible, both during the political meetings and in the help desk activities. The MMRN regularly conducts different types of meetings, some of which are for regular participants and aimed at coordinating group activities and making decisions, whereas others are carried out with newcomers. One example of the latter is the weekly meeting conducted before the start of the help desk activity. Several migrants, most of whom are not familiar with the group and the social centre in which activities take place, gather to meet the activists who run the help desk activity, seeking support for paper-related, work and housing issues. Before the help desk activity begins, the activists organize a short political meeting that is usually conducted by migrant activists and long-term participants who share the story of the MMRN and inform newcomers about the previous struggles the movement has taken part in. In so doing, memories of past struggles embraced by the group are immediately shared with migrants. The reason given for this type of meeting is to share the importance of previous struggles and to frame the help desk activity as a political practice rather than a welfare-oriented one.

> The help desk begins at 9 in the morning, we write down the names of the people that need to meet us, then from 10.30 to 11 there is a political meeting. […] Usually it is migrant activists who do these meetings, because over time they became the point of reference for the anglophone or the francophone newcomers. And so from a mechanism that might seem simply charitable, we transform it into a mechanism of struggle. Even if a person comes only once for his/her own business, we talk about the common injustices they live, the struggles, […] and they understand that there is a different mechanism at play. (I-19)

However, on an implicit level, the act of repeating the story of the group and the struggles carried out to date for newcomers, helps foster the collective story of the group for longstanding participants too. This practice of memory work can be related to what Gongaware calls collective memory maintenance (Gongaware 2003). He distinguishes between practices oriented at collective memory creation, which relate primarily to recent

events, and how these become part of the group memory, and practices concerned with the maintenance of a certain narrative that "ensures that memories from the movement's past are carried forward to be shared by current members" (2003: 484).

In this case, with regard to the process of collective memory creation, the biographical accounts that become the collective memory of the group tend to be associated with past political experiences undergone by migrants in their countries of origin. In fact, for a number of reasons, stories of activism and militancy are more part of group members' past histories than those from other spheres of life.

First, the MMRN has strong links with a broader political project, which is the social centre Je so' Pazzo, a former OPG, a mental asylum for offenders. The strong links with the broader local movement milieu mean that a number of stories are already available at the collective level and, consequently, those biographical accounts that are more attuned to the already existing collective narratives are more likely to be incorporated into the collective memory of the group. Second, there is a value-oriented factor that determines how certain accounts are selected over others; a communist articulation of politics in conflictual terms means that stories and values of militancy and activism relate more easily to the group's collective memory. To provide an example, the respondent below has an important role in the MMRN, in which he has participated since its very early stages. He was a leading figure in the Communist Party in Mauritania, had an active role during the Arab uprisings and was later forced to leave his country because he became the target of Islamist groups. His biography is well known to all members of the group, and thus represents one of those cases in which an entire group adopt a person's history as part of its collective legacy.

> I get on well with ex-OPG [a former ospedale psichiatrico giudiziario, that is, a mental asylum for criminal offenders, now a revolutionary social centre], because they do just like we used to, the same ideals to bring a party back, a widespread movement, left-wing, real left, or better, communist if we want to be clear. Even back in Mauritania I had this idea, […] my young comrades and I tried to bring about a new and actual communist party. The ex-OPG is working on the same thing, shares the same way of mobilizing and struggling. (I-3)

The respondent is framing his involvement with the Je so' Pazzo social centre (OPG, a former mental asylum for offenders) as a natural consequence of his political trajectory, in perfect continuity with his past. This quote shows the importance of ideological alignment in determining what stories become part of a collective heritage and filter into the group

memory. Moreover, those who have previously participated in political activities are not just carriers of the stories of the past, but also of the knowledge that accompanies it. Another migrant activist refers to this transferred knowledge as familiarity with the "mechanism" of struggle:

A person who participated in past struggles and comes here and keeps on doing that struggle is capable of understanding the mechanism. When a person arrives here he/she faces two challenges, the first one is the language […] and the second one is how to fit into the mechanism of struggle. A person who took part in political struggles in the past has the difficulty of the language, but the second challenge isn't so much of a problem. (I-2)

When I was observing participants, on many occasions they reported other migrant activists' stories as being relevant to the group. In fact, the stories and knowledge gained from these migrants who have engaged in struggles in their countries of origin are well known and emphasized by all participants. Another significant factor is the level of participation: migrants who participate the most are those who share more parts of their past histories with the group. Over time, participation transforms social relationships into friendships and camaraderie, referring back to the idea of affective communities and the ways in which these enable the recollection of memories. An Italian activist tells me about this transformation:

The other day I was reasoning with some of the girls with whom I have a more personal relationship. Inevitably, we create ties of friendship, we go out together, we go for walks along the sea, they are our comrades. (I-19)

On the one hand, then, certain stories are granted preferential access to the collective memory of the group, based on their resonance with the ideological values of the broader political project and on the extent to which the narrator participates. On the other hand, the help desk activity exposes the group to an impressive amount of stories from newcomers. Activists conduct regular help desk activities in the Je so' Pazzo social centre in which they are based. Every week many migrants share their stories with activists, mostly in preparation for their claim to asylum or other paper-related procedures. Working on the helpdesk is a very intense, tiring and time-consuming activity; it generally lasts all day, and is sometimes conducted several days a week. During this time, activists are exposed to

hundreds of life accounts and become aware of the commonalities between different stories. In this sense, the help desk activity provides a context in which a different type of memory work is at play, that is, one that builds on recursivity. It is not simply the repetitive action of listening to migrants' stories, but rather the capacity to grasp the common threads running through them that contributes to the construction of the group's collective memory. As Ann Rigney writes, "it is by virtue of selection and recursivity that common points of reference can emerge, since if all details were retained sharing would become impossible" (Rigney 2016: 79).

The process of collective memory construction in the MMRN is not only based on regular participants' stories, but also draws on the accounts of newcomers and other migrants participating for a short period of time. A process of intense storytelling is at play and the collective memory of the group becomes based on the similarities between a very large number of migrants' lived experiences.

> With the helpdesk, people [newcomers] understand what is going on in their lives and become familiar with the "struggle mechanism", I mean they realize that there are other people with their same problems, which can be addressed at the collective level. But also for us [activists], to be honest, without doing the helpdesk we would have never understood a lot of things. (I-19)

As can be seen from the quote above, there is a sharp distinction between newcomers and activists, but the help desk activity is relevant to both to keep the process of collective memory construction open. In this case, the process of the group's collective memory construction is caught between two poles. On the one hand, there is the memory that is already established, based on the stories of past mobilizations of the group and also on those biographical accounts that resonate more than others with the group's already existing memory. On the other hand, the process of collective memory construction is open to external input from newcomers who share their stories, and by virtue or recursivity, the common parts of these stories build the collective memory of the group.

5.4.4 – CMB: a case of memory as accumulated knowledge and legacy

Compared with the previous two, the CMB is a unique case from the point of view of the process of collective memory construction. The group started gathering nearly 20 years ago, and over time has amassed considerable experience of struggle and constructed a well-established group memory. As a consequence, the process of the CMB's collective memory construction is further advanced than the previous cases presented. This distinctive factor paves the way for many questions that relate to two different aspects of this: whether the process of collective memory construction is largely closed to further changes because longstanding participants already share a collective past and an accumulated knowledge of struggle; and whether there is a possibility of transforming, adapting and challenging an already established story at certain points in time, or in other words, whether there is a possibility of reopening the process of collective memory construction.

The practice of memory work observed here is at play during internal political meetings. One of the insights that can be drawn from the data collected during participant observation is how the group can relate to a wide variety of experiences of struggle at both the city and national level. Often, new participants ask for help from older members. To provide an example, during one particular meeting, a young migrant who was leading a struggle in his workplace – a logistics warehouse at Bologna's freight terminal – addressed a longstanding participant. He said "*non sappiamo dove mettere i piedi*" which could translate as "we're unsure which steps to take". A long discussion followed, in which an older activist shared some of the group's past experiences and offered the younger participants suggestions as to what could be done and what should be avoided, based on the knowledge gained from previous struggles.

The instance reported above is both an example of how the memory of the group is maintained in the present in relation to new challenges that the group faces (Gongaware 2003), and an example of how memory is inextricably linked with knowledge transmission. To be able to draw on a wide set of past collective mobilizations is generally an advantage for groups, especially considering that a particular characteristic of migrants' collective action with regard to memory is that groups generally lack common ground on which to build a shared past. In this context, some longstanding activists become the carriers of memory and acquire legitimacy for their role of mobile archive, because they personify the living memory of the group. In the quote below, one of the founding members of the group briefly recalls the number of activities and struggles he took part in:

I participated in the struggles with the Coordinamento Migranti since the very beginning. Well now quite some time has passed [he laughs], everything has changed. We used to go around a lot, there used to be a sort of coordination of associations and groups [of migrants] at the national level, and so there were many of us taking the squares. But it wasn't very useful to change that law [Bossi–Fini law] that makes us easily blackmailed. (I-11)

When analysing the interviews with participants who had been active in the CMB for some time, it was interesting to note how the biographical accounts largely corresponded to the story of the group itself. In line with this, Gongaware (2003) notes how highly active participants, as well as "veteran members potentially have a degree of power over newer members in the collective memory maintenance as they have a greater store of memories on which to draw" (2003: 514). In comparing cases that started mobilizing during the last 20 years, it can be seen that the solidity and coherence of the group memory depends on the stage of group formation. In particular, the longer the group has been in existence, the more cohesive its story, to the point that it becomes more difficult for new participants to challenge this or to participate equally in the process of collective memory building. Although knowledge accumulation and the construction of a group's memory generally represent an advantage for the collective capacity to mobilize, in certain cases memory can become a constraining factor. In the quote below, a young respondent who had just joined the CMB was expressing her initial concern about joining the group:

The Migrants Coordination has been there for the past 20 years or so? At the beginning I was sceptical about joining them for this reason, 20 years of struggle and nothing changes. The majority of the people in the Senegalese community think so. (I-13)

This provides an example of how having a history of struggle does not always constitute a mobilizing factor. In this case, what is in question is the capacity of the movement to engender an actual change in migrants' living conditions after so many years of mobilization with little significant changes.

As discussed above, the process of collective memory construction, even if it never reaches full capacity, is at times more stable and harder to challenge. In this respect, some scholars

of collective memory have emphasized that there are limits to the malleability of memory, that past events are persistent and exercise a constrain on the present and on actors' willingness and capacity to suspend or transform those pasts (Spillman 1998: 450; Schwartz 1982). However, there are factors, events and circumstances that clearly favour the reopening of the collective memory-building process. First, in over 20 years of activism, the CMB has lived through a considerable transformation of the migration experience itself in Italy, and with it the implementation of different regimes in an attempt to govern it. With the different waves of migration, the participants and their needs and claims have changed. This is emphasized in various conversations with long-term activists who compare their own migration wave with the following ones and highlight the subsequent adaptation of migration regimes. The following respondent begins by telling the experience of the early waves of migration that reached Italy from West Africa in the late 1980s and early 1990s, of which he is part. He emphasizes in particular the centrality of the housing question, and the subsequent effort of movements to address the problem with squats like the one he lived in:

This thing that we've witnessed recently, that migrants arriving now are brought to live in places that are run by cooperatives […] When I arrived it wasn't like so. In fact the early years […] we slept at the station – platform 12 – and to shower there were some places in Piazza Maggiore, where you could pay and have a bath. The first years have been harsh. Very much. At that time, we all did the market, the so-called *vu cumprà* [pejorative for street seller in Italian]. We went around with our carpet selling belts, umbrellas, those things and we slept outside for a long time. And then with an association that was called Chez Vous, we squatted a place, la Barca, which became our home. (I-11)

The respondent then goes on to point out the difference with more recent waves, referring in particular to how circumstances changed in the post-2015 period:

The recent wave of migrants has been housed, but has a lot more problems compared with us. They are placed in these centres run by cooperatives which all have the interest in leaving them there […] six-month residence permit, asylum commission, rejection, and they start all over again. So recently, with the Coordinamento Migranti we focused on these issues, we also carried out a lot of struggles at the freight terminal, because not only are migrants exploited there, but they go to work with scooters and bikes, and from time to time trucks kill another one. (I-11)

As reported above, new experiences of migration and corresponding new regimes certainly affect the group, not only in terms of claims, but also in relation to the lived experiences that inform those claims and, consequently, the memory of the group itself. However, these structural factors alone are insufficient for understanding the reopening of the process of collective memory construction in the history of a group. In the previous sections, we observed how this process is inextricably linked with the construction of relationships of proximity and mutual belonging. From the data collected, the moments at which these types of social ties are more commonly constructed correspond to times of more intense mobilization. This way, even in groups with a reasonably established collective memory, such as the CMB, there are moments or events that have the capacity to reopen the process of collective memory construction. As della Porta writes, "memories seem particularly relevant in unsettled times, as they can work to re-establish solidarities but also to challenge existing ones" (della Porta 2018a: 12). In this respect, the existing literature tends to emphasize that if events and critical junctures are combined with the successful mnemonic capacity of movements, they can transform the collective memory of broader society. Therefore, most studies focus on a transformation directed outwards, and one that develops at the level of the public sphere (Armstrong and Crage 2006; Wagner-Pacifici 2010; Rigney 2016; della Porta 2018a). Scholars have paid considerably less attention to the ways in which periods of intense mobilization transform the collective memory internal to the groups, activating processes that, in turn, transform the relationships within the groups and their boundaries, which is what Zengin has referred to as a form of "belonging in becoming" (Zengin, 2013). Along similar lines, Whittier (1995) introduces the concept of micro-cohorts to show how joining a group in a different point in time means having different experiences of socialization within that group and connecting the private to the political sphere in different ways. Moments of more intense mobilization are also times at which strong relational ties are built and new memories are made. During public initiatives, examples of struggles enter the public sphere, providing the inspiration for new participants to start mobilizing. In the quote below, one participant reports her experience of encountering the Black Lives Matter protest in Bologna for the first time:

Then one day in the square I saw Lisa, one of our comrades, and I was impressed by her, she was a real power of nature, she's the one who attracted me into the group. She wasn't even talking to me, she was talking to the people in the square […]. And I was captured by her, she talked about her personal experience, how hard it had been for her to get to Italy […] and then the importance of struggle and she said something like "I'm here and I'm talking to you in this square, and I keep on doing this protest after protest, every time, because I never know who might be listening." And then I thought, ok let's go, I need to know her, I need to talk to her. (I-13)

In another example of how a period of intense mobilization corresponded to a qualitative transformation of group ties, fostering a sense of mutual belonging, it is interesting to report the words of an activist who participated in a long struggle in her workplace, a logistics warehouse. The struggle primarily affected migrant women, most of them mothers. In recalling the intense period of mobilization, what is discussed first and foremost is the transformative capacity of that period in terms of building stronger ties of mutual solidarity and recognition among both women workers who were directly involved and also with other movement groups:

The most important thing is to know we were not alone. We were united, when one person lost hope, others were there to give courage […]. We also helped one another more concretely, in these months there were women who didn't know where to place their children, so we offered each other's help, we went to collect others' children after school and look after them until the end of the work shift. We discovered this sisterhood among us […]. And also the comrades of the Coordinamento Migranti helped us in every possible way, from freezing with us at 5.30 in the morning during protest sit-ins, to looking after our children. (I-14)

It is precisely in moments at which a sense of reciprocal belonging emerges that the process of memory building reopens, even when the story of the group seems to be established once and for all.

The occurrence of traumatic events is yet another circumstance that results in a transformation of relational ties, thereby fostering a mutual sense of belonging among participants. In the face of traumatic circumstances, already established ties suffer shocks that are addressed by relying on new stories and new interpretations, adapted for extraordinary circumstances. In these times, new group members can join and others leave; as the composition of the group changes, so do the stories that are available and mobilized at the collective level. Traumatic events can vary greatly in nature; they can relate to

external occurrences or affect group members directly, or sometimes they coincide with moments of intense mobilization. During the fieldwork in Bologna in October 2021, a 22-year-old precarious and outsourced worker originally from Guinea Bissau – Yaya Yafa – died at his workplace, which was an SDA (subsidiary of the Italian postal service, Post Italiane) warehouse in Bologna's freight terminal. Following his death, several migrants felt the need to join the CMB to find a space to discuss collectively the scary feeling of "being killed one after the other", as a migrant said during one of the meetings. When new participants join the group following a traumatic event, there is greater room for mutual listening, as well as an intense effort to interpret the extraordinary circumstances of the traumatic event.

To conclude, what emerges in the case of the CMB is how the main practice of memory work relates to memory maintenance. The presence of a well-established group memory generally constitutes an advantage for the group's capacity to mobilize. However, an established memory can sometimes be counterproductive for the group, because it can be associated with a sense of defeat and the idea that nothing changes, and it can also become hard to challenge. The analysis shows how the process of collective memory construction is never fully completed, and how, under the circumstances of intense mobilization or in line with traumatic events, reopening the process of collective memory construction becomes easier to challenge. When it does restart, the process adapts to the changed circumstances.

5.5 – Everyday political practices as memory in itself

The final section of this chapter addresses an issue that has so far remained in the background. Until now, everyday practices and activities at the group level have been analysed as the context in which practices of memory work are carried out. This section complement the previous ones by considering how everyday practices are themselves the result of memory work.

In the previous sections, the process by which certain parts of biographical accounts in preference to others become the collective memory of the groups was addressed. To do so, for each case I considered some practices of memory work that are at play at the group level, highlighting the similarities between the groups. All practices considered involve forms of intense storytelling and are aimed at building affective ties between participants

that are crucial to the process of memory construction. The analysis later focused on the distinctive features of the three groups and on the different factors that play a role in shaping the process of collective memory construction. However, the analysis as it is leaves a number of questions unanswered. Indeed, not all of the groups' collective memory is built on biographical accounts; there are collective forms of knowledge and practices that come from past political experiences which are themselves the result of previous memory work.

Studies of memory and movements have for the most part focused on the content, or better the objects of memory. Here, instead, the analysis gives primacy on the one hand to a very much relational understanding of memory (the focus on practices of memory work presented above) and, on the other hand, on practices that implicitly constitute an archive of the past. Thus, this section engages with a further understanding of how past political experiences – undergone both in the countries of origin and in Italy – have an impact on the choice of certain practices and organizational structures in the groups considered.

To do so, the analysis follows two main lines of enquiry: how the practices considered come from an already collective past – past struggles and the legacy of previous movements; and how these are reinterpreted according to the specific needs of the present. In other words, this section investigates how practices and organizational structures chosen by the groups analysed represent both the permanence of the past in the present through forms of implicit knowledge transmission, and also a reinterpretation of past legacies based on present necessities. Here again, as Zamponi and Daphy point out, "existing studies on the movement-memory nexus often tend to focus on explicit mnemonic references (i.e., the intentional or conscious recollection of previous experiences)" (2019: 410). Scholars from the broader field of memory studies have emphasized those types of memory that are built-in rituals and practices, which remain largely unquestioned and unconsciously transferred. This is often referred to as procedural memory, "'how to' knowledge, involving action, and […] generally activated in specific contexts" (Nelson 2017: 190). Along these lines, we can look at the focus on practices and their in-built archive as 'how to' knowledge, that calls into question the tools of collective action, part of which is derived from the history of past mobilizations and past ways of doing things.

The analysis focuses on one type of organizational feature – separatism – and on one type of everyday practice – meetings – because these are common to all groups considered. Separatism has been chosen by all three groups considered, although in different ways and

with different interpretations. Meetings are one of the most common practices in political groups. The analysis addresses the ways in which these practices both preserve elements that are inherited from a collective past and are also rearranged on the basis of the groups' specific exigencies in the present. Whereas in the section above, practices of memory work were investigated as activities that facilitate the process of collective memory building in relational ways through intense storytelling and the creation of affective communities, in this section practices are intended to be seen as the result of memory itself. In other words, practices in this sense inherently represent the "permanence of the past in a group's present" (Jedlowski 2001: 40). At the core of this empirical section is a discussion of the following: the role of past experiences that enter the present in non-reflexive ways by means of practices that act as a sort of procedural memory (Jedlowski 2001; Erll 2017); and the effect of present circumstances, needs and actors on reframing these practices (Connerton 1989: 5).

5.5.1 – Separatism and meetings as instances of memory in itself

In this section, separatism and meetings are considered as practices – in the broadest possible sense – that in themselves bring with them a permanence of the past. For all three cases, we look at the traces of legacies from the past that persist in present practices and consider the ways in which these practices are reinterpreted and adapted according to present contingencies. Past and present are here distinguished exclusively for analytical purposes, because in reality they remain at all times intertwined with regard to the ways in which these practices are carried out in everyday life. Moreover, the analytical effort here is to visibilize what remains largely implicit within groups; there are different degrees of self-awareness of the past legacies on which these practices are based, depending on whether they are indirect legacies or more direct types of past political experiences.

The RDMF's choice to adopt separatism as an organizational feature shapes the structure of the whole group, which is separatist along the lines of gender and migration background. In terms of legacies from the past, separatism is without doubt regarded as a practice that has a feminist background, especially in relation to the idea of privileging the lived experience of those groups who have endured multiple oppressions. Moreover, separatism is regarded

as a characterizing feature of anti-colonial and anti-racist struggles both in the past and in the present. The anti-colonial discourse and the construction of an anti-racist subject separate from its Western oppressor is often made explicit as a common denominator that brings together participants with origins as different as East Africa and Latin America. Both the legacy of anti-colonial struggles against the Italians, and a broader understanding of Western colonialism that continues in the present and is confronted by indigenous peoples, among others, are reported not only as a derivation of separatism – in terms of knowledge and skills – but a justification for its adoption. If the question of how activists use the past narratively to justify and legitimize their actions in the present has often drawn the attention of scholars (Polletta 2006; Jansen 2007; della Porta et al. 2018), the idea of practices as knowledge and skills that represent a permanence of the past in the present has often remained in the background, unrelated to questions of collective memory and, rather, investigated through spatial lenses such as the concept of diffusion (Chabot 2010; Romanos 2015). However, practices can be thought of as undergoing a temporal as much as a spatial diffusion; their transmission often remains implicit and is not always verbally channelled. However, they represent an accumulated knowledge that comes from the past and is reinterpreted in the present. Indeed, the necessity for separatism is also strongly linked with dynamics that refer to the present. In the data collected about migrant women, especially those in Italy with previous political experience, it has often been expressed that they feel a need to distance themselves from mixed political groups in which migration is often treated as an issue rather than a lived experience, and anti-racism was scarcely mentioned until it became a fashionable topic. Therefore, separatism is justified by the group's objective of building a new political subject who is emancipated from the vertical dynamics of voice and silence that sometimes exist within the movement milieu.

Another element of criticism that underpins the RDMF's choice of separatism is the widening gap between political consciousness and lived experience. Such criticism has been aimed especially at present-day white feminism. Even if feminist practices are adopted by the group, its relationship with the vocabulary of "feminism" is quite contradictory. Self-determination depends on the possibility of the subjects self-narrating their lived experiences, which increasingly collides with an hyper-complex terminology used within certain feminist environments that are perceived as imposing a language of emancipation.

Finally, compared with the adoption of separatism in past feminist movements, in which the forms of political activism outside of the household directly challenged the role women played in social reproduction and care work, the case of the RDMF shows the importance of the harsh material conditions of migrant women in shaping the form separatism takes in the present. Members' children are allowed to participate in the activities of the group, because migrant women's lack of time and financial resources means they would not be able to participate otherwise. This adaptation, which no doubt is a result of sheer material needs, is then reformulated in political terms: women participants value the presence of their children as a moment in which they can learn how to be and grow together with important values.

Thus, the type of separatism adopted by the RDMF represents both the permanence of the past in the present and a reinterpretation of this organizational structure based on present material and political necessities, the latter also being a response to the criticism of the existing internal dynamics at the movement level. Consistent with the organizational choice of separatism is the preference for quasi-awareness-raising meetings, which privilege horizontal methods and favour those who have undergone certain lived experiences with a view to building a new political subject. Here again, the indirect legacy from feminist practices of the 1970s is undeniable, and yet it is complemented with certain activists' more recent political experiences before the RDMF was formed. For instance, an activist provides an example of how her previous political experiences both in Rome and elsewhere convinced her to look for more horizontal practices that would allow subjects to voice their claims directly:

> After heading back from my three years' experience of self-government in Turin, in the *Cavallerizza Reale,* an artistic squat where we tried to get rid of anything that was outside to re-compose a collectivity, a community […] and this is something I brought with me when I got back to Rome, as a political tool: horizontal meetings in which to understand others and draw from them. When I got back to Rome I tried to reconnect with those who did politics with me at the time, so the militants who took part in Via Cupa experience in 2015–2016, I'm referring to the Baobab experience, a completely self-organized experience where there were more than 3000–4000 passers-by, migrants, who from disembarking in the South came to Rome […] And there we tried to deconstruct the welfare system and engage with a politics that wasn't even the "movement politics" that dealt with migration as an issue. Us, daughters of migrants, who were also intercultural mediators in that context, started to oversee the meetings and bring migrants inside the meetings. (I-7)

In this respect, it is interesting to note how at different moments in time, various parts of past histories, some of which are in the form of indirect legacies, whereas others are direct experiences, have an impact on the ways in which practices are adapted in the present.

The women and LGBTQ+ sections of the MMRN gather for separate meetings and yet they do so in a very different way from the case discussed above, because the group as a whole is mixed both in terms of origin and gender. An unusual distinction here is the choice of separatism not so much as a legacy from the past, but as a present-day necessity, even though Italian activists openly distance themselves from separatism, claiming it is not part of their own Marxist–Leninist history, but rather a legacy of the feminist movement they have often regarded with scepticism. However, given the political conditions in the present, they consider separatism as a necessary organizational situation for migrant women participants so they are able to recognize common grievances and bring forward a unified voice later in the general meetings. This method particularly addresses the challenge of mobilizing women who are often victims of human trafficking, or sex workers, and who in general are faced with very precarious life conditions.

> It was hard to make them participate as protagonists, even during meetings, so we chose let's say this separatist path. But I'm not in favour of separatism. (I-19)

Thus, this case shows how the challenge of negotiating between what is considered a collective past and what it is not entails a transformative choice in relation to the present-day political circumstances that is far from clear cut, because it is a choice that directly involves the identities of groups and their capacity and willingness to readjust them. Although separatism in the previous case was fully embraced as a political preference, in this case it is regarded as a necessary intermediate step and a strategic organizational choice based on the political circumstances. However, the ways in which meetings are conducted, no matter the strategic or ideological reasons behind them, have an effect on the type of social relations built by such a collective mechanism. The same activist who ideologically opposes separatism describes the women's first meeting as transforming the bonds between participants, a powerful description that resonates with the responses from the RDMF:

We met among women last Wednesday. It's been the first meeting, very emotional, because we had never had the chance to simply talk among us and because this mechanism sparked that which they could recognize themselves. This is a major difficulty with women prostituting, especially victims of trafficking: since they live under very harsh conditions, you're used to thinking about their own subjectivity. And instead on Wednesday there was this moment in which they looked at each other, we were also there [Italian activists], and at some point during the meeting this sort of embarrassed feeling developed. It was like when you go out with someone you like for the first time, apologies for the example but it's the only one that comes to my mind to explain this. So you go out with this person and you start talking about the things that you both like, and you get embarrassed but there's also this feeling of discovery of the other person, and inevitably based on who you are. (I-19)

Whereas the type of meeting that results from the choice of separatism is a novelty for this group, other forms of meetings as well as the structuring of hierarchies of meetings based on different levels of participation and political training reflect a Marxist–Leninist tradition. Once again, the forms meetings take is not simply plucked from the past and reapplied to the present; new challenges are addressed by readjusting the "ways of doing things". One interesting example in this case is provided by the language issue, which is often mentioned as a challenge that has a direct impact on how meetings are conducted. First, the presence of many languages means that meetings have to be organized with translations in multiple languages. Consequently, the pace of the meetings is slower, and so is the decision-making process; as a result, meetings can be very long. These multilingual meetings do not simply rely on literal translation, but rather engage with a political translation; the task is to build common ground, shared references and an arena in which active inclusion is guaranteed for the widest number of participants. In this sense, meetings are adapted, and utilize political translation as a practice for enhancing democratization in mixed groups and during the process of deliberation (Doerr 2012, 2018). One way in which multi-language meetings become political is when migrants use different languages depending on who they wish to communicate with, transforming knowledge of multiple languages into an empowering tool that is deployed during meetings. When I participated as an observer at MMRN meetings, during one gathering a long discussion about what struggles the group should become involved in during the subsequent months was taking place. As the discussion went on, mostly in English, two positions polarized, one backed by an Italian activist, the other supported by a migrant activist. At one point, the migrant activist decided to switch

language and started to speak Bambara, which allowed him to direct his communication exclusively to the group of people who spoke that language, and at the same time to exclude Italian activists from the discussion. In this case too, the data collected show two things: how the practice of meetings represents a legacy of the past and, thus, shapes the ways in which proceedings are carried out, often at a very implicit level; and how the way in which meetings are conducted is transformed both by the presence of a new group, which brings with it different past histories, and by present necessities, which contribute to forming the fragile compromise between past and present.

The case of the CMB provides yet another reason for taking the decision to adopt separatism. The group is mixed and has very strong ties with the local feminist section of Ni Una Menos. In this instance, separatism has been adopted almost as a natural consequence of the presence of migrant women. This choice seems to be more related to the present-day ties of the group, rather than to legacies from the past, which are hardly mentioned. The choice of holding separatist meetings is justified by the specific circumstances of migrant women. Their precarity is exacerbated for a number of reasons. First, the residence permit is often related to a male family member, either the father or the husband, and this makes it particularly challenging to leave an unwanted relationship, as well as situations of domestic violence, for fear of losing a regularized status. Moreover, migrant women endure harsher material conditions and are often weighed down with care and social reproduction tasks. Thus, these are some of the main motivations that justify the necessity of discussing certain matters in separate contexts exclusively among women. Along with separatist meetings, the CMB holds two other types of meetings: a larger meeting that is usually held once a month and includes migrants who do not have the time to participate weekly; and a smaller meeting of a number of core activists who meet every week. Based on the data collected, in the case of the CMB it is harder to grasp the negotiation between past and present and the ways in which it has affected the form meetings take as a practice. This is certainly related to the fact that the group is well established and, consequently, the practices implemented at the collective level are stable and not in a transformative phase. It should also be noted with regard to practices that the trade-off between past and present is less visible in longstanding groups and in times of relatively low mobilization.

5.6 – Concluding remarks

This chapter addresses the question of how a shared social past is built in migrants' groups, one that enables the construction of new mnemonic communities and facilitates engagement and mobilization. In moving from the micro level of biographies to the meso-level of shared collective memories, the chapter focuses primarily on the practices of memory work that are put in place at the group level to build a common past.

Some of the key findings emerging from the analysis are: first, the collective memory constructed cannot be regarded as an aggregate of singular memories, rather, various filters are at play for the selection and adaptation of certain pasts in ways that contribute to build a shared common ground. There are various practices of memory work at play within groups, all of which are characterized by forms of intense storytelling and are closely tied to the creation of affective communities. As such, a collective appropriation of participants' stories as if they were everyone's stories is possible. It is primarily on the basis of relationships of belonging that the selection and organization of certain parts of past histories in preference to others occurs. This brings about questions of political belonging that will be addressed more in detail in chapter 6. Instances of these practices include the recursive sharing of personal and collective stories which become well-known by all participants, the construction and transmission of the founding myth of the group, the reference to specific events, mobilizations and struggles conducted in the past, the sharing of everyday life experiences common to various participants, such as lived experiences of racism and discrimination. Second, practices of memory work are active on an implicit level, they are not regarded and discussed by participants as practices aimed at building a collective memory, in this sense they represent "unintentional and nonconscious recollections" (Zamponi and Daphi 2019: 410), which are defined as such by the researcher. Third, while the construction of a shared past enables the creation of novel mnemonic communities, the heritage of the groups does not come solely from the political biographies of participants. In this regard, there are certain features of the groups that play a role in the degree of openness of the process of collective memory construction. The features of the groups that played the role of filters in the process of collective memory construction are:

(i) the different stages of group formation: these play a role in determining the extent to which the process of collective memory construction is generally open or closed. While the process of collective memory construction is never fully closed, as time passes, the gradual

accumulation of memory becomes more established and thus harder for newcomers to challenge it. In turn, this affects the extent to which memory can be enabling or constraining for collective action.

(ii) The ideological values of the group: value-orientations, such as communism or feminism, are grounded in longstanding political traditions that play a role in the process of selection of certain parts of past histories over others, the chosen ones being more likely to become part of a common heritage that participants refer back to.

(iii) The ties to the broader movement milieu: connections to the local movement areas are relevant insofar as they indicate the presence or absence of previously established collective stories, which can influence the selection in the direction of stories that are more attuned to the pre-existing narratives.

Third, in the last section, the analysis shows how certain everyday life political practices carried out by the groups can be interpreted as inherent legacies that the groups carry forward. Rather than being practices of memory building, these should be regarded as bearers of memory in themselves, in the ways they represent the implicit continuations of routinized ways of doing things in the past. In this sense, the analysis lingers on two instances – separatism and meetings – as inherent carriers of past ways of doing things, which are partially taken as such and partially re-adapted to present-day exigencies.

To conclude, the chapter provides a better understanding of how migrant groups build their collective memory by drawing both on parts of participants' biographies and on practices that inherently bring forward legacies of the past. However, these past histories are not simply adopted as they are but, rather, are filtered and are continuously subjected to readaptations based on the present context and exigencies of the group. Finally, these collective memories not only shape group boundaries at the identity level, but have an important impact on the knowledge that is available to these groups, as well as on their discourses, practices and the organizational features selected.

Existing scholarly literature variously highlights the close nexus between memory and collective identity (Somers 1994; Polletta and Jasper 2001; Jedlowski 2001). In particular, Paolo Jedlowski does not see memory as a simple building block of collective identity. Rather, he cites the "critical and destabilizing force" of memory compared with identity.

Memory cannot be reduced to what serves the identity of a group and its present interests, because it constitutes the "depository of traces that may be valid both in defetishizing the existing and in understanding the processes that have led to the present as it is now, and to the criticism of this very present" (Jedlowski 2001: 36). Along these lines, this chapter brings to the fore the close interconnection of memory and affect in building new communities of belonging. The form of political belonging among participants, however, do not automatically match the public and strategic representations that these groups choose to adopt. In the following chapter, the analysis explores this tension, which at least partly condense around the term "migrant".

Chapter six

Political belonging beyond migration

6.1 – Introduction

In the previous chapters, temporality in the form of political biographies, social past and collective memory construction was the central focus. Biographical past, its narrative configuration and the construction of collective memories provide participants with reference points that enable and sustain collective action. In the first empirical chapter, drawing on a combined analysis of form and content, the research discussed the minor role played by migration itself in political biographies as a trigger for mobilization. Migration encompasses a variety of experiences and meanings for participants, and in this sense is quite a weak connecting thread that has a limited mobilizing force. In the second empirical chapter, we focused on the methods of group construction, addressed the challenge of building a collective memory "from scratch" and discussed the practices of memory work that migrant groups utilized to build a shared social past. In this chapter, we move back to an analysis of content to explore the nexus between collective identity and the term migrant and investigate the tension between the way migrants are viewed in public and within their groups.

Indeed, the word "migrant" can be found in the names of all three groups considered. In this chapter, the aim is to obtain a better understanding of how the choice of public self-representation as migrants is negotiated at the crossroads of the micro-, meso- and macro-levels. In particular, the tensions between inward-oriented needs, such as promoting recognition among participants and strengthening group boundaries, and outward-oriented strategic goals, that is, targeting the public discourse on migration and the material conditions associated with migrant status, are explored.

6.2 – Identity: a concept under erasure

Identity informs practices and forms of articulation and representation. As Escobar writes, the profoundly political character of identity rests on "the dense interweaving of expert, state, place-based and activist techniques" of articulation, which can reconfigure power relations (Escobar 2007: 256). In this study, we look at practices and forms of articulation and representation from the perspective of actors mobilizing as migrants. Undoubtedly, the myriad of categorizations associated with migrants are externally produced by state authorities, scientific institutions, the media and political actors for different purposes (Trakilović 2021). As a consequence, mobilizing as migrants not only suggests that forms of internal recognition have to be negotiated across very heterogeneous groups, it also implies that the meaning of externally appointed labels has to be resignified and strategically reused. The analysis shows how the groups resort to multiple identities that both serve the purpose of strengthening a sense of belonging among participants and of challenging externally produced discourses and definitions. Overall, this analysis contributes to answering the broader research question by shedding light on the ways in which migrants coalesce and considering how a weak common thread is dealt with at the collective level.

When adopting the concept of identity, this work acknowledges that we walk along a slippery path. Stuart Hall refers to identity as "a concept operating 'under erasure' in the interval between reversal and emergence; an idea which cannot be thought in the old way, but without which certain key questions cannot be thought at all" (Hall 1996: 2). Hall expresses dissatisfaction with the concept, although he admits its necessity. On the one hand, following deconstructivist scholars, we can no longer refer to identity as an essence that remains stable and true to itself over time. On the other hand, Hall recognizes that the narrative and fictional character of the identity process "in no way undermines its discursive, material or political effectivity" (1996: 4). We find a similar stance in Alberto Melucci's work; from a Social movement Studies perspective, he emphasizes the processual nature of collective identity, while also stressing the limits of the term. In this regard, he writes that "the term 'identity' remains semantically inseparable from the idea of permanence and may, perhaps for this very reason, be ill suited for the processual analysis for which I am arguing" (Melucci 1996: 72 in Emribayer 1997: 296). Similarly, in this

research, the concept of identity is adopted for lack of better options, and it is used to refer to a narratively constructed process that is never fully complete.

6.2.1 – Collective identity in Social movement Studies

The concept of collective identity entered the field of Social movement Studies in the mid- to late 1980s in the framework of the cultural turn in Social Sciences. Scholars started elaborating on the question of collective identity, providing a significant amount of theoretical reflection. Within this debate, Alberto Melucci produced one of the earliest and most important works. In his research, the emphasis on collective identity stems from what he conceives to be a historical change in the dominant forms of collective action, which led to collective actors playing a new role as symbolic signifiers. This process of signification takes place on contentious ground in which movement areas act as cultural laboratories that challenge the dominant cultural codes (Melucci 1989). The potential of movement areas to carry out this countersymbolic work rests ultimately on their capacity to form a distinctive collective identity; thus, activists "reclaim the right to define themselves against the criteria of identification determined by an anonymous power and systems of regulation that penetrate the area of 'internal nature'" (Melucci 1989: 61).

Melucci's theorization is one of the major efforts that has been made within Social movement Studies to disentangle the process of collective identity constitution and relate it to theories of social change. Collective identity was introduced to the sociological debate in the 1970s and 1980s by both Touraine and Pizzorno. However, according to Melucci, both failed to clarify the processual dimension of collective identity, which is based on the interactions and negotiations between actors and with their environment, and regarded it rather as the essence of a movement (Touraine 1973; 1978) or restricted it to a mere condition that could be used to calculate the costs and benefits of collective action (Pizzorno 1983). Melucci maintains that collective identity provides an answer to the question of "how collective action is formed and […] how individuals become involved in it" (Melucci 1989: 30). Collective identity is defined as "an interactive and shared definition produced by several interacting individuals who are concerned with the orientations of their action as well as the field of opportunities and constraints in which their action takes place" (1989: 34).

Melucci's research is based on data collected in social centres in Milan in the 1980s and, thus, his conception of collective identity is located at an intermediate (meso-) level, which he calls a movement area, also referred to as a recruitment network. These networks are a key factor in understanding how individuals influence each other, negotiate motivations and become involved in collective action. In line with this, some scholars turned to network analysis to study the mobilizing capacity of collective identity and pointed out that identities are not based on fixed categories, but rather emerge from common positions in networks (Gould 1995; Mische 1996). Other scholars emphasized the role of social contexts and spaces in which new identities are forged, for example, "free spaces" (Evans and Boyte 1992), "abeyance structures" (Rupp and Taylor 1987) and black churches for the early civil rights movement (Friedman and McAdam 1992). Arturo Escobar (2007), which also focuses on the meso-level with an emphasis on communities, sheds light on the role collective identities play in building communities and engendering a sense of belonging among participants. Adopting an anthropological perspective on social movements, his work puts forward both a processual and relational understanding of collective identity, which he views as being constructed in everyday practices and encounters.

There is little consensus on where collective identity should be located, in the socio-cultural sphere, as a process external to individuals' minds or in the very cognitive process that, ultimately, is carried out by individuals. William Gamson (1995) considers collective identity to be a socio-cultural matter, not an individual one, and describes it as being composed of three embedded layers: the organizational; the movement; and the solidarity group. Social movements have the task of bridging the socio-cultural and individual concepts by working to enlarge personal identities and connect the different levels of collective identity. Taylor and Whittier (1992) and Whittier (1995) maintain that collective identity consists of shared definitions based on common interests, experiences and solidarity. Partly in line with Gamson's distinction, Jasper (1997) outlines three types of collective identity: activist; organizational; and tactical. However, Polletta and Jasper consider collective identity to be located ultimately at the level of individuals' cognitive processes and to consist of the "moral and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice or institution" (Polletta and Jasper 2001: 285); thus, collective identity might be part of personal identity and might be imagined rather than experienced. This work focuses on collective identity as a process located at the meso-level of communities and groups.

However, it acknowledges that most works focusing on a socio-cultural understanding of identity do not address certain questions that concern (a) the links between participants' singular and collective identities and (b) the links between inward-oriented identities for belonging and recognition and outward-oriented identities for public representation in response to externally produced discourses.

6.2.2 – Migrants and collective identity

The case of collective action undertaken by actors that mobilize as migrants is especially useful for addressing the two points above not yet considered. In the analysis provided here, we consider how the groups activate as migrants (meso-level) in relation to what has emerged from the analysis of political biographies (micro-level) and with regard to externally produced labels and discourses (macro-level). As has become clear from the analysis of political biographies, being a migrant is hardly ever a deeply felt identity in relation to political engagement. However, there is no denying that migrants are the subject of discourses produced by the media, state authorities, institutional and non-institutional political actors, scientific communities, etc. Therefore, looking at the meso-level of movement groups mobilizing as migrants entails exploring the ways in which these tensions are negotiated both internally among participants and externally in relation to the broader society.

As far as migrants' collective identity is concerned, De Genova (2005, 2010) has pointed out that the label "migrants" is a type of "we" that has "nothing positive in common […] except the negative relation to the machinery of the state, which reduced [migrants] to rightless denizens and de facto 'suspects'" (De Genova 2010: 104). Therefore, a migrant is considered to be a person who has a negative relationship with the state. Further, De Genova defines "migrant" as ultimately a negative identity in itself, and claims that "there is nothing positive, essential, or cohesive about it which could coalesce around any sort of distinct "group" or "population". He adds that it is crucial to avoid at all costs the trap of endorsing culturalist notions of a generic 'immigrant experience'" (2010: 104), which he also refers to as immigrant essentialism (De Genova 2005). In his analysis of migrants' mobilizations in the USA in 2006, De Genova proposes that queerness as a type of "identity without an essence" (Halperin 1995), can be seen as a metaphor for conveying the idea of

an “assortment of different identities that came to be bundled together through the mere commonality of belonging, however haphazardly, to that category that is the part of no account – the disposable, ever-deportable mass of migrants with debased, negligible, or no legal personhood whatsoever, who from the standpoint of the dominant order of citizenship, simply do not exist” (De Genova 2010: 104). Engin Isin (2009) suggests that however these actors are externally labelled, as “migrants”, “refugees”, “foreigners”, etc., they ultimately resist categorization. In this sense, he emphasizes the performativity of citizenship and describes a type of agency that challenges its boundaries exactly by avoiding such categorization: the premises of citizenship are unsettled by rejecting state-given categories aimed at governing migration (2009: 367). Similarly, other scholars have suggested on the one hand that the increase in categorizations referring to the term migrant is an attempt to govern migration better, and on the other that there is a general tendency to reject those labels (Zetter 1991, 2007; Schuster 2005, Trakilović 2021). Both Zetter and Trakilović, focusing on the labels of “refugee” and “migrant”, respectively, refer to these terms as being the result of a top-down labelling process. However, Trakilović (2021: 35) admits there should be an opportunity to “acknowledge and leave space for exploring the ways in which these categories are managed, contested, and possibly re-worked by individuals according to a bottom-up logic”.

In the current analysis, we adopt a similar understanding of this double direction of top-down labelling and bottom-up contentious re-work of such categories. Moving from the factual element that refers to the adoption of the term migrant as a collective identification, we look at this two-directional dynamic from the meso-level of the movement groups investigated. In the first section, the analysis focuses on three things: the ways in which migrants are produced as objects of discourse by different authorities; the perceptions migrants’ groups have of such discourses; and the challenges arising thereof. In the following section, the focus shifts to internal group dynamics and begins by acknowledging the fact that being a migrant does not play a major role in cementing ties within the group; it then moves on to consider how alternative forms of belonging are developed at the group level.

6.3 – Perceptions of and challenges to top-down articulations of the term migrant

This analysis takes the move from the objective fact that all groups considered adopt the term migrant as a collective public representation of their activities and struggles. While the debate on migration has long been polarized in Italy, all three groups emerged in correspondence with moments of juncture for the history of migration and anti-racism in Italy, along the Mediterranean border area, and in Western countries more broadly. In fact, the CMB emerged in 2004, in response to a very restrictive Law on migration, the so-called Bossi–Fini Law, the MMRN started mobilizing in 2016, in correspondence with the so-called long summer of migration, and the RDMF became visible in June 2020 during BLM protests against racism and police brutality that followed the assassination of George Flyod. In these framework, it certainly made sense to self-represent in the public sphere as migrants, adopting the term as a type of collective identification, although with slightly different slants to it. And yet, criticism and problems are raised with respect to the very use of the term migrant, in particular with respect to external attempts to overdetermine migrant constituencies and fostering a negative depiction of migration.

In line with the existing literature, many respondents from across the three cases considered recognize how the term migrant and its associated attributes is produced at the macro-level by various actors and is imposed on them. At the same time, as discussed in Chapter 1, being a migrant alone is insufficient to explain the trajectories of political activism. In particular, the experiences of migration do not constitute a trigger for participation or form a migrant identity that is deeply felt by individual respondents. As a consequence, other identities inevitably complement or alternate with the one of migrant. Before analysing these various identities, we consider the meaning that the term migrant has acquired in these groups, starting by looking at how top-down discourses on migration are perceived and contended by the participants.

One respondent from the RDMF (I-5) emphasizes that the likelihood of obtaining a residence permit depends on a person's willingness to behave as a "good migrant". She suggests that the characteristics of a "good migrant" are defined by both the original and new societies and that many migrants act according to that image, especially in the early stages after migration. The "good migrant" is not only shaped by state institutions and associated with the necessity of obtaining a residence permit, but is also linked with the desire to comply with a socio-cultural image both in relation to family and friends in the new society, showing the successful path of migration through status markers, and in the

original society, where recognition is sought through deferential behaviour. Moreover, the idea of a "good migrant" is ultimately useful to the labour market, because it makes people more easily exploitable:

I arrived and I was a migrant who has to earn and save money, I was a caregiver, a cleaning lady, and at first that's what I did. The first two years I mostly just behaved like the good migrant, in every way. I acted like the good migrant – that's how I call it – paying taxes, showing the status, getting the paperwork done. But I mean the good migrant in a stereotyped way, the one they like, and who works like a slave, and says thank you for that […] who collaborates, even contributes to the stereotype, to the collective image that Europe gives you, right? And, on top of that, you even consume here, do you understand? And that's what I did, I remember being eager to reach that ideal, I also wanted a pair of trousers or a jacket with a signature print, I wanted to be recognized for the effort that I was making […]. Ultimately all of this behaving like the good migrant ends up feeding into the oppression that weighs you down. Then my path changed, with time I became more aware, and it is also as a result of that awareness that we created the RDMF. (I-5)

Similarly, a respondent from the MMRN emphasizes the way in which the figure of the migrant is produced in the relationship with state authorities, even more so considering the political unwillingness to grant neither a route to citizenship to newcomers nor stability to long-term migrants. She provides several examples of how state institutions purposefully leave migrants in a state of endless uncertainty through interminable waiting times and short-term residence permits, similar to what Liza Schuster (2005) refers to as the mobility across statuses and regimes of migration. In the quote below, the respondent stresses the importance of observing the relationship between police officers and migrants at the immigration office at the police headquarters (*questura*) in Naples:

The immigration *questura*: we go there every day and we deal with the police. It is not a pleasant thing to do, but it is also the only way we have to understand what is going on, both at a normative level and at a practical level. Because of course there is one law and many different interpretations of that law. You get to understand how that law is applied in your territory from the interaction between police officer and migrant. (I-19)

The same respondent explains how the help desk activity organized by the MMRN is not only useful because it provides information to migrants on the matter of residence permits, but also because it broadens their perspective beyond obtaining this and encourages them to look beyond the stressful short-term rhythm currently imposed on their lives. In this

sense, the group activity resists the condition of precarity and vulnerability that migrants are systematically brought back to by the legal production of illegality and its discursive reinforcements (De Genova 2002):

Going to the local *questura* and doing the help desk are useful activities for two reasons. The first one is that you get to tell people their own rights and inform them about their current state. The second is to build a broader perspective on people's life: it's about your life, and what you want to do with it. (I-19)

Migrant as a label is also produced by the **scientific community**, which has often contributed to a monolithic understanding of mobility and migration, and at times has fostered an image of migrants as victims. In this regard, a respondent rejects the attempts of several social scientists to define him as a victim by focusing persistently on trauma:

I am not a victim, I am not a victim. Words are important, I stopped giving interviews to anyone for this reason. How things are told, how people are represented: these are serious matters. I'm not and I don't want to be represented as a fragile victim […] what I need is to be represented as a person who fought back, to make sure that the same things wouldn't happen to someone else. (I-18)

Finally, a top-down discourse on migrants is also produced in the **media**, which alternates images of migrants as victims with images of them as intruders and potential perpetrators of crimes (Eberl et al. 2018). In line with this, one respondent recalls how during some protests that occurred inside reception centres in response to miserable living conditions, migrants' voices and struggles were consistently misrepresented by the press; rather, they were instrumentalized to reinforce an already existing impression:

We had a problem with the protests in the reception centres and we started discussing about bringing the protest outside of the centres, the problem was that whenever journalists arrived, the message that was reported outside was never in line with what was actually going on. (I-2)

These few examples are useful for providing an understanding of the multiple top-down representations of "migrants": the production of illegality in relation to the state; the production of deferential and exploitable subjects with regard to the labour market; and the dichotomous image of victim and invader produced by the media and scientific discourses. However, more importantly, they show how these articulations are perceived and

contended by the actors mobilizing as migrants. If, on the one hand, there is a widespread awareness of being produced by externally appointed characteristics, on the other hand, the groups put in place different counterdiscourses and practices aimed at challenging these images. In this sense, the adoption of the term migrant is not a linear choice: groups mobilize as migrants and this generally makes them better able to intervene in the public discourse. As this section shows, though, in doing so the groups engage critically with the labels that are imposed upon them from the top-down, and aim at undermining already existing articulations of the term migrant.

The following section focuses on the ways in which the term migrant is adopted and signified across the different groups. As the analysis of political biographies showed, the experience of migration is often eschewed by individual participants' political trajectories. This raises questions as to whether and to what extent the term migrant is used by these groups as a shared identity not only to challenge external discourses, but also as a common denominator within the groups themselves. Thus, how is the term migrant signified and how is it associated with other alternative or complementary identities to provide a basis for mutual recognition and to foster a sense of belonging among participants?

6.4 – Belonging beyond migration

When considering the meaning that the term migrant acquires internally in group dynamics, a common thread can be detected. Across the three case studies, migration is mostly referred to as a specific material condition far more than a deeply felt identity. Migration as a material condition is characterized by a series of intertwined forms of oppression. Difficulties in accessing a regular status are connected to issues of both housing rights and labour rights, which, in turn, are the conditions for obtaining a residence permit. These multiple forms of oppression, often referred to by the respondents as a blackmail, are then bundled together with forms of gendered and racist violence, which are exacerbated by a fragile legal status.

Such an understanding of the term migrant as marked by multiple intertwined oppressions is shared by all groups and has led participants to resort to multiple identities that are complementary or alternative to the migrant one for the purposes of strengthening mutual recognition and creating a sense of belonging.

6.4.1 – RDMF: Building a new family of belonging

In the RDMF, the term migrant is more often referred to as a form of self-identification. This specificity is rooted in the group's choice of separatism (along the lines of gender and migration background) as a form of organization. The lived experience of migration is articulated as the basis for mutual identification as opposed to instrumental discourses produced at the level of the movement area and to forms of misrecognition existing in society more broadly. In turn, this process of identification has an impact on the specific modes of participation that the RDMF has developed. Keeping away from the usual forms of militancy and activism, which tend to privilege intense participation, time availability and a relatively high level of acquaintance with political debates, the RDMF openly aligned the process of participation and decision-making with the participants' limited time and their lack of previous political experience. In this way, the precarious living conditions migrants find themselves living under, rather than constituting a barrier to participation, are taken into consideration and valued as inherently political.

Moreover, identification as a migrant, especially when embraced and adopted by children of migrants, is connected with shared experiences of racism. As one respondent with Eritrean origins who was born in Italy explains, this form of self-identification is built on the racialized experience that migrants' children share with migrants. If the everyday life of migrants' children is continuously marked by forms of racist misrecognition, encounters with other migrants often provide the basis for recognition.

> Living everyday with this awareness of having to narrate and make yourself visible every second, from when you get out of the house to when you get on the bus, the person in front of me always has a very clear narrative about myself, right? Over time I noticed that those who live my same racialized experience have more tools at their disposal to make me visible […] they recognize me. Whenever you feel expected and anticipated as a person, as an equal other, that is an experience that is more unique than rare for us. […] and then of course my parents are migrants, and all things considered […] it is precisely migrants who recognize me, and in doing so they give me a chance to come into the open and reason as a political entity. (I-7)

In this case, the migrant identity is associated with experiences of racialization that are often reported and shared between participants. This constitutes an exception in the data

collected and, more broadly, with respect to tendency of recently formed groups mobilizing against racism to avoid the use of the term migrant. Traditionally, as Lentin (2004) noticed, the anti-racist movement in Italy has generally associated forms of racism exclusively to the question of migration. In more recent year, groups of racialized subjectivities and people with a migration background started mobilizing for citizenship and against racism, avoiding the use of migrant as a category that does not provide the grounds for participants' mutual recognition and identification. Recently formed groups privileged an articulation of racism embedded in the everyday life experience of racialized subjectivities, often having to address difficulties related to the framing of a discourse around race as a critical concept in the Italian context. In this sense, the RDMF constitutes a quite exceptional case as it brings together questions of racialization and migration in a way that speaks to both the tradition of Italian anti-racism and its new forms and groups emerging in more recent years.

Nonetheless, the majority of respondents refer to migration as a material condition of extreme vulnerability far more than they express that being a migrant is a deeply felt type of identity. For this reason, other identities are mobilized and juxtaposed with the migrant one. One important form of identification that emerges from the data is the idea of building a **new family of belonging**, chosen rather than inherited, and based on **gendered relations** among racialized women with a migration background that revisit family-type connections and resemble, for example, mother–daughter and sisterhood ties.

From the early 1980s, scholars started to look into gender and migration more extensively (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2000, 2003). Although some research tended to treat gender simply as a variable – the so-called add gender and stir approach – other feminist-oriented studies engaged with gender as a central organizing principle of migration as well as a key theoretical concept. Scholars examined gender and the conflicts emerging from it as an experience of migration, and investigated the dichotomy of migration and emancipation, focusing on whether and to what extent gender norms and roles are challenged and transformed through migration, coming to very different conclusions (Foner 1976; Ferree 1979; Pedraza 1991). Many of these studies focus on the family–work nexus, but are now more cautious in saying there is a positive relationship between women's entry into the labour market and gender equality in the household. The study of family is central to this line of research and is considered relevant in decision-making processes concerning migration (Grasmuck and Pessar 1991; Pedraza 1991). Moreover, researchers have focused

on the role of family and care in transnational migration processes, looking into how familial ties are maintained across time and space because of technology (Parreñas 2001, 2005), and how as a consequence of globalization, global care chains displace care and emotional work from mother-to-children relationships to caregiver–care receiver working ties (Hochschild 2000). Here, we bring together family, gender and migration in a quite different way, and consider the underexplored case of migrant women's mobilization. In the data collected, the category of family in general, and the role of specific family members in particular, are often highlighted as being significant. This recurrent recourse to family as a form of identity in the data collected is quite common across the three case studies, but is especially relevant to the RDMF. The term "family" and the language associated with it are referred to in two distinct – although partially overlapping – ways: family as political family; and family as family of origin. The analysis shows how in the context of migrant women's political activism, the term family is primarily evoked so it can be resignified in political terms. In this sense, the use of the category of family and the language attached to it serves the purpose of building new post-migration community ties.

In the case of the RDMF, the reference to the family is more extensive and rooted in the very articulation of the group, because migrant women clearly refer to family in their group's name (translated as Network of Migrant Women and Daughters) in order to politicize the connection between generations of mothers and daughters with a migration background. Moreover, the group is described as a horizontal solidarity network that is active in helping participants cope with the loneliness and uprootedness of migrant life. For instance, periods around holidays are perceived as particularly hard times to endure, and migrant women in the RDMF often celebrate festivities together, describing their ties with the organization as being with a new and chosen family, as opposed to biological family ties:

> In the end I stayed in Rome, with this family from Milan and Florence I kind of broke the ties, because sometimes I was going back to meet them and I couldn't […] I became less tolerant with certain things and they weren't willing to understand me […] it is mostly about relationships and how I could no longer tolerate sexist and violent behaviours that some cousins were engaging in against their wives at the table. They would tell me things like "he is your cousin, he is your family, and so you have to shut up". I didn't accept this and I stepped away from these relatives. In the meantime, I found this big feminist family. (I-5)

The idea of family as a collective identity is addressed from yet another perspective, that is, the idea of the family of origin as the bearer of the past heritage and values that are encapsulated in the experiences of the family and its members. This refers in particular to the relationship with the mother. In this regard, a recurrent pattern is a politicized version of the mother–daughter relationship, and respondents claim to have learnt feminism from their mothers. However, the mothers do not recognize themselves as being feminists:

I took inspiration from my mother to be a feminist. My mother[…] even if she doesn't know, she doesn't understand yet what it means to be a feminist. But I took it from her, the idea of independence and of not […] of taking what is mine in life, of fighting back when situations are unfair and reminding myself that I don't have to apologize to the world for existing. This is what my mother taught me without knowing. (I-8)

Migrant women who refer to their mothers' life experiences recognize these as inherently political and also state their uniqueness, which, ultimately, is the mothers' unawareness that they are actually participating in political activity. As a result, the migrant women do not belittle the experience of everyday struggles, but rather recognize them as crucial for their political activism. Much more than the migrant identity, the reference to family as a form of political recognition allows participants to include their personal stories and their strongest affective ties in a community of belonging that extends beyond actual participation and is experienced and imagined as well.

This type of identification gives way to forms of care initiated by the RDMF that in many respects resemble those put in place by families for their members because they are based on informal and concrete forms of reciprocal sustenance. Unlike other groups active at the movement level, who organize quite structured forms of direct social action generally aimed at the poorest sections of the population, the RDMF works as an informal support network for participants and their acquaintances. During the COVID-19 lockdown, for instance, participants would keep in touch and help each other:

At the beginning of COVID we all got stuck, some of us were left without a job, others were having problems paying the rent or even getting supplies. Unfortunately, several of us were in this condition, some were friends

of friends. And what we did was share information, helping each other the way we could, small things like "look there is a free room in a flat in this neighbourhood" or "I can cover for the grocery this week". (I-6)

However similar in form, these types of mutual help should be interpreted as a type of care work that far from having a socially reproductive scope, aims to transform traditional gendered relations and to challenge the role that migrant women are expected to play in the labour market in Western societies. Indeed, the socialization necessary to enable women to perform reproductive work is a heavy task for migrant women not only within the family, but also within the labour market of their destination countries, where they are largely employed in care work (Hochschild 2000; Parreñas 2001, 2005). In this framework, the RDMF provides an example of how participants utilize care work in selective ways, deploying it as a resource directed at struggles that are intended to be radically transformative. In this regard, one respondent recalls the time when the group obtained access to its own social space in the Porto Fluviale squat. In the quote below, she refers to a common work activity for migrant women – doing the cleaning – in two completely different ways:

And having that space has been […] so we are people who normally don't own a house, some of us have a house rented here or there, but that space […] the first time we went there to do the cleaning we started to clean the bathroom. I knew that we had all cleaned bathrooms that weren't ours, our mothers, our aunts, our friends, there's always this thing that we clean someone else's bathrooms. And that day I remember it was like […] how cool is that to clean this bathroom? It's ours! We were physically taking care of it, laying down a tile where it was missing, putting a cute object in the corner, taking care of our space […] and I remember the four of us there laughing, listening to reggaeton and cleaning the floor telling one another "it's the first time in your life that you actually enjoyed cleaning a toilet, isn't it?" (I-5)

The process of signification articulated around the idea of family, which also gives way to specific forms of participation and organizational expression, shows how family, family language and family stories – usually a conservative frame mobilized by right-wing actors – is deployed here in a radically different way. Far from reproducing the traditional family features, participants find new ways of building a sense of community by connecting their matrilineal family heritage with the idea of a new political family. This type of identification

shows how the notion of family is revisited and filled with new meanings, a process that is directed at the transformation of social relations rather than at social reproduction. In this case, the idea of family is deployed as a complementary identity to that of migrant, rather than an alternative one. Indeed, this new form of political belonging emerges in the framework of a separatist group that refers to its participants as members of a new, chosen family. Finally, the reference to female family members and to migration background in the name of the RDMF, as well as the choice of separatism, call into question the debate on intersectionality. Participants experience intersecting lines of oppression that encompass migration, race, gender, and class-based discriminations. Intersectionality provides a lens from which to look at the multiple and simultaneous lines of oppression that affect migrant women and, at the same time, paves the way to reflections on the ways in which these groups cope with intersecting oppressions. In the case of the RDMF, the choice of separatism can be interpreted as a necessity to organize among participants that experience multiple forms of oppression. As some scholars have emphasized (Crenshaw 1991; McCall 2005; Yuval-Davis et al. 2019) intersecting patterns of discrimination change across contexts. To give an example, participants emphasized class-based oppression, poverty, and material strains as the main problems they faced during Covid pandemic. For what concerns their relationship with the broader anti-racist movement, instead, the RDMF denounces how gender-based discrimination does not allow them to speak from the perspective of migrant and racialized women. At the same time, the ties to the broader movement milieu call into question the limited relevance attributed to race-based oppressions, in favour of a class or gender-based focus. In this sense, the RDMF aims to cultivate a type of political belonging that allows participants to engage without having to eschew bits and pieces of their experience.

6.4.2 – MMRN: Belonging as activists

In the case of the MMRN, the term migrant, rather than constituting a deeply felt identity, is used to refer to a specific material condition that primarily calls into question the matter of the residence permit and the different forms of precarity that stem from having one or not. In line with this, participants do not build a common narrative around the term migrant; on the contrary, they tend to disengage from it in different ways. One respondent emphasizes

the necessity of making a clear-cut distinction between "migrant" and "refugee", and identifies with the latter:

Sometimes I use the word "migrant", even though I do not always like this word: we must say refugees. Because if we always speak about migrants in this way, we end up facilitating the discourse of the right. These people are here in Italy because they are seeking asylum, they are refugees, they had to flee from their country. It is on these grounds that they have rights. And us refugees, we are many. (I-3)

Another respondent from Sri Lanka stresses the difference between different types of migration, referring in particular to those types that are generally made invisible, as opposed to others that are hyper-visibilized:

Let's say that there are many differences among us, for example immigration from Africa reaches Italy in a certain way, and is very visible. While our part is completely invisible, we enter via other routes, such as family reunification or study visa. (I-1)

If, then, being a migrant is hardly ever the basis for a deeply felt identity, there are other elements for mutual recognition that migrants resort to instead. Primarily, some participants identify with a shared **activist identity**, which fosters ties between migrant and non-migrant groups. It is interesting to note how personal pronouns are used by respondents: the pronoun "we" tends to refer to the role of activists rather than to that of migrants. In this sense, the "we" fosters connections between Italian-born activists and migrants who participate in the struggle:

One person comes to the legal desk, and we notice that that person has a difficulty with the language. (I-2)

This form of identification is based on ideological affinity as well as on the intensity of participation. The importance of ideological affinity is best explained by an Italian activist, who retracing the early stages of group formation, refers to the important role played by migrants who were already familiar with the Marxist movements and participated in mobilizations in their countries of origin:

These practices of mutualism are central for the MMRN, because the first type of trust that we had to build with these people [migrants] was inevitably based on a form of material assistance. But this mechanism can

backfire, it can end up being "I give you the service, you come to the rally". We tried to dismantle this mechanism with migrant militant cadres, who played an in-between role. Over time, in reception centres, we met people who were more predisposed to the struggle, some of them were militants in their countries of origin, they had already participated. (I-MAD)

Although **ideological affinity** provides a basis for immediate identification, an activist identity is not solely built among communists who were already involved in political activities before their decision to migrate. Duration and intensity of participation, which increase the number of shared experiences, are also relevant for building mutual recognition. In this regard, various respondents articulate a difference between migrants as short-term participants, who join the group for the time necessary to obtain a residence permit, and activists, who decide to stay and fight for everyone's rights. A respondent describes three different types of people who participate in the MMRN:

We got to understand one thing: there are three types of people. There are people who come here because they want a result, they want to solve their problem. Once their problem is solved, they leave, this is not a problem. There is a second type of people who come over to participate in different struggles, not only for their problems, but to get known, to socialize, to have the chance to be together with many other people. There is then the last type of people who understood the mechanism: they got to understand how this country works and decided to engage in the struggle, not just for their own well-being, but for everyone's. (I-2)

Over time, ongoing participation leads to relationships built on activism being transformed into **friendship** ties:

Inevitably you create friendship ties, I don't mind telling you that with some of them we go out, we go have walks along the seafront, they are our comrades. (I-1)

We like these guys better [ex-OPG (ospedale psichiatrico giudiziario – a former mental asylum for criminal offenders, now a revolutionary social centre) activists], we got closer to them, not just for politics, we are more attached to them like friends, like brothers and sisters. (I-4)

As the analysis shows, participants align with an activist identity that is based on ideological affinity, intense participation and, over time, the construction of friendship ties.

Other forms of mutual recognition are available at the group level for migrants who participate for shorter periods of time or on specific occasions, for example, in association with public mobilizations. In line with this, one respondent distinguishes between migrant comrades and brothers and sisters:

Actually, it is precisely our migrant comrades who were able to activate this mechanism of struggle. It is them who talk to our brothers and sisters to get them to participate in the broader political movement. (I-MAD)

Another example of this is the recourse to the idea of political family. Similar to the RDMF, family and family language are referred to as a way of building new post-migration community ties. Thus, family is conceived as a new chosen family and participants commonly refer to one another as brothers and sisters. During the legal help desk activity in particular, an oft-heard sentence is: "brother/sister, don't make yourself afraid, you're not alone, you found a new family and we will solve this together". The idea of a new family is utilized as a synonym of solidarity and as an antidote to fear, loneliness and bewilderment.
To conclude, in the case of the MMRN, multiple identities are deployed as an alternative to the term migrant, which far from inspiring engagement and recognition, is framed as divisive. Various kinds of mutual recognition are available to participants. Most of these forms of identification are based on intense and longstanding participation, ideological affinity and friendship ties. William Gamson (1995) regards collective identity as simultaneously sustained by three embedded layers to which participants attribute different relevance: the organizational; the movement; and the solidarity group. In the MMRN, the type of activist identity presented shows how participants tend to privilege the organizational dimension of their collective identity, thus fostering stronger ties with other non-migrant activists who share similar forms and intensity of participation. However less prominent, there are also other forms of mutual recognition that give less prominence to intense participation and focus more on the feelings of fear and loneliness that are linked with migrants' material concerns.

6.4.3 – CMB: Belonging as heritage

Similar to the previous cases, in the CMB, the term migrant is used to refer to an extremely precarious material condition in which questions of obtaining a residence permit, residency, work, gender and racially based violence intertwine. Moreover, respondents tend to emphasize the considerable diversity of the migrant group in terms of experiences, waves and types of migration and diasporic communities of origin:

Right now in the coordination there are a lot of different migrants, the so-called second generation, refugees, asylum seekers, long-term migrants, students, a little bit of everything. (I-15)

As a result, group participants refer to a multiplicity of identities that contribute to filling the void left by the generally weak connecting thread of simply being a migrant. The longstanding history of the CMB provides a common heritage to which all participants refer as a source of identification. Both long- and short-term participants mention the multiple struggles that the group has engaged in over the last 20 years as grounds for recognition. Although long-term participants were personally involved in those struggles, those who joined the group at a later stage still rely on "the ability to experience events that [...] happened to groups and communities to which we belonged long before we joined them, as if they were part of our own past" (Zerubavel 1996: 290).

In this respect, a key part of that heritage refers to the story of migrant workers. On the one hand, identifying as migrant workers entails referring to the history of the precarity of the labour market and the struggles that the CMB has itself engaged in over the course of the last 20 years. On the other hand, it refers to present-day struggles in the workplace that several participants are engaging in, especially in the logistics sector.

When I arrived in 1992, I started doing a bit of activism with the CGIL [General Italian Confederation of Labour] union, we were among the first migrants to participate, I was a volunteer and I helped with the legal desk on Saturday mornings. At the beginning, the only reference point for migrant workers' rights was the CGIL. But this thing got lost: there was the crisis in 2008 which obviously broke up the workers. Precarity took over, "work flexibility", the famous "*contratti internali*". As a result of this break, the mobilizing power of the union decreased and grassroots unions emerging from the movement became stronger. There's another aspect that is specific to migrant workers. I remember telling them [the CGIL] "this thing that they're trying to do at the detriment of migrant workers, once they understand that it works, they're going to extend it to everyone else, it's about time we fight back to protect the rights of migrant workers to protect all workers." But this thing was

never quite understood. Later, during a protest in the workplace, I met the Coordinamento Migranti, and that was the moment when I ultimately distanced myself from the CGIL. (I-12)

This long-term participant tells a story that retraces his singular trajectory of activism since his arrival, which mirrors a significant part of the story of migrant workers in general over the course of the last 30 years. In so doing, he also shares that part of the story that led to the creation of the CMB and the establishment of one of the key values of the group, namely, the protection of migrant workers' rights through support for autonomous struggles. This heritage provides the background to present-day struggles CMB participants in the workplace engage in, particularly in the logistics sector.

I also did that job [logistics], I uploaded and downloaded containers, the same job they all do, the job that Yaya did, I know the importance of that job, not just at SDA, DHL: every logistics company needs them, the whole freight terminal, to function, needs them. And yet they're not directly employed, companies use cooperatives to employ them, make them work 13 hours a day, and only pay them 8 or 9 hours, as soon as they raise their heads, they get fired. Migrant workers have problems in organizing, as they do not live together and there's continuous recirculation of employees, so with the CMB we try to help. (I-11)

These struggles in the logistics sector indicate yet another form of identity that is relevant for CMB participants, that of **gender**. The dimension of gender oppression for migrant women is linked with questions of material inequality, the social reproductive labour they are expected to perform and the indirect access to a residence permit, which is often tied to male figures in the family. The respondent below participated in a struggle in her workplace, a logistics warehouse, to fight against the changes in shift patterns introduced by the new employers. The majority of employees were migrant women, several of them mothers, who would have had to leave their jobs as a result of the new shift schedule. Strikers self-identified as both mothers and workers. However, in this case, the gender component is the key identity that emerges from the struggle:

It was us, the most desperate, who went out there to ask for the day shift, otherwise we would lose our jobs […] and throughout the struggle we discovered a strong sisterhood among us, I think it is vital that we don't remain indifferent to other women's problems, because at some point, sooner or later, they're going to affect all women. […] The world, and women too, were convinced to have a few rights, but with this struggle I got to understand that us women we don't have any rights, children are still seen as ours, they belong to the

mothers. To give you an example, when they changed the work shifts, the only ones who lost their jobs were mothers, not even one dad. This makes me want to fight back even harder as a women, as a mother, because I realized that we still don't have the right to be mothers and workers. In our case, society, the company and the owners made it very clear to us: once you've got children you can quietly stay at home, because your child is a problem. (I-14)

In the quote above, the intersection of oppressions is articulated very clearly by the respondent, who given the specific circumstances, chooses to identify primarily as a woman and a mother. In this regard, it is relevant to note how identities are not only transformed across time, but also in different contexts and under changing circumstances (McCall 2005). This type of identification is further sustained by the CMB alliance with the local feminist group belonging to the Ni Una Menos movement. During a general meeting of the CMB, one activist invited all migrants to a rally on 8 March 2022. In her speech, she stresses the necessity of recognizing the connection between racism and sexism and discusses certain issues that are specific to the condition of migrant women. In particular, the fact that the residence permit is often tied to the paterfamilias is mentioned as an example. Because of this, women who are subjected to family violence find themselves in the position of either denouncing violence and being left without a residence permit, or the other way round.
Finally, in the case of the CMB, the long story of struggle constitutes a rich heritage with which long- and short-term participants identify. Identities such workers and women are central to the CMB story and are often coupled with the term migrant. However, simply being a migrant does not contribute to building a sense of belonging among participants.

6.5 – Concluding remarks

The adoption of the term migrant as a form of collective representation is not a linear choice. This chapter focuses on the contradictions, tensions, and negotiations around the choice of the term, in relation to both the macro-level of public discourse and the micro-level of participants. The analysis privileges the perspective of the meso-level of the groups considered.
First, this analysis takes the move from the objective fact that all groups adopt the term migrant as a collective public representation of their activities and struggles. While the debate on migration has long been polarized in Italy, all three groups emerged in

correspondence with moments of juncture for the history of migration and anti-racism in Italy, along the Mediterranean border area, and in Western countries more broadly. In fact, the CMB emerged in 2004, in response to a very restrictive Law on migration, the so-called Bossi–Fini Law, the MMRN started mobilizing in 2016, in correspondence with the so-called long summer of migration, and the RDMF became visible in June 2020 during BLM protests against racism and police brutality that followed the assassination of George Flyod. In this framework, it certainly made sense for the groups to self-represent as migrants, adopting the term as a type of collective identification, although with slightly different slants to it. And yet, criticism and problems are raised with respect to the very use of the term migrant, in particular with respect to top-down attempts to overdetermine migrant constituencies and fostering a negative depiction of migration. If, on the one hand, there is a widespread awareness of being produced by externally appointed characteristics, on the other hand, the groups put in place different counter-discourses and practices aimed at challenging these images. In this sense, the groups mobilize as migrants and this generally makes them better able to intervene in the public discourse, but in doing so they engage critically with the labels that are imposed upon them from the top-down, and aim at undermining already existing articulations of the term migrant.

Second, the focus shifts to the ways in which the term migrant is adopted and signified across the different groups. As the analysis of political biographies showed, the experience of migration is often eschewed by individual participants' political trajectories. This raises questions as to whether and to what extent the term migrant is used by these groups as a shared identity not only to challenge external discourses, but also as a common denominator to foster a form of mutual belonging among participants. The analysis shows how, broadly speaking, the term migrant does not provide a strong and shared basis for identification. In order to cope with a weak common thread, the groups take recourse to a multiplicity of other identities, which are either complementary or alternative to the one of migrant. When investigating collective identities we do not mean exhaustive or stable entities; on the contrary, the examples of multiple collective identities presented here are part of an ever-changing process that varies over time and in different circumstances. As a consequence, the types of identities discussed above are not significant in themselves, but are important in relation to the term migrant, which is deployed by groups in the public sphere, although it constitutes a weak connecting link for fostering internal ties between

group participants. In this sense, we can state that feelings of having a common bond and belonging among participants are not based on being a migrant, but are beyond migration itself. The analysis contributes to the literature on collective identity by moving beyond an understanding of identity as being either strategically deployed in the public sphere or an individual characteristic of participants, and offering an alternative meaning. The case of migrants' collective action in particular, addresses the challenge of negotiating identities when moving in-between the public discourse and the construction of in-group ties.

Conclusions

Over the course of the past couple decades, scholars registered a steady increase in migrants' collective action across Western societies, in a context of growing social complexity, which is in no small part due to migration itself. Against this background, migrants' collective action can no longer be regarded as an exception and, rather, has come to epitomize one key challenge that movements face in contemporary society, namely that of bringing diversity together. Scholars from across Social movement Studies and Critical approaches to Migration have progressively paid more attention to the ways in which migration challenges border regimes and to the numerous struggles enacted by migrants themselves around issues of housing and workers' rights, citizenship and freedom of movement, against racism and state violence. The majority of scholarly works has importantly investigated these forms of collective action from a spatial perspective, often relying on concepts originally elaborated within critical and human Geography. As a way to complement the existing literature, in this research I outlined a temporal approach to the study of migrants' collective action. In particular, this approach draws on an understanding of agency inspired by the work of Emirbayer and Mische (1998), who importantly emphasized how the relationships people estabish with the past, the present, and the future across changing contexts affect their actions. The temporal approach advanced here is linked both to methodological and to analytical choices. Methodologically, the adoption of life histories allows to expand the time-span considered beyond the experience of migration and the moments of visible mobilizations, and paves the way to an understanding of how participants relate to their past in ways that enable their engagement in the present. Analytically, the focus on narratives, memory, and processes of identification as the key working concepts adopted, places temporality at the core of the research. In particular, a temporal approach to migrant's' collective action emphasizes how the processes of recomposition of the past both at the singular and at the collective level are key to legitimize and enable action. More to that, the re-articulation of the past constitutes the ground upon which novel forms of political belonging come into being. Indeed, when building a shared collective past, participants are simultaneously fostering the affective ties that bring them together and constructing new mnemonic communities. A time-sensitive

perspective thus sheds light on new forms of political belonging that exceed territorial and citizenship boundaries and that escape external and top-down discourses around migration. This multi-level analysis moves across the micro-level of political biographies and the meso-level of groups that mobilize as migrants. Life histories are conceptualized as political biographies: the first part of the analysis explores the ways in which participants recompose their relationship to different pasts in a narrative way that enables and sustains their choice to engage in the present. One of the key findings emerging from the analysis of political biographies is how, despite the fact that participants mobilize as migrants, the experience of migration is hardly ever referred to as a trigger for mobilization. This finding importantly emphasizes how the ways in which collective action is represented in the public sphere is not automatically related to deeply-felt types of identities of participants. Consistently, the term migrant provides a collective category used in public representation, but cannot be regarded as a collective denominator capable of fostering ties across participants. The analysis of political biographies further shows how the decision to mobilize is not solely related to watersheds, transformative moments, and strong triggering emotions. Participation is just as much connected to lines of continuity with the past; however, the ways in which these lines are traced vary greatly. In this regard, an analytical distinction is advanced: on one hand, participants with previous political experiences tend to frame their participation in the present as the natural continuation of their political engagement in the past. On the other hand, participants who started mobilizing in Italy build continuity by re-interpreting certain past histories with a political slant. As a result, some political biographies can be more easily related to the concept of activist careers proposed by Fillieule (2010), because they rely on past political experiences and skills developed during previous mobilizations, albeit in different socio-political contexts. Other political biographies, instead, cannot be reduced to activist trajectories; this is especially true in cases of more volatile one-off forms of participation. The latter types of narratives reconfigure occurrences from everyday life experiences, such as family and community stories and educational and working environments, in ways that emphasize their political character. These rearticulations provide respondents with alternative sources of inspiration, motivation, experience, skills and, ultimately, a political past on which they can rely. Along these lines, in political biographies, what is regarded as "political" is not reduced to the sphere of activism and militancy, nor triggered by migration. Rather, political biographies

are recollections based on a multiplicity of spheres of life, from which resources, values, triggers and motivations for participation are drawn. In this sense, the analysis contributes to the studies of biographical trajectories in Social movements, by highlighting the necessity to move beyond an exclusive focus on trajectories of militancy and activism, traditionally intended. The analysis shows how the narrative construction of political biographies has a great potential in shedding light on more volatile and precarious forms of participation. Along the same lines, the analysis of narratives stresses the key role played by perceptions and interpretations in understanding political engagement. The primacy given to the analysis of life histories as narratives sheds light on the agency of respondents in selecting, organizing and, ultimately, re-interpreting their pasts. Rather than tracing trajectory patterns based on objective expectations, the analysis of narratives allows us to look into perceptions and interpretations that are capable of advancing explanations on apparently counter-intuitive decisions, on their timings and forms. In the case of migrants' participation, in particular, these perceptions and interpretations are based on a multiplicity of experiences that encompass different geographical, cultural, social and political contexts and are informed by the process of adult socialization. In this sense, the analysis shows how different ways of selecting and articulating past histories lead to contrasting timings in the process of activism, helping us understand more fully why migrants participate when they do. For instance, the research shows how the interpretation of the movement milieu as a familiar environment drives migrants with past political experience to start participating immediately after their arrival, notwithstanding their precarious material conditions. Similarly, the perception of risk and the fear of repression – key factors when making a decision to opt in or out of political engagement – can vary depending on previous experience of violence, which is shaped by different contexts. For example, past political experiences in non-democratic regimes can set a different threshold with regard to expectations of violent responses from the state; these experiences remain true across different contexts and shape participants' risk perception.

The ways in which the past is recomposed and articulated is not only relevant at the level of singular trajectories of engagement, but importantly invests a collective level, especially in the case of heterogeneous groups. In this regard, one of the key challenges migrants' groups face is the lack of socialization within the same mnemonic communities. Moving on from this dilemma, the analysis sheds light on the ways in which a collective memory of

migrants' groups is constructed. The analyses focuses primarily on the practices of memory work that are put in place at the group level to build a common past. The practices of memory work considered are characterized by forms of intense storytelling and are closely tied to the creation of affective communities. Instances of these practices include the recursive sharing of personal and collective stories which become well-known by all participants, the construction and transmission of the founding myth of the group, the reference to specific events, mobilizations and struggles conducted in the past, the sharing of everyday life experiences common to various participants, such as lived experiences of racism and discrimination. Practices of memory work favour a collective appropriation of participants' stories as if they were everyone's stories. Consistently, it is on the basis of relationships of belonging that the selection and organization of certain parts of past histories in preference to others occurs. While the construction of a shared past enables the creation of novel mnemonic communities, the heritage of the groups does not come solely from the political biographies of participants. In this regard, there are certain features of the groups that play a role in the degree of openness of the process of collective memory construction. The groups' characteristics that play the role of filters in the process of collective memory construction are: the different stages of group formation, the ideological values of the group, and the ties to the broader movement milieu. Moreover, the analysis shows how certain everyday life political practices carried out by at the collective level can be interpreted as inherent legacies that the groups carry forward. Rather than being practices of memory building, these should be regarded as carriers of memory in themselves, as they represent the implicit continuation of routinized ways of doing things in the past, which are partially taken as such and partially re-adapted to present-day exigencies. This section of the analysis contributes in particular to the literature on memory in movements, focusing on relational and implicit forms of memory that have hardly been the focus of scholars' attention.

Finally, the last section of the analysis tackles the question of the use of the term migrant as a form of collective identity for public representation and asks how it comes to be negotiated with in-groups forms of political belonging and contentiously deployed against public discourses around migration. Paolo Jedlowski highlights the "critical and destabilizing force" of memory compared with identity. Memory cannot be reduced to what serves the identity of a group and its present interests, because it constitutes the "depository of traces

that may be valid both in defetishizing the existing and in understanding the processes that have led to the present as it is now, and to the criticism of this very present" (Jedlowski 2001: 36). Along these lines, the analysis of political biographies and collective memory is useful to delve into the complexities of collective identity, contributing to respond to the main research questions which asks how heterogeneous constituencies coalesce into collective formations that mobilize as migrants. While all groups considered adopt the term migrant as a form of collective identification, this choice is far from linear: contradictions, tensions, and negotiations around the choice of the term can be singled out in relation to both the macro-level of public discourse and the micro-level of participants. The choice of adopting the term migrants can be related to the critical moments in which the three groups started mobilizing, in correspondence with key events investing migration in Italy and, broadly speaking, in the framework of a highly polarized public discourse on the matter. The decision to mobilize as migrants make these groups better able to intervene in the public discourse. In doing so, participants raise criticism against hostile top-down discourses around migration, openly engaging in a struggle for representation. Still, as the analysis of political biographies shows, the experience of migration is often eschewed by individual participants' political trajectories. This raises questions as to whether and to what extent the term migrant is a common denominator that fosters a sense of mutual belonging among participants. The analysis shows how, broadly speaking, the term migrant does not provide a strong and shared basis for identification. In order to cope with a weak common thread, the groups take recourse to a multiplicity of other identities, which are either complementary or alternative to the one of migrant. In this sense, we can state that feelings of having a common bond of belonging among participants are not based on being a migrant, but are beyond migration itself. A sense of belonging can take different shapes, the analysis shows how mutual recognition can be related to the reconstruction of a chosen family, to an identity of activism, and to feelings of belonging that stem from a longstanding history of struggle. Interestingly enough, these forms of belonging constitute novel political configurations that emerge in collective action and are detached from both territorial and citizenship boundaries. This analysis contributes to the debate on collective identity in Social Movement studies, by stressing the need to simultaneously take multiple layers and their contradictions into account. How in-group and out-group necessities are balanced,

how affective and strategic purposes are served, and how singular and collective levels are aligned are the key, and at times conflicting, grounds upon which collective identity rests.

A temporal approach to migrants collective action complements the existing literature on forms of mobilizations and resistance around migration, which has almost exclusively focused on a spatial perspective. It does so by delving into the ways in which participants reframe their relation to the past across changing geographic, social, and political contexts. On one hand, these singular and collective re-interpretations of the past contribute to build a legitimizing and enabling ground for political engagement. On the other, this re-work of the past contributes to build new affective and mnemonic communities, paving the way to imagine novel configurations of political belonging. The temporal approach proposed in this research contributes to the vast corpus of literature encompassing Critical approaches to migration, exploring in particular on the forms of micro-mobilization. The research shows how, in spite of its volatility and precarity, migrants' collective action can be regarded as the result of longer processes, extending beyond the peaks of mobilization and the experience of migration alone. The research contributes to the study of Social movements, by focusing on the specificity of migrants' collective action. Rather than giving primacy to resource mobilization, political opportunities, or framing, this work sheds light on the relational work that brings together heterogeneous constituencies. To do so, some key aspects that are generally taken for granted and remain unquestioned are here brought to the fore: among these, shared linguistic codes, references to the same social past, similarities in trajectories of political socialization. In the case of migrants' collective action these pre-conditions are not given and, as such, constitute core aspects that remain to be explored. The research aims to shed light on the formation of relational ties that enable collective action and on the grounds upon which these rest beyond their ephemeral forms. In this regard the analysis of political biographies, practices of memory, and forms of political belonging offer rich insights into processes to collective action that have long been regarded as short-time exceptions.

To conclude, the study of human time applied to migrants' collective action paves the way to three sets of considerations. First, the **temporal perspective advanced has a deconstructive purpose**, directed in particular at the categories of "activist" and "migrant" which often remain under-problematized to the point of gaining a quasi-solid status. On one hand, the specificity of migrants' collective action brings to the fore different forms of

participation, characterized by varying degrees of intensity and duration, at times volatile and precarious, at other times long-term and stable. In turn, these differences are reflected in the frameworks of meaning that sustain them: as the analysis of political biographies shows, the ways in which participants make sense of their decision to engage in collective action vary greatly depending on their past histories and the ways in which they advance a re-interpretation of those past occurrences. In this sense, the research shows how traditional understandings of activism and militancy are insufficient to account for the forms of participation in migrants' collective action. On the other hand, a temporal approach calls into question the experience of migration. Methodologically, the expansion of the timeframe considered via the use of life histories already helps to contextualize the experience of migration in a wider lifetime span, avoiding reducing migrants to the experience of migration alone. Along other lines, the category of migrant is often unreflexively taken to be homogeneous: the analysis shows how the term discloses a great heterogeneity along the lines of age, gender, origin, wave and generation of migration, legal status, etc. Moreover, the analysis of political biographies shows how the experience of migration has very little relevance to the choice of mobilizing. Migration does not play the role of a trigger of mobilization, nor is it reported as an element of continuity that explains the choice of mobilizing in the present as migrants. In this respect, the analysis shows how, to understand the trajectories that lead to participation, we need to deconstruct the very categories that we normally adopt to study migrants' collective action.

Second, the focus of this research on **subjective time facilitates a multi-level analysis**, allowing us to achieve a better understanding of the grey area that connects different analytical levels. In particular, this research draws attention to the connections between the micro and the meso-level. The analysis of collective memory is especially insightful in this regard. In the case of migrants' collective action, there is no already available social past that anticipates and provides a common ground for action. Instead, multiple singular storylines condense in a certain moment in time. In this sense, by observing internal everyday practices and interpreting them as practices of memory building, we are precisely observing that interstice that connects singular and collective levels. Collective memory is explored not so much as a product or an object that is tied to specific *lieux de memoire* (Nora 1989), but rather as a relation that implicitly fosters new collective ties. By looking in-between biographies and collective memories, we gain a better understanding of how

collective formations are permeated by some storylines while, at the same time, eschew others which remain silenced, latent, and forgotten.

Third, by giving primacy to human time this research opens to reflections on the **definition of political**. This work tries to bring forward the idea that transformative agency cannot be reduced to the strategic and organizational side of collective action. The question of what we mean by political has been widely explored by political philosophers working around migration. This research, for its part, builds on those works to try and investigate forms of collective action as both inherently and strategically transformative. In this sense, the analysis sheds light on the grounds upon which we can look at processes of collective action as inherently political. Political biographies of participants who do not have past political experiences provide a significant example in this regard, as they build a framework of meaning that rests upon parts of their lived experiences that come to be interpreted as political. This process of re-signification is not only important to sustain and motivate participation in collective action but also paves the way to new and unexpected forms of subjectivation. In other words, actors decide what can be qualified as political, and their decision contributes to building new political formations with new boundaries. Along the same lines, forms of collective identification can be understood as the sheer result of strategic necessities of the groups considered. However, this leaves out a great deal of complexity that is instead necessary to understand how collective formations, under certain circumstances, can be interpreted as inherently political. In this regard, the analysis reflects on how practices of memory give rise to new communities. In the manuscript I refer to these as affective communities, communities of belonging, and mnemonic communities, drawing a line that connects affects and belonging to the construction of a shared social past. These new communities of belonging often bring together participants who are otherwise excluded from the body politic. These formations can be regarded as inherently political for the ways in which they constitute examples of detachment of political belonging from territorial entities, thus contributing to denaturalizing nationally and territorially bounded identities. Moreover, these new forms of political belonging abruptly interrupt the "homogeneous, empty time" (Anderson 1983: 26) of national communities. In this respect, Anderson writes that "the idea of a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogeneous, empty time is a precise analogue of the idea of the nation, which also is conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history" (Anderson 1983: 26).

Novel communities of political belonging shall thus be interpreted as political precisely because they bifurcate or break with the homogeneous time of national communities.

This research work benefited greatly from both theoretical frameworks and conceptual tools elaborated within the Autonomy of Migration and Critical Citizenship studies, especially for the great attention these scholars paid to definitions of political and to questions of in/visibility. While this research work focuses primarily on forms of collective action, often organized at the level of the movement milieu, these by no means represent the full spectrum of political ramifications that migration can take as a phenomenon at large and in its particular forms of resistance. For its part, this research tries to avoid reification of the experience of migration and activism, by providing a complex and temporally informed understanding of these experiences as embedded in longterm processes of socialization that go beyond the visible moments of mobilization.

The main theoretical effort made here is to complement the existing scholarly work on migrants' collective action with a temporal approach. Ideally, the temporal approach proposed shall be integrated with the spatial approaches elaborated within the existing literature. This, however, constitutes one of the key limitations of this work which has outlined a time-sensitive approach without fully engaging in a reflection on the paths to and advantages of integrating it to a spatial perspective. At the same time, this hopefully represents a useful line for future research.

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List of life history interviews

I-1: male, Sri Lankan origin, Naples, ex-OPG, MMRN, JVP activist, recorded, 18/01/2020

I-2: male, Ivorian origin, Naples, ex-OPG and MMRN activist, recorded, 13/01/2020

I-3: male, Mauritanian origin, Naples, ex-OPG and MMRN activist, recorded, 20/01/2020

I-4: male, Senegalese origin, Naples, DEMA activist, former ex-OPG and MMRN activist, recorded, 17/01/2020

I-5: female, Peruvian origin, Rome, RDMF activist, recorded, 17/09/2020 and 14/04/2021

I-6: female, Peruvian origin, Rome, RDMF activist, recorded online, 05/02/2021

I-7: female, Eritrean origin, born in Italy, Rome, RDMF activist, recorded, 17/04/2021

I-8: female, Albanian origin, born in Italy, Rome, RDMF activist, recorded online, 23/02/2021

I-9: female, Salvadorian origin, Rome, RDMF activist, recorded, 16/04/2021

I-10: female, Mexican origin, Rome, RDMF activist, recorded, 13/07/2021

I-11: male, Senegalese origin, Bologna, CMB activist, recorded, 26/01/2022

I-12: male, Senegalese origin, Bologna, CMB activist, recorded, 21/01/2022

I-13: female, Senegalese origin, Bologna, CMB activist, recorded, 24/11/2021

I-14: female, Moldovan origin, Bologna, CMB activist, recorded, 19/01/2022

I-15: female, Turkish origin, Bologna, CMB activist, recorded, 01/12/2021

I-16: female, Kurdish origin, Milan, CUB trade unionist, recorded, 07/07/2021

I-17: male, Ivorian origin, born in Italy, Bologna, La casa del mondo activist, recorded, 12/11/2021

I-18: intersex, Lybian origin, Bologna, MIT activist, former CMB activist, recorded, 26/01/2022

List of semi-structured interviews with activists and key informants

I-19: female, Italian origin, Naples, ex-OPG and MMRN activist, recorded, 19/10/2019

I-20: female, Italian origin, Naples, ex-OPG activist, non-recorded, 19/10/2019

I-21: male, Senegalese origin, key informant, leader of the Senegalese community in Naples, non

recorded, 29/01/2020

I-22: male, Italian origin, Naples, key informant mapping city level Naples, non-recorded, 25/11/2019

I-23: female, Italian origin, Naples, NGO leader and migration researcher, key informant, recorded, 24/01/2020

I-24: collective interview to RDMF, online, recorded, 06/11/2020

I-25: collective interview to RDMF, non-recorded, 15/05/2021

I-26: female, Italian origin, Florence, key informant local movement area Rome, recorded, 15/02/2021

I-27: female, Italian origin, Rome, key informant local movement area Rome, recorded, 23/05/2021

I-28: female, Key informant on Bologna movement area, non-recorded, 28/10/2021

I-29: male, Key informant on Bologna movement area, non-recorded, 15/10/2021

I-30: female, Key informant on Bologna movement area, recorded, 14/09/2021

I-31: female, Key informant on Bologna movement area, recorded, 30/11/2021

I-32: male, Italian origin, CMB activist, non-recorded, Bologna, 18/12/2021

I-33: female, Key informant on Florence and Prato, non-recorded, Verona, 30/03/2021

I-34: female, Key informant on Turin, non-recorded, Turin, 24/06/2021

I-35: female, Key informant on Milan, non-recorded, Verona, 28/06/2021