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# **Contentious migration policies:** Dynamics of urban governance and social movement outcomes in Milan and Barcelona

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*To those who struggle,  
whose pain is the very reason for my efforts.*

*To my family and friends,  
whose love is the very reason for my happiness.*

# Abstract

Local governments—of large cities especially—enact policies that crucially affect the daily life of immigrants. Migration policy-making has proliferated across cities of the Global North—and so did its own contestation. The urban environment is, in fact, a fertile breeding ground for the flourishing of activist networks *by* and *in solidarity with* immigrants. Yet, research on social movement outcomes in the field of migration has been lagging behind. This thesis is aimed to theorize how and under what conditions pro-immigrant activists can affect policy-making at the city-level and beyond. By adopting a strategic-interaction and mechanisms-based approach to the study of contentious politics, the research contends and demonstrates that movements can rely on strategic leverages within three arenas of interaction. First, brokerage mechanisms are essential to the emergence of a social movement in the *civil society arena*. The peculiar qualities of urban spaces—notably, the availability of dense relational networks extended over an array of geographical scales—allow immigrants to create bonds of solidarity, craft alliances, and ultimately turn into vocal political subjects. Second, alliance-building mechanisms in the *city politics arena* have to be activated. Within a propitious political environment (e.g., ideologically sympathetic political elites) activists are able to build potent pro-immigrant coalitions. Once crafted, these alliances can activate upscaling mechanisms to shape policy-making in the *multi-level governance arena*. Such mechanisms reinforce and concatenate with one another in recurrent fashions, producing policy outcomes far beyond the immediate local contexts in which mobilization occurs. Yet, a plethora of dilemmas and contradictions are likely to arise, too. The study compares three contentious policy realms—exclusionary policies, policies in support of undocumented immigrants, and asylum policies—so as to assess similarities and dissimilarities across social movement outcomes. Empirically, it focuses on policies enacted in two large South European cities, Milan and Barcelona. Results are drawn from fieldwork carried out in 2017-19 and entailing 57 interviews. In addition, policy documents, media outlets, and the secondary literature have been extensively analyzed.

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# List of abbreviations

<b>AN</b>	Alleanza Nazionale
<b>BCR</b>	Barcelona Ciutat Refugi
<b>BeC</b>	Barcelona en Comú
<b>CAS</b>	Centri di Accoglienza Straordinaria
<b>CCOO</b>	Comisiones Obreras
<b>CEAR</b>	Comisión Española de Ayuda al Refugiado
<b>CIE</b>	Centro di Identificazione ed Espulsione   Centro de Internamiento de Extranjeros
<b>GiU</b>	Convergència i Unió
<b>CITE</b>	Centre d'Informació per a Treballadors Estrangers
<b>CMIB</b>	Consell Municipal d'Immigració
<b>CNCV</b>	Casa Nostra Casa Vostra
<b>CPT</b>	Centri di Permanenza Temporanea
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>FTS</b>	Forum del Terzo Settore
<b>GJM</b>	Global Justice Movement
<b>IU</b>	Izquierda Unida
<b>LN</b>	Lega Nord
<b>M5S</b>	Movimento 5 Stelle
<b>NOII</b>	No One Is Illegal
<b>PAH</b>	Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca
<b>PD</b>	Partito Democratico
<b>PP</b>	Partido Popular
<b>PRC</b>	Partito della Rifondazione Comunista
<b>PSC-PSOE</b>	Partit dels Socialistes de Catalunya
<b>PSOE</b>	Partido Socialista Obrero Español
<b>SAI</b>	Sistema de Acogida y Integración
<b>SAIER</b>	Servei d'Atenció a Immigrants, Emigrants i Refugiats
<b>SFIO</b>	Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrier
<b>SPRAR</b>	Sistema di Protezione Richiedenti Asilo e Rifugiati
<b>SMM</b>	Stop Mare Mortum
<b>TeC</b>	Tancarem el CIE
<b>UDC</b>	Unione Democratica di Centro
<b>UGT</b>	Unión General de Trabajadores
<b>Z8S</b>	Zona 8 Solidale

# Chapter 1

## Introduction: Global cities, local governments, and social movement outcomes

«The city is the dumping side for anxieties and apprehensions generated by globally induced uncertainty and insecurity; but the city is as well the training ground where the means to placate and disperse that uncertainty and insecurity can be experimented with, tried out and eventually learned and adopted. It is in the city that the strangers who in the global space confront each other as hostile states, inimical civilizations or military adversaries, meet as individual human beings, watch each other at close quarters, talk to each other, learn each other's ways, negotiate the rules of life in common, cooperate and, sooner or later, get used to each other's presence and, on an increasing number of occasions, find pleasure in sharing company».

(Baumann 2003: 38)

### 1.1 Introduction

Inherent to the notion of global city coined by Saskia Sassen (1995) is the manifestation of worldwide phenomena within the urban environment. Migration counts among these societal changes, as a global-scale phenomenon that powerfully erupts within specific territories. City-dwellers have to cope with such far-reaching transformations, which affect their communities and yet lie beyond the full jurisdiction of local administrations. In face of these constraints, local policy-making aimed at either integrating or marginalizing resident immigrants proliferated across the Global North—and so did its own contestation. The contentious politics of citizenship and ethnicity has escalated over the last decades, with protests *by*, *in solidarity with*, and *against* migrants diffusing across cities of transit and settlement. Surprisingly, however, the consequences of collective action for migration policy-making received little scholarly attention thus far.

The aim of this research is precisely to address such lacunae. Theoretically, it draws on migration studies, social movement studies, and urban studies—bridging them in a

systematic, coherent fashion. Empirically, the investigation focuses on two large South European cities, Milan and Barcelona, where both the governance and the contestation of immigration have unfolded as crucial, transformative phenomena. Their respective national contexts—the Italian and the Spanish ones—, as well as the supra-national framework of the European Union (EU), are subject to in-depth examination, too. Methodologically, the research lies in the tradition of case study research, but also borrows from strategic-interaction and mechanism-based approaches to the study of contentious politics. Results are drawn from extensive fieldwork carried out in 2017-19 and entailing 57 semi-structured interviews with public officials, movement spokespersons, other civil society actors, and experts. The study aims to offer generalizable comparative insights that transcend the immediate contexts of analysis. Migration is used as an entry point to pose broader questions on how cities respond to global-scale transformations and how civil society can revitalize liberal democracies.

This introductory chapter is structured as follows. The next section ([Section 1.2](#)) is aimed to highlight the relevance of this research. It reflects on how global transformations—including migration—land in urban environments, as well as on the rooms to maneuver of city governments and social movements in coping with them. Subsequently, [Section 1.3](#) intends to show why this research is necessary. It briefly reviews different scholarly contributions so as to identify their major gaps and the opportunities for cross-fertilization. The research questions guiding the study are then formulated. The terminological, geographical, and temporal boundaries of the research are traced in [Section 1.4](#). Finally, [Section 1.5](#) presents the outline of the manuscript.

## **1.2 Why is this research *relevant*? Global migration, local governments, and social movements**

Understanding cities is essential for understanding society and politics at large. As most of the global population is nowadays settled in urban settings, critical collective problems of our time originate, reproduce, and are challenged by agents operating therein.

What defines a city as such is the geographical concentration of numerous and diverse people in restricted areas (Wirth 1938). In densely populated spaces, societal change tends to be more rapid, abrupt, profound, and—ultimately—difficult to govern.

Contemporary globalization has possibly accentuated the vulnerability of cities because worldwide phenomena first become manifest within the urban environment. Global cities tend to cluster economic activities within their territories, with dramatic consequences in terms of social inequalities, both between and within cities. The case of immigrants seeking employment and/or protection is emblematic. The postindustrial restructuring of cities—in the Global North especially—has worked as a magnet for both high- and low- skilled workers of the service economy (Schiller & Çağlar 2009), thereby breeding spatial segregation, social exclusion, and humanitarian crises.

However, the chaotic, seemingly ungovernable character of urban societies does not only depend on global-market forces: political processes also play a decisive role. The complexity of urban governance is indeed magnified by the multiple tiers of government and spheres of power that in cities are conflated. First, policy problems arise at different territorial scales, therefore «issues of jurisdictional design are fractal» (Hooghe & Marks 2003: 234). The multi-level governance concept—first crafted in the field of EU studies—reflects this concern for proliferating, interdependent jurisdictions (Bache and Flinders 2004). Moreover, interactions among governmental players at various levels do not unfold on an even field. City governments are constitutionally inferior to, and dependent on, nation-states (Kübler & Pagano 2012), thus local governments are keen to select policy alternatives that are deemed compatible with supra-local provisions (Liu *et al.* 2010). As a consequence of these power asymmetries, when higher tiers of government are unable or unwilling to tackle emerging public problems, their solution ultimately depends on the agency of local actors.

Cities, however, are not condemned to be passive receivers of social changes and political conditions imposed at a higher scale. On the contrary, local policy matters, even within extremely complex metropolitan environments (Le Galès & Vitale 2013). Thanks to the peculiar qualities of urban politics, city governments can convert the conditions constraining their prerogatives into opportunities for policy change. Cities are, in fact, political hubs that cluster large constituencies of voters, powerful economic elites, communities of experts and intellectuals, and grassroots activists. All these are often tied to transnational networks. Local political leaders—mayors especially—can tap into such dense

webs of relationships to pursue their policy objectives (Sapotichne & Smith 2012). Drawing on their visibility and credibility as political figures, they are able to shape the public agenda nationwide and beyond, enacting strategies of issue definition, conflict expansion, and venue-shopping (Baumgartner & Jones 2010). These possibilities also indicate that urban governance is not only a matter of formal competencies. City governments, although legally subordinated, have a strategic toolbox at their disposal for shaping policies in line with their vision and interest. Policy-makers at various territorial tiers thus engage in complex relations based on cooperation, antagonism, and mutual dependency (Le Galès & Harding 1998).

Immigration is a case in point when it comes to these multi-level dynamics. While constrained in many respects, city governments enact policies that crucially affect the lives of immigrants (de Graauw & Vermeulen 2016). Room to maneuver is large because abstract, sometimes ambiguous legislative prescriptions are translated into concrete administrative practices by urban policy-makers (Mayer 2018: 235). Urgent problems force them to act fast and innovations may arise during these phases of acceleration. This is why cities are often ‘avant-gardes’ whose experiments may travel toward other localities or levels of governments (Caponio 2018). Far from being ‘policy takers’ at the bottom of a multi-level hierarchy, urban actors can set their own local agenda, identifying «‘local’ problems in need of clear ‘local’ solutions» (Scholten 2013: 220). Since priorities may differ across levels of government, policy-making may become ‘decoupled’, i.e., governmental players are poorly coordinated and possibly in conflict with one another. Specialists on European immigration point to the divergence between national policies, generally restrictive and security-oriented, and local practices of inclusion—even though local exclusionary policies mushroomed in recent years, too (e.g., Ambrosini 2018). Not only partisanship, but also pragmatic rationales (e.g., maintenance of public order, cohesion of communities) drive the preference for progressive policies (Mayer 2018).

Relatedly, migration to western societies has become increasingly politicized during the last two decades (van der Brug *et al.* 2015). This is the result of multiple actors’ mobilizations, within both the electoral and the protest arena, either opposing or supporting migrants, diversity, and multiculturalism. Subsequently, social movements *by, in solidarity with, and against* immigrants have emerged across the Global North. What is their role

in local migration policy-making? Being located at the periphery of power relations, protest groups usually have limited chances of changing policies. Those seeking to advance immigrant rights appear especially weak, even more so if compared to anti-immigrant ones. As Steil and Vasi put it,

«[w]hen we think abstractly about movements and countermovements, we generally assume that they confront each other on an even playing field. But the playing field itself can be as uneven as the resources that opposing movements bring to it. The difference between the proactive immigrants' rights movement and the reactive immigration restrictionist movement is the difference between a movement seeking rights for a minority excluded from the political process and a movement positioning itself under the culturally resonant banner of law and order, with the commonsense refrain that 'illegal is illegal'» (Steil & Vasi 2014: 1145).

Yet, the urban environment may facilitate the success of these marginalized groups. Thanks to cities' relational density, immigrant activists can weave networks of solidarity that enhance the viability of their claims (Nicholls 2016). Classic studies on protests in US cities similarly emphasize the role of local sympathetic elites that work as transmission belts between demand-makers and powerholders (e.g., Lipsky 1970; Eisinger 1973; Schumaker 1975). Networking endeavors even allow activists to scale up and out—that is, to strategically extend beyond their location of origin and access other geographical arenas. Hence, the city works for social movements «as a *relational incubator*, facilitating complex relational exchanges that generate a diversity of useful resources for campaigns operating at a variety of spatial scales» (Nicholls 2008: 842, italics in original).

Finally, given the critical role of local governments in the global governance of migration, as well as the escalation of the contentious politics in this realm, it is worth asking *how and under what conditions social movements exert their influence on local migration policy-making*. Nonetheless, «research on the consequences of social movements in the field of immigration has been lagging behind» (Eggert & Giugni 2015: 168). Arguably, these major lacunae owe to the lack of cross-disciplinary dialogue between distinct but overlapped strands of literature, namely migration, social movement, and urban studies. This PhD dissertation aims to fill this gap.

### 1.3 Why is this research *necessary*? An inter-disciplinary endeavor

Over the last two decades, migration studies have gone through a ‘local turn’, meaning that research has paid growing attention to the local dimension of migration policy-making (e.g., Rogers & Tillie 2001; Penninx *et al.* 2004; Caponio & Borkert 2010). Departing from early studies focused on national citizenship regimes and models of incorporation (e.g., Soysal 1994; Zincone 1992), students have increasingly detected patterns of divergence across localities, even within the same national polity, and have thus recognized how autonomous are local governments in crafting policies aimed at the integration or marginalization of foreign-born residents (e.g., Koopmans 2004; Penninx & Martiniello 2004). This autonomy owes, on the one hand, to the peculiarities of urban societies, which provide migrants with concrete opportunities for developing interethnic relationships, regardless of the xenophobic discourses which may spread in the public sphere (Pratsinakis *et al.* 2017). On the other hand, local governments have gained importance in many policy areas (including migration) due to the trends of welfare fragmentation and decentralization occurred in western countries (Catalano *et al.* 2015).

More recently, migration studies have embraced multi-level governance perspectives (Scholten & Penninx 2016; Zapata-Barrero *et al.* 2017; Caponio & Jones-Correa 2018) so as to account for the vast array of state and non-state actors located at different territorial scales shaping migration policies (cf. Bache & Flinders 2004; Hooghe & Marks 2003; Piattoni 2010; Schmitter 2004). Importantly, the multi-level governance character of these policies is likely to breed controversy among those having a stake in this realm. To support this argument, Scholten (2013) resorts to the concept of ‘intractable controversy’:

«Rein and Schön define ‘intractable controversies’ as those situations that are characterized by a multiplicity of frames or ‘multiple social realities’ (1994: 4). This type of policy problems would be ‘intractable’ as they seem to defy resolution and obstruct critical debates about a problem situation, because the involved actors not only have different ideas about the issue involved, but also disagree about the very issue at stake. This can pose a specific challenge to governance in multi-level settings. When the framing of policies differs between levels, it can be expected that interaction and the

coordination of policy efforts between levels will be complicated» (Scholten 2013: 219).

In a nutshell, specialists on migration emphasize the importance of local contexts, multi-level governance, and contestation for migration dynamics. The role of social movements, however, has been seldom considered by this strand of literature.

On the other hand, social movement studies have paid increasing attention to immigrant solidarity activism (for a state-of-the-art, see della Porta 2018). These instances of collective action have spread in western societies over the last two decades, initiating «a new era of protest» (Ataç *et al.* 2016) and «a new form of activism on the global stage» (Carauş 2018). The burgeoning literature on this topic has sought to understand how actors at the margins of society can turn into vociferous political subjects. In fact, immigrants are unlikely protestors «given the limited resources, enormous heterogeneity, precarious legal status, ban on free mobility, restricted participation rights and the high fluctuation among movement members» (Mayer 2018: 13). These mobilizations might then appear ‘anomalous’ in so far as they «contrast with a dominant portrayal of marginalized migrants as either passive, needy and ideally grateful objects of government or civil society humanitarianism or stigmatized outsiders and intruders in a national order» (Steinhilper 2018: iii).

To solve this puzzle, early research points at the role of political opportunity structures (e.g., Morales & Giugni 2011; Koopmans 2004), whereas more recent studies look at the role of threats—rather than opportunities—as drivers of mobilization (cf. della Porta 2018: 9). For instance, tightening migration policies «can transform a latent sense of group membership among unconventional protest organizers (e.g., immigrant soccer league members and ethnic small business owners) into a willingness to take action» (Zepeda-Millán 2016: 269). Nicholls (2014b), too, refines the notion of political opportunities and introduce the one of ‘niche-opening.’ In face of hostile political environments, mobilization is an option only for narrow segments of the migrant population, i.e., those having cultural, legal, and economic attributes deemed compatible with the values of nationally-defined polities. This poses a complex dilemma, as «niche-openings provide the only path to legal status for some, but they can also differentiate (discursively and legally)

between ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ undocumented immigrants» (*ibid.*: 23)—thus further stratifying the immigrant population and deepening the adverse conditions faced by the lower strata.

Scholars also point at the role of allies, sometimes defined as ‘supporters’ or ‘pro-beneficiaries’ (e.g., della Porta 2018; Steinhilper 2019; Nicholls & Uitermark 2016; Ataç *et al.* 2016; Agustín & Jørgensen 2016; Rosenberg & Winkler 2014). These networks of solidarity are essential for providing resource-poor groups with the necessary mobilizing structures. Yet these coalitions are normally very fragile and likely to suffer from internal controversies. In fact, positional differences ingrained in society at large are proved to be reproduced, on a smaller scale, within cross-movement alliances. The preferences of participants having a lower status thus risk to be disregarded, with negative consequences for mobilization (Beamish & Luebbers 2009; Dixon *et al.* 2013). Also, solidarity might be driven by paternalistic attitudes (Cappiali 2016; Fadaee 2015). Altruism can victimize immigrants rather than facilitate their self-determination as political subjects, then implicitly validating the dynamics that generated oppression in the first place (Rosenberg & Winkler 2014; Mayer 2018). Hence, the same conditions that galvanize players into building alliances can, at a later time, sow discord by sharpening pre-existing power unbalances.

Combining social movement and critical citizenship studies, scholars also emphasized the importance of ‘acts of citizenship’, i.e., practices through which immigrants in precarious conditions transform themselves into citizens without the need to be formally ‘authorized’ and without legally belonging to a certain national polity (Ataç *et al.* 2016: 532, see also Isin 2008; Caraus 2018). Other studies focus on the cultural outcomes of these mobilizations, highlighting how immigrant activism redefines the limits of the legal order within a territory (Monforte & Dufour 2011; 2013). In such processes of politicization, the role of emotions is decisive for converting personal stigma into a sense of pride (e.g., Nicholls 2016), as well as for re-interpreting individual blames in terms of collective responsibilities (della Porta 2018: 5).

All in all, extant literature on immigrant rights movements seeks to explain how groups at the margins of society engage in contentious politics «against all evident odds» (Steinhilper 2019: 1). Surprisingly, however, the question of political outcomes has been largely overlooked. Mobilization is investigated as a phenomenon to be explained rather

than as a potential causal force. Although the literature on the biographical, cultural, and political consequences of collective action has grown considerably (e.g., Soule & King 2006; Amenta *et al.* 2019; Baumgartner & Mahoney 2005; den Hond *et al.* 2014; for a comprehensive review, see Bosi *et al.* 2016), contributions are virtually non-existing in the field of migration.

The study of Steil and Vasi (2014) on US localities is a remarkable exception. The structural changes produced by new waves of immigration to the US has gone hand in hand with the dramatic spread of local immigration policy-making, aimed at either expanding or restricting immigrant rights. Both progressive and conservative social movements have mobilized around such issues, making worth to ask whether they have influenced local policy-making processes. Such developments set a perfect ground for the study of social movement outcomes, as they allow us to examine, simultaneously, the consequences of collective actors on both sides of the ideological spectrum. As the authors put it,

«[s]ome cities have passed laws aimed at driving out undocumented immigrants, while other cities have enacted policies trying to support foreign-born residents regardless of their immigration status. [...] Because active social movements on both sides of this issue have mobilized for the introduction of these ordinances, we can also use them to advance our understanding of social movement outcomes» (Steil & Vasi 2014: 1105).

Their results show how proactive and reactive movements respond to different sets of opportunities and constraints. On the one hand, the adoption of pro-immigrant laws is facilitated by the mobilization of progressive movements, whose influence is however contingent upon the presence of sympathetic political elites in the local government. Such access points are defined as ‘municipal opportunity structures.’ On the other hand, anti-immigrant ordinances are more likely to be approved where local powerholders frame migration-related structural changes as threats for native-born residents. In other words, progressive movements are able to access friendly powerholders for promoting inclusive policies, whereas reactive movements more hardly have such an influence in pushing for restrictive policies.

Departing from these insights, my research will seek to advance the study of social movement outcomes in the field of migration. By adopting a strategic-interaction and mechanisms-based approach to the study of contentious politics (Bosi *et al.* 2016: 11-12), I will contend and demonstrate that pro-immigrant activists are able to exert an influence on policy-making by means of their strategic leverages within three arenas of interaction.

First, brokerage mechanisms are essential to the emergence of a social movement in the *civil society arena*. The peculiar qualities of urban spaces—notably, the availability of dense relational networks extended over an array of geographical scales—allow immigrants to create bonds of solidarity, craft alliances, and ultimately turn into vocal political subjects. Second, alliance-building mechanisms in the *city politics arena* have to be activated. Within a propitious political environment—e.g., ideologically sympathetic political elites—activists are able to build potent pro-immigrant coalitions at the city-level. Once crafted, these alliances can activate upscaling mechanisms to shape policy-making in the *multi-level governance arena*. Such mechanisms reinforce and concatenate with one another in recurrent fashions, producing policy outcomes at various spatial scales, far beyond the immediate local contexts in which mobilization occurs. Yet, a plethora of dilemmas and contradictions are likely to arise, too. The empirical study will compare three highly contentious policy realms—exclusionary policies, policies in support of undocumented immigrants, and asylum policies—to assess similarities and dissimilarities across social movement outcomes.

The concept of ‘contentious migration policies’—which gives the title to this PhD dissertation—draws on the seminal work by Doug McAdam, Charles Tilly, and Sidney Tarrow (2001). The adjective ‘contentious’ denotes the contested character of policy realms in which the interests of claimants are at stake. Also, it allows researchers to move beyond narrow movement-centered perspectives by considering broader patterns of interaction between claim-makers, elites, opponents, and the state (see also Ataç *et al.* 2016: 536). As argued by van der Brug and his colleagues,

«[...] there are several instances of ‘grievances’ (migration, globalization, welfare states reconfigurations, etc.) that contemporary societies are confronted with; grievances that transform social cohesion into a contentious domain. It is contentious, because

social actors claim different, and in some cases contrasting, conceptions of social cohesion. Some of these actors promise a conception of social cohesion that strengthens their identity, and that fosters the closeness of communities within themselves, whereas other groups embrace a more inclusive and not ‘identity-based’ cohesiveness. Of course, such claims do not occur in a vacuum but are embedded in a specific context that can offer opportunities and constraints to social actors. And, in their turn social actors themselves may have an impact on the context, depending on their ability to mobilize their interest» (van der Brug *et al.* 2015: xiv).

Overall, my research will seek to solve two main conundrums. First, I will investigate if and how immigrants—a section of the population normally located at the periphery of power relations—can surpass their own marginality to affect the political process. Second, I will investigate how cities of the Global North can cope with global-scale transformations that cannot be fully governed through the levers of local government. These propositions can be converted into a set of research questions guiding the investigation: What are the main characteristics of local migration policy-making when the contentious politics of migration escalates? What are the main actors participating at these processes? How and under what conditions are pro-immigrant movements able to affect them? Before moving ahead, it is necessary to specify the terminological, geographical, and temporal boundaries of the study.

## **1.4 Research boundaries**

### *Scope of the study and terminological notes*

In line with the most recent trends in migration studies, this study refers to ‘migrants’ as an encompassing category that include any person who changes his or her country of usual residence (UN DESA 1998). This terminological clarification is essential to escape ‘categorical fetishism.’ As Crawley & Skleparis (2018) put it,

«[t]he use of the categories ‘refugee’ and ‘migrant’ to differentiate between those on the move and the legitimacy, or otherwise, of their claims to international protection has featured strongly during Europe’s ‘migration crisis’ and has been used to justify policies of exclusion and containment. [...] [These] dominant categories fail to capture

adequately the complex relationship between political, social and economic drivers of migration or their shifting significance for individuals over time and space» (Crawley & Skleparis 2018: 48).

Otherwise put, in a highly politicized landscape, the migrant-refugee dichotomy implies a distinction between ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ migrants, in terms of both public discourses and policies. Such a distinction is empirically misleading, because the boundary between ‘having’ versus ‘choosing’ to move is extremely blurred and unstable (McMahon & Sigona 2018). In fact, Carling (2015) argues,

«[d]etermining refugee status can be a messy and unpredictable process. Caseworkers who handle applications for asylum frequently lack the resources or information to make decisions with confidence and the applicants often dispute the outcome. Many asylum seekers are denied protection in Europe, but still have a genuine fear of returning to their own country. [...] The ‘two kinds of people’ argument is further undermined by the drawn-out trajectories of many current migrants. A Nigerian arriving in Italy might have left Nigeria for reasons other than a fear of persecution, but ended up fleeing extreme danger in Libya. Conversely, a Syrian might have crossed into Jordan and found safety from the war, but been prompted by the bleak prospects of indeterminate camp life to make the onward journey to Europe. Regardless of the legal status that each one obtains in Europe, they are both migrants who have made difficult decisions, who deserve our compassion, and whose rights need to be ensured» (Carling 2015).

In this research, the term ‘refugee’ will be used only to describe migrants that have successfully claimed the right to refugee status—most often under the 1951 Refugee Convention—thus obtaining some forms of international protection in the country of asylum (Hatton 2009). Of course, national authorities have the power to make the procedures for status determination more or less tight over time—another element that shed light on the political nature of categorical boundaries, which are only partly related to immigrants’ biography. On the same vein, the study will resort to the term ‘asylum-seeker’ to describe migrants who have submitted a protection request or intend to do so, whereas ‘forced migrant’ is deemed the most appropriate definition to describe a person who migrates «to

escape persecution, conflict, repression, natural and human-made disasters, ecological degradation, or other situations that endanger their lives, freedom or livelihood» (International Organization of Migration 2000: 8, cited by Steinhilper 2018: 7). When fitting, the study will interchangeably use the adjectives ‘undocumented’ and ‘irregular’ for referring to «migrants who enter a country illegally, either by crossing a border undetected, using false documents or having entered a country legally and then fallen out of legal status or letting their legal status lapse» (Kaufmann 2019: 3).

This study will focus on pro-immigrant social movements, whose constituency consists of both immigrants and their supporters, i.e., social movements *by* and *in solidarity with* migrants (Eggert & Giugni 2015). The activists of such groups ‘do not oppose discriminatory discourses and practices, but also attempt to improve the fate of immigrants in the countries of residence’ (van der Brug *et al.* 2015: 14). Anti-immigrant movements, instead, will not be systematically scrutinized, although their role will be taken into account if relevant to unravel movement-counter-movement dynamics. In general terms, by social movement I will refer to conflict-oriented networks of informal relationships between individuals and groups/organizations, based on collective identities, shared beliefs, and solidarity, through the frequent use of various forms of protest (cf. della Porta & Diani 2020). Also, with Schumaker (1975), the term ‘protest groups’ will describe «groups of citizens who do not normally interact with governmental officials, but who, under certain conditions [...], organize on an informal, issue-specific basis to make demands on public officials through pressure processes» (*ibid.*: 490).

From this angle, pro-immigrant movements are classified as such when they pose a sustained challenge to powerholders (cf. Tarrow 2011), and thus have to be distinguished from other civil society actors—such as service providers and philanthropic organizations—that interact with state authorities without having non-institutional forms of demand-making at the core of their agency. It should be noted, however, that recent studies emphasize how volunteers in the field of migration tend to understand their humanitarian actions as politically loaded (Zamponi 2018), and then to blur the boundaries between activism and volunteering (della Porta 2020).

When appropriate, the study will also resort to the notion of urban social movements. Although the scholarly debate around these actors is heated (cf. Pickvance 2003;

Mayer 2003; della Porta & Subirats 2019), I will follow Andretta *et al.* (2015) in simply defining them as social movements mobilized around urban issues, e.g., related to collective consumption and urban planning (Pruijt 2007: 5115)—issues that, in fact, often intersect with migration affairs. From this perspective, the urban context is the most suitable for studying the outcomes of pro-immigrant movements, as it is where such actors tend to originate and proliferate, tapping on networks of allies and engaging in contentious interactions with elites, authorities, and opponents (cf. Nicholls 2016).

As for migration governance, the study will focus on three contentious realms of policy-making, namely exclusionary policies, policies in support of undocumented immigrants, and asylum policies. Local exclusionary policies aim to exclude specific, highly politicized sections of the immigrant population from various rights and benefits. They often go hand in hand with fear-mongering discourses and punitive measures against lawbreakers. Examples include bans from collective goods, policing in public spaces for deportation purposes, and evictions from unauthorized camps. On the other side of the spectrum, policies can support undocumented immigrants, either by granting them access to generalist services or through specific provisions. Importantly, the targets of these policies are deemed ‘illegal’ from the perspective of the nation-state. Last, asylum policies are aimed to support migrants who are either settled in, or in transit through, a locality and who are seeking protection. Local governments can enact these provisions within the framework of national policies or by means of ‘transgressive’ actions, as in the case of decisions to locally suspend bans on mobility. Hence, the study will focus on policies shaped by municipal governments *regardless of their jurisdictional competences*.

Overall, these policies are aimed to either enlarge or restrict the civil, political, and social rights of immigrants. While local authorities in the context of the Keynesian state used to merely deliver national social policies (e.g., Béal 2011; Le Galès 2002), nowadays welfare systems are much more localized than in the past (Heidenreich & Graziano 2014). This shift has been driven by trends of decentralization (Catalano *et al.* 2015), the increasing fragmentation and heterogeneity of social needs, and the more general retrenchment of social spending—especially following the Great Recession (Andreotti & Mingione 2014; Bifulco 2016). It can be expected that contention over social policy is especially profound also because of its redistributive nature (Lowi 1972). When policies aim at the

redistribution of scarce resources, adversarial and ideologically-driven political relationships are more likely to unfold (Aurich-Beerheide *et al.* 2015: 3).

### *Contentious migration policies in Milan and Barcelona*

The study will compare contentious migration policies enacted in two large South European cities, Milan and Barcelona. This strategy for case selection is grounded on both substantive and methodological considerations.

Italy and Spain have experienced both out-migration and internal migration since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and became contexts of massive settlement from abroad only in relatively recent times, between the 1970s and the 1980s. The regulatory models of these two countries have always been characterized by relevant deficiencies. Their poor governance systems produce sheer numbers of undocumented immigrants, in a pendulum between restrictive policies and mass regularizations (e.g., González-Enríquez 2009; Caponio & Cappiali 2018). Such weak planning capacities and the logic of emergency that often permeates policy-making have put local actors at the forefront in handling immigration. Local governments played a decisive role not just in the delivery of basic services, but also in the development of innovative policy solutions then transferred at the national level (e.g., Caponio 2010a; Bruqueta-Callejo *et al.* 2011). Such a bottom-up perspective on migration policy concerns local institutions as much as civil society, which often mobilizes in collaboration with (or on behalf of) the state as a ‘policy-maker of last resort.’

From a methodological perspective, the numerous similarities between the two cities—in terms of urban, national, and supranational contexts—make them ‘spontaneously’ apt for comparison. As ‘global’ cities, they are both relatively affluent, but also characterized by severe social inequalities. In the 1800s, they have emerged as pivotal industrial centers and attracted vast numbers of workers from southern Italy and Spain. Since the late 1970s, their transition to the service economy has gone hand in hand with the rapid growth of the foreign population, which nowadays represent roughly one fifth of their total population. They also benefit of a considerable social capital, as made apparent by their long-standing tradition of urban social movements, voluntarism, and solidarity associations (see Chapter 3 for an extensive justification of case selection).

Under the period of investigation, the local governments of the two cities were led by different governing coalition. Between 2006 and 2011, the Milan municipality has been led by conservative and anti-immigration parties, which enacted assorted exclusionary policies. These provisions were mostly dismantled starting from 2011, when a center-left coalition took over the city hall. Over the following years, policies in support of forced migrants became one of the hallmark of Milan's left-leaning administrations. Under the leadership of a movement-party on the radical left, Barcelona's administration also engaged with asylum policy-making since 2015. Policies in support of undocumented immigrants have been extremely relevant, too. Ultimately, this strategy for case selection will allow us to assess similarities and dissimilarities across social movement outcomes.

## 1.5 Outline of the manuscript

After the Introduction, *Part I* of this PhD dissertation offers an extensive discussion of the theoretical and methodological foundations of the research project. [Chapter 2](#) presents intersect multiple scholarly contributions to build the theoretical framework of the study. [Chapter 3](#) clarifies how the research design is constructed, how the cases are defined and selected, what are the sources and the methods of the investigation, and how these are combined with each other. [Chapter 4](#) contextualizes the empirical analysis that will be presented in *Part II* of the manuscript. More precisely, this chapter provides a comprehensive overview of Italy's and Spain's history of migration, governance models, structures of multi-level governance, as well as a snapshot of the main sociological features of Milan and Barcelona. *Part II* of this manuscript presents empirical evidence from case study research. It draws on fieldwork conducted in Milan (February-September 2017, January 2019) and Barcelona (February-July 2018). [Chapter 5](#) focuses on Milan's local exclusionary policies, [Chapter 6](#) moves to Barcelona to analyze policies in support of undocumented immigrants, and [Chapter 7](#) focuses on asylum policies adopted in both these cities. *Part III* brings the dissertation in full circle. [Chapter 8](#) assesses the similarities and dissimilarities of social movement outcomes across contentious migration policies, with the purpose of formulating general theoretical statements. [Chapter 9](#) clarifies the contribution of this dissertation to the literature, its limitations, and the avenues for future research.

Part I:  
Theory and methods

# Chapter 2

## Theory: The arenas and mechanisms of contentious migration policies

«[U]rban citizenship policies may well depend on the state, but they are not entirely contained by it in practice. [...] [C]ity governments can use their prerogatives of self-government and the competencies gained through decentralization to set their own priorities, to interpret and even to disobey national policies».

(Gebhardt 2016: 7)

«The city becomes a strategic site for creating the levels of power needed to assert broad claims for equality. By becoming politicized in the urban trenches, outcasts like undocumented immigrants can position themselves in larger fights for rights, recognition and equality».

(Nicholls 2016: 300)

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter is aimed at theorizing how and under what conditions social movements can produce outcomes in local migration policy-making—a research field that has been lagging behind. It does so by reviewing and combining different scholarly contributions in the fields of migration studies, social movement studies, and urban studies. Specialists on migration have unpacked the black box of migration policy-making, showing how such processes unfold in contexts of multi-level governance, within which city-level actors play a decisive role, possibly interfering with nationally-defined citizenship regimes ([Section 2.2](#)). However, this literature largely neglects the consequences of social movements for policy-making. On the other hand, the burgeoning literature on pro-immigrant social movements has sought to understand how groups at the margins of society can turn into vocal political subjects, but overlooked how they can produce meaningful outcomes in the realm of policy-making ([Section 2.3](#)). Finally, urban studies have shed light on the role of urban actors

in affecting politics across various territorial scales ([Section 2.4](#)). Bridging these distinct but overlapped scholarly contributions and siding with strategic-interaction and mechanism-based approaches to contentious politics, a comprehensive theoretical framework for studying the outcomes of social movements in the field of local migration policy-making is presented ([Section 2.5](#)). Conclusive remarks are presented in the last section ([Section 2.6](#)).

## 2.2 The multi-level governance of immigration

### *Multi-level governance as a contested field*

At a glance, one might easily argue that immigration is a typical policy domain handled at the national level. Historically, states are founded on their own capacity of claiming the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within their territory (Weber 1968). Since boundary-making is intrinsic to state-building, the control of borders stands out as the phenomenology of state power *par excellence*. Yet policy studies provide us with a more fine-grained perspective, pointing at migration as a matter of multi-level governance (Scholten & Penninx 2016; Zapata-Barrero *et al.* 2017; Caponio & Jones-Correa 2018).

Multi-level governance is a concept that gained importance along with the process of Europeanization and was crafted for describing «a system of continuous negotiation among nested governments at several territorial tiers» (Marks 1993: 392). In its current use, it entails both vertical and horizontal dimensions and «reflects a shared concern with understanding increased complexity, proliferating jurisdictions, the rise of non-state actors, and the related challenges to state power» (Bache & Flinders 2004: 4-5; see also Hooghe & Marks 2003; Piattoni 2010). A similar conceptualization is advanced by Schmitter, who defines multi-level governance as

«an arrangement for making binding decisions that engages a multiplicity of politically independent but otherwise interdependent actors – private and public – at different levels of territorial aggregation in more-or-less continuous negotiation/deliberation/implementation, and that does not assign exclusive policy competence or assert a stable hierarchy of political authority to any of these level» (Schmitter 2004: 49).

These definitions aptly describe the fragmented, often contested character of migration governance in the EU. What, then, are its main characteristics? For sake of clarity, it is useful to follow the path-breaking contribution of Hammar (1985), who distinguishes migration policy between *immigration* and *immigrant* policy. The former deals with the conditions posed to foreigners for being admitted in a national polity (e.g. visa policy, family reunifications, expulsions). Immigrant policy instead refers to the status of immigrants once settled in the national territory, i.e., the bundle of civil, political, and social rights that they can be entitled with. Such analytical distinction is crucial because, far from being a unitary issue, migration encompasses a wide array of challenges and stakes, each characterized by peculiar jurisdictional ecologies.<sup>1</sup> In Europe, both immigration and immigrant policies are multi-level in nature, but in very different terms.

As for immigration policy, central governments still bear the lion's share. EU institutions are relevant, but decision-making within them prevalently relies on the interaction between domestic actors (Wallace 2000; Toshkov & De Haan 2013). This also explains its highly restrictive, security-oriented character. Guiraudon (2000) pioneered this scholarship by importing the US literature on policy venues (Baumgartner & Jones 2010). In the early 1980s, the personnel of Interior ministries were losing ground in their domestic environments. Their preference for stricter controls on migration and asylum was opposed by 'migrant-friendly' actors, such as ministries of labor and social affairs, NGOs, and the judiciary. For circumventing such 'liberal constraints', law-and-order officials began to cooperate at the European level, where a new site of authority (i.e. policy venue) was gradually established. They could neutralize their national adversaries and eventually embed securitarian principles in the EU institutional design emerged in the 1990s. As Bonjour *et al.* put it, «[t]he influential metaphor of 'Fortress Europe' reflects this intergovernmentalist view of European cooperation as a means for restriction-minded member states to close down their external borders» (2018: 411).

While national governments (especially their security-oriented components) dominate EU immigration policy, they are relatively less important when it comes to immigrant

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<sup>1</sup> Based on Faist (1995), Scarpa (2015: 2) further clarifies such an analytical distinction: «[t]he whole set of immigration and immigrant policies is generally labelled as *immigration policy regime* and is deemed to form an important component of the welfare state, since it delimits the categories of non-nationals who can gain entitlement to public benefits and services».

policies, which are often formulated and implemented at the local level (Morales & Giugni 2011). In the last two decades specialists on migration have paid increasing attention to the local dimension of integration policies. Until then, studies often consisted of comparisons across national models of immigrant incorporation (e.g., Soysal 1994; Zincone 1992). Yet country-level studies proved insufficient to grasp the complexity of these phenomena, then pushing for a ‘local turn’ in migration studies (Caponio & Borkert 2010; Rogers & Tillie 2001; Penninx *et al.* 2004; Schiller & Çağlar 2011). The rationale behind this shift has to do with both the relevance of local contexts for migrants’ settlement, and the consequent intervention of local governments in this realm—especially when it comes to urban settings.

The city is where migrants firstly shape their everyday interaction with the receiving societies (Pratsinakis *et al.* 2017). Consequently, local governments—of large cities especially—enact policies that crucially affect the daily life of migrants (Caponio and Borkert 2010; Penninx *et al.* 2004; Alexander 2003; Jesuit & Mahler 2004). While constrained by national governments in terms of competencies and resources, they are autonomous in crafting their own policies. This often leads to remarkable intra-country variations in terms of policy outcomes, even in relatively centralized countries (Koopmans 2004; Penninx & Martiniello 2004). As Zincone and Caponio put it,

«Local authorities and institutions play a dual role in the governance of immigrants’ policies. On the one hand, they are responsible for the implementation of national legislation, which is an adaptive process that implies more than simply executive activities. On the other hand, they are called upon to answer to the demands of their local societies and to initiate new policies in order to cope with these demands». (Zincone & Caponio 2006: 279-80)

Under certain circumstances, local governments are even able to interfere with immigration laws, thus overstepping their jurisdictional boundaries. This is especially the case of progressive municipalities that—amid restrictive national policies—decide to ‘row against the current’, overtly or covertly non-complying with supra-local provisions (for a recent review, cf. Kaufmann 2019). The most emblematic case is that of US sanctuary

cities, i.e., cities or police departments that have «passed a resolution or ordinance expressly forbidding city or law enforcement officials from inquiring into immigration status and/or cooperation with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)» (Gonzalez O’Brien *et al.* 2019: 4; see also Huang & Liu 2018; Varsanyi 2006; Ridgley 2008).<sup>2</sup> Similar dynamics have been observed also in European localities (cf. Gebhardt 2016; Kos *et al.* 2016; Mayer 2018).

Municipal governments can thus promote alternative visions of citizenship by which all types of resident are deemed legitimate members of the local community, regardless of their administrative status (so-called *jus domicili*; cf. de Graauw 2014). As pointed out by Gebhardt (2015: 7), «urban citizenship policies may well depend on the state, but they are not entirely contained by it in practice» and cities are thus able «to set their own priorities, to interpret and even to disobey national policies».

In short, the responses of local governments to migration and ethnic issues can foster, supplement, deviate, and even undermine supralocal provisions. Far from being ‘policy takers’ at the bottom of a multilevel hierarchy, local policy-makers can set their own agenda, identifying «‘local’ problems in need of clear ‘local’ solutions» (Scholten 2013: 220). These policies may be different from (and even in contradiction with) the ones of supralocal authorities. The leeway of local actors may thus result in *decoupled* policy-making, i.e., government levels are poorly coordinated and possibly in conflict with one another (Scholten and Penninx 2016: 94). In Europe, most often, decoupling dynamics have taken the form of a divergence between restrictive EU and national policies, on the one hand, and local practices of inclusion, on the other. In sum, the multi-level governance of migration is a contested field. Who, then, are the main agents and drivers in local migration policy-making?

#### *Actors and determinants of local migration policy-making*

The extant literature points at elected officials—mayors especially—as the pivotal actors in local migration policy-making. Early research describes their behavior as driven

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<sup>2</sup> Such policies have spread in the 1980s to prevent the deportation of asylum-seekers from El Salvador and Guatemala, but a second wave of diffusion has occurred since the 2000s, when the tightening of federal immigration laws on the heels of 9/11 led many cities to adopt sanctuary policies aimed at protecting undocumented immigrants at large.

by electoral panic (e.g., Mahnig 2004). Since the public opinion is often assumed to oppose immigration, and immigrants are usually devoid of voting rights, politicians would be keen to opt for restrictive policies, regardless of their ideology. In fact, they can embrace such decisions with little concern in terms of immigrants' electoral response (Monogan 2013). Further studies refine this argument, showing that politics does make a difference for policy outcomes. In her study of Italian cities, Caponio (2010a) finds that incumbents' ideology determines the orientation of policies to a large extent. Progressive politicians tend to promote multiculturalism, thus recognizing immigrants as a resource for the receiving communities. Conservatives instead prefer assimilationism and usually frame migration as a problem. Individual immigrants may be integrated on an individual basis, providing basic assistance to the most vulnerable groups (e.g., refugees, asylum-seekers, trafficked women) while countering social deviance through the use of force ('law-and-order' approach to integration, cf. Scholten 2013: 225)<sup>3</sup>

Studies on US localities provide additional nuances on the political determinants of local migration policy-making. When it comes to exclusionary policies, scholars point at demographic change, partisanship, national politics, and local officials' interpretative schemes as the main drivers of these policies (e.g., Ramakrishnan & Wong 2010; Gulasekaram & Ramakrishnan 2015; de Graauw *et al.* 2013; Steil & Vasi 2014). When significant numbers of immigrants rapidly settle in a community, right-leaning entrepreneurs, such as Republicans seating in the municipal government, are likely to respond with exclusionary measures. Yet such local dynamics unfold through the prism of national rhetoric (Hopkins 2010). Profiting from debates that are salient nationwide, local right-wing actors frame social change as a threat for their communities, so to justify hostile responses.

Driving forces are different in the case of inclusionary policies (cf. Steil & Vasi 2014; de Graauw & Vermeulen 2016). Partisanship is still important, as pro-immigrant measures are more likely to be implemented when incumbents are left-leaning. However, political leaders need to sustain intense processes of coalition-building for passing such policies. They have to find the support of local elites and advocacy groups, possibly overcoming the skepticism of their electorate. Scholars point, moreover, at the role of policy

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<sup>3</sup> Also, mainstream left parties tend to respond to the success of the extreme right by embracing more restrictive positions on migration-related issues (see Krause 2017; Hinnfors *et al.* 2012).

feedbacks. For instance, federal refugee resettlement policies generate feedbacks that encourage cities to accommodate not only refugees but immigrants more broadly (Williamson 2018).

Whether enacting inclusionary or exclusionary policies, the role of local political leaders is thus decisive in setting policy frames. By drawing the perimeter of legitimate policy choices, they seek to build and maintain consensus over migration-related issues. Yet, once frames are established, they are likely to become blame avoidant so as to minimize electoral risks (Caponio & Borkert 2010). Being politically hot and technically complex, the governance ‘on the ground’ of migration-related issues is often in the hands of experts and civil servants, who are not electorally accountable. In fact, politicians are more likely resort to experts’ information when the issues at stake are highly politicized (Lundin & Öberg 2013). Bureaucrats’ expertise and discretion are thus crucial for policy-making and may even act as veto points throughout policy processes.

Non-state actors bear the lion’s share of local migration policy-making, too. On the grounds of their technical know-how and political legitimacy, civil society organizations participate at policy arenas and delivers services in cooperation with (or on behalf of) the state. Faith-based and lay NGOs, trade unions, grassroots committees, and migrants’ associations are the main actors involved. They often access policy-makers through formal consultations, but also thanks to their personal ties with incumbents. Faith-based organizations are normally the privileged partners of conservative governments, whereas progressive politicians more likely interact with trade unions and lay cooperatives. Being often in charge of service delivery, the civil society is especially influential during the implementation stage, after policies are formally adopted (cf. Penninx & Martiniello 2004; Schiller 2017).<sup>4</sup>

Because of their connections with local political elites, civil society actors can more easily mold municipal than national policies. Immigrants themselves have greater chances

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<sup>4</sup> Other authors (e.g. Caponio 2006) have similarly suggested a distinction between *government* and *governance* of local migration policy, consistently with other works in the field of urban studies. For instance, Le Galès (1995) describes the local *government* as an organized, rational, and coherent form of authority, essentially based on the power of local politicians and bureaucrats over policy-making. Differently, the local *governance* refers to fragmented, heterogeneous, and incoherent policy processes, in which local authorities represent only a component of a broader network.

for participation at the local level, beyond the formal provisions of national laws on foreigners' political rights (Penninx *et al.* 2004; Kalandides & Vaiou 2012). The role of civil society is even more pronounced in countries that have traditionally experienced emigration, and where immigration has occurred only very recently and rapidly. In Italy and Spain, for instance, national legislations were initially unprepared to the high number of arrivals that started in the 1980s. The initial absence of legislative frameworks attributed—*de facto*—the responsibilities of integration to local (non-state) actors, which often filled in for 'policy voids.'

However, non-state actors do not mobilize evenly and controversial dynamics often emerge among them. NGOs, trade unions, and other social organizations are overwhelmingly composed by natives who indirectly represent migrants' demands. They are better equipped to interact with policy-makers, especially because of their organizational, financial, and political resources. Immigrant groups might be then 'crowded out' (Caponio 2005). Such power imbalances are likely to intensify over time, as the lack of access to policy-makers further reinforce power asymmetries. Relatedly, while many European municipalities established consultative institutions to include immigrant communities in policy-making (Morales & Giugni 2011), they are often prone to the cooptation of the associations closer to, or dependent on, local incumbents (Però 2007). Organizational skills, financial capacities, and political autonomy then emerge as critical resources of ethnic minorities for emancipating their position as political actors. This also echoes the literature on immigrants' political participation, which shows how group-level resources are important for having a voice in the political process (e.g., Jacobs & Tillie 2004; Fennema & Tillie 2001).

In a nutshell, elected officials are the main actors of local migration policy-making. By establishing frames that resonates with the values of their constituency, they seek to secure electoral gains while setting the principles and the boundaries of policy choices. Assorted civil society actors intervene to mold these policies and to deliver public services. Within this context, however, the outcomes of social movements for local migration policy-making have been largely overlooked. Despite the burgeoning literature on pro-immi-

grant movements, «research on the consequences of social movements in the field of immigration has been lagging behind» (Eggert & Giugni 2015: 168). The next section is precisely aimed at bridging social movement studies with the scholarship on migration policy.

### **2.3 Pro-immigrant activism and social movement outcomes**

#### *The contentious politics of migration*

Migration from the Global South is producing structural changes within western countries as contexts of settlement. These transformations are nowadays extremely politicized, as a result of multiple actors' mobilization, within both the electoral and the protest arena (Eggert & Giugni 2015). Contention is not limited to material issues, such as social welfare, labor, and security, but it also touches upon cultural and religious aspects, especially with respect to the integration of immigrants with a Muslim background.

The contentious politics of migration fits Tilly's (1978) definition of both proactive and reactive movements. On the one hand, progressive movements struggle for ensuring rights that immigrants do not enjoy yet. On the other hand, right-wing movements seek to maintain the status quo, that means, to not grant the rights enjoyed by native-born residents to incoming groups. These mobilizations have to be intended in broad terms, since they are not limited to physical protest, but they also encompass softer collective actions, such as speech acts—consistently with the work by Koopmans & Statham (1999) on claim-making. The research project 'Support and Opposition to Migration' shows how claims concerning migration in western Europe have dramatically escalated in the period 1995-2009, and how claimants are both state and non-state actors, including social movements (Berkhout 2012). In sum, migration-related issues represent a field of contention involving movements *by*, *in solidarity with*, and *against* migrants.

All else equal, raising numbers of immigrants increase the likelihood of mobilization by immigrants themselves, their native allies, and anti-immigration groups (e.g., Eggert & Giugni 2015; Caiani *et al.* 2012; Hutter & Kriesi 2013). Nonetheless, one of the most solid findings of social movement studies is that structural changes do not automatically translate into agency by collective actors. At least three factors intervene in enabling mobilization, i.e., the organizational strength of movements, the framing of collective grievances,

and the opening of political opportunities that incentivize the pursuit of change (cf. McAdam *et al.* 1996). This last condition—i.e., the contextual dynamics occurring outside the movement environment that affect their own mobilization—is now scrutinized in detail, as it has proved to hold also in the field of migration.

*The theory of the political opportunity structure*

Scholars of social movements have attached growing importance to the political-institutional context in which social movements develop and mobilize. Somehow, this allowed researchers to move beyond classical theories of collective action that focus on social change, such as relative deprivation, for explaining mass activism. After all, social movements need sustained interactions with elites, opponents, and authorities in order to be defined as such (Tarrow 2011). The concept of contentious politics point at a relational configuration of social movements by placing them within a broader political picture, in which the counter-mobilization of their opponents is also important (McAdam *et al.* 2001). Tracing neat boundaries between institutional and movement politics is thus detrimental (Kriesi 2015).

The theory of the political opportunity structure (POS) has been crucial for moving beyond movement-centered perspectives, as it sheds light on movement dynamics as a function of the external environment in which they are inherently embedded (McAdam *et al.* 1996). The notion of POS was firstly introduced by Eisinger (1973) to describe the degree of openness of political systems vis-à-vis the demands of urban protesters. Several authors have further developed this bundle of concepts because of its worth in explaining collective action, especially in mature democratic regimes (for example, see Kitschelt 1986; Tarrow 1996; 2011; della Porta & Rucht 1991; Kriesi *et al.* 1995). Since activists are assumed to act purposefully, they are more likely to mobilize when they perceived greater opportunities for successfully influencing politics. In other words, the POSs are those signals to social and political actors that may either encourage or discourage them to use their internal resources for forming social movements (Tarrow 1996).

The conceptualizations of the POS are numerous and often vary depending on the tradition and the context of investigation (for a comprehensive review, see della Porta 2013b). Overall, a distinction can be advanced based on the POS relative stability. The

long-lasting cleavage structure of a polity is relevant for the national development of social movements (Tilly 1978; Kriesi 2004). In addition, the territorial decentralization of institutional systems and the division of power between and within institutional bodies determine multiple points of access (Kitschelt 1986; della Porta 1995; Kriesi *et al.* 1995). When it comes to more contingent characteristics, the configuration of power can also affect social movements, because of electoral instability, elite divisions, or the availability of allies (e.g., Tarrow 1989). The composition of the executive and the legislative is of utmost importance, as it opens an avenue for movements to form alliances with established political actors. In general, the more expanded are the opportunities, the more intense is collective action. However, protest may radicalize when points of institutional access are particularly closed (della Porta & Rucht 1991).

The POS theory has proved useful also to study immigrant activism (e.g., Morales & Giugni 2011; Koopmans 2004; Burciaga & Martinez 2017). This scholarship attaches major importance to local contextual factors. Variations in the structure of opportunity at the local level result in different patterns of migrants' mobilization, although national models of integration and citizenship regimes are relevant anyway. According to Eggert and Giugni,

«[t]he increasing salience of migration as an issue in the public domain and in contentious politics goes along with an increasing organization of migrants as collective political actors. In the 1990s and 2000s, [...] there has been a paradigmatic shift towards theories stressing the role of resources and opportunities for the political mobilization of migrants. This theoretical turn has come in part under the lead of students of social movements who became interested in collective action in the field of immigration and ethnic relations politics. Studies undertaken in this theoretical tradition were able to show how *collective action by migrants follow logics similar to any other social movement* as well as its wide cross-national variation as a result of different sets of institutional and discursive opportunities» (Eggert and Giugni 2015: 166-167, emphasis added).

The literature reviewed thus far has focused on structures of political opportunity as potential determinants of mobilization. Yet the POS theory has looked not only at the

emergence, but also at the consequences of social movements in terms of political outcomes (cf. Bosi *et al.* 2016). In other words, the political-institutional context is not only a *determinant* of collective action, but also a *condition* for the mobilization to be influential. The same factors that facilitate mobilization affect, in turn, the outcomes sought by movements (Soule and King 2006: 1881). How can these insights be applied to the study of migration governance?

*Migration policy and social movement outcomes: The decisive role of allies*

The study of Steil & Vasi (2014) on US localities is virtually the only one engaging with a systematic assessment of movement outcomes in the field of migration policy-making. The authors introduce the notion of ‘municipal opportunity structure’ (MOS), which refers to the availability of local political allies as access points that facilitate the adoption of pro-immigrant ordinances. They find that mobilizations aimed at enlarging migrants’ rights are more likely to succeed in influencing policy-making when local powerholders are ideologically sympathetic with such demands. The authors elucidates the underlying causal mechanisms as follows:

«[...] associations and political context matter for the pro-immigrant movement because the proactive policies they seek to pass require sustained effort to craft, to win support, and to successfully enact. Immigrant civil society groups are essential because they serve as brokers, connecting two previously unconnected groups and mediating the relationships between the two [...]. Sympathetic political elites are important because they are well positioned to build support among native-born elites for pro-immigrant policies and to overcome skepticism among native-born voters.» (Steil & Vasi 2014: 1143)

The burgeoning literature on immigrant activism—while rarely concerned with the question of policy outcomes—also emphasizes how influential supporters are essential for turning so-called ‘outcasts’ into legitimate political actors (e.g., della Porta 2018; Steinhilper 2019; Nicholls 2013; Nicholls & Uitermark 2016; Ataç *et al.* 2016; Agustín & Jørgensen 2016; Rosenberg & Winkler 2014).

Social movements often mobilize to produce political (and thus policy) change. Yet achieving such victories is the exception rather than the rule. In the classic definition provided by Lipsky (1968), protest is the political resource of powerless groups. This weakness is particularly pronounced in the case of immigrant activists, being located at periphery of power relations. As claimed by Piven & Cloward (1979) in their seminal study on the Poor People's Movements, collective actors at the margin of society can hardly exercise any credible threat to institutional routines (cf. della Porta 2008b). This is often the case for immigrants, who are more likely to be materially deprived, socially stigmatized, and devoid of voting rights. Their chances of producing political reverberations are meager. Undocumented immigrants, being the «excluded among the excluded» (Monforte & Dufour 2011: 204), are those having the most meagre chances of producing political reverberations.

In the light of this weakness, influential supporters allow marginalized immigrants to mobilize «against all evident odds» (Steinhilper 2019: 574). As della Porta puts it,

«[t]he difficulty in constructing resources for mobilization of 'poor people' has often been identified as accounting for the important role played by potential allies. Social movement organizations are often formed by committed activists who take up the concerns of social constituencies to which they do not belong [...], but for which they act out of a sense of solidarity [...]. Given the lack of material and symbolic resources of the precarious constituency, protests on related issues often require the support of broad networks of different social movement organizations [...]» (della Porta 2018: 11).

'Supporters' or 'allies' may include institutional actors, social organizations, activists' groups, and individuals that «become guardians of migrants' rights and dignity» (Hagan 2008: 84). They favor the transit, the settlement and/or the integration of newcomers by giving material and moral relief, while possibly advocating the expansion of their rights (Fontanari & Ambrosini 2018). In fact, migrants' supporters tend to understand their humanitarian actions as politically loaded (Zamponi 2018), and then to blur the boundaries between activism and volunteering (della Porta 2020). For this reason, although these alliances may reproduce dynamics of ethnic subordination and be grounded on paternalistic

attitudes (e.g., Cappiali 2016), they are essential to allow immigrants' self-determination as political subjects.

In short, the political outcomes of pro-immigrant movements seem contingent upon the existence of a dense network of supporters—with the most decisive role played by local elected officials. Ideological affinity indeed galvanizes activists into crafting alliances with institutional actors. But why should policy-makers be responsive and cooperate?

Relevant insights come from the literature on movement-party interactions. Some of these studies adopt an agenda-setting perspective to explain how issues are transmitted from protest to institutional politics (cf. Walgrave & Vliegenthart 2012). When competing with each other, political parties resort to issue emphasis, i.e. they can gain strategic advantages in the electoral arena by emphasizing some issues while disregarding others. Such dynamics also hold at the local level and are especially pronounced when it comes to migration-related issues (Castelli Gattinara 2016). Hence, for the sake of competition, parties can pick up the issues raised by a social movement so as to shape the institutional agenda in their own favor (Hutter & Vliegenthart 2018).

Put differently, protest is a signal sent by large sectors of the electorate about urgent societal problems they care about (*ibid.*: 360). Elites can embrace popular causes for electoral opportunism, i.e. playing the role of 'tribunes of the people', but also guided by a more substantial ideological commitment (Hutter *et al.* 2019). Also, responsiveness can help parties in power to recover from a crisis of legitimacy (Holdo 2016). If large and persistent, protest can even represent an electoral threat, especially when many protesters belong to the incumbents' voter base. Precisely because they need support from above, social movements seek to profit from elites' vulnerability, trying to be perceived as potentially facilitating or disruptive for institutional goals (Amenta *et al.* 2010).

These are the strategic considerations that drive activists and public officials in their mutual interactions. When ideologically sympathetic, these actors are incentivised to back each other up in enacting pro-migrant policies at the local level. From this angle, the concept of 'municipal opportunity structure' is especially fruitful to connect migration policy and social movement studies. It allows us to capture the role of local political leaders as coalition-builders and consensus-seekers while engaged in migration policy-making, as

well as the dynamics by which pro-immigrant activists can shape policy outcomes. What is missing, however, is a focus on multi-level governance, which is a defining feature of migration policy-making. The following section draws on urban studies to incorporate this perspective into the study of social movement outcomes.

## **2.4 Urban perspectives on migration governance and social movements**

### *Cities and pro-immigrant movements*

Social movements have gained importance in many fields of urban governance, especially since the withdrawal of the state from the sphere of social reproduction (cf. Castells 1983; Mayer 2003; della Porta & Subirats 2019). What is the nexus between pro-immigrant movements and the urban space?

Urban scholars with a focus on contentious politics have convincingly demonstrated how cities are the most favorable settings for the emergence of pro-migrant activism. Walter Nicholls is among the pioneers of this scholarship. In his study on Californian cities (Nicholls 2016), for instance, he points out that the specificities of the ‘urban’ facilitate the agency of undocumented immigrants. Politicization is a relational process to be sustained over time through resources that are far more abundant in large cities. Because of its dense population of individuals and organizations, the urban environment works as a catalyst for relationships, which eventually smooth the development of trust, solidarities, and collective identities.

In other words, thanks to cities’ relational density, immigrants can develop a sense of groupness and, then, weave networks of allies that ultimately enhance the viability of their claims (see also Uitermark & Nicholls 2012; Nicholls & Uitermark 2016). In Nicholls’ own words,

«[t]he density of people and organizations combines with the diversity of activist networks to make cities into unique spaces facilitating the transformation of stigmatized immigrants into robust political groups. The city becomes a strategic site for creating the levels of power needed to assert broad claims for equality. By becoming politicized

in the urban trenches, outcasts like undocumented immigrants can position themselves in larger fights for rights, recognition and equality» (Nicholls 2016: 300).

Scholars adopting quantitative methodologies have also embraced space-sensitive approaches in the study of migration-related mobilizations. For example, Cebotari & Vink (2013) find that ethnic minorities engage in more intense forms of protest behavior when they are territorially compressed, as they benefit from «better intra-group communication and stronger feelings of in-group ‘we’ identity» (*ibid.*: 303; see also Huang & Liu 2018: 24).

Hence, immigrants more easily develop a sense of belonging when settled in cities, as it is where they benefit from concrete chances for their economic, cultural, and political integration (Pratsinakis *et al.* 2017). Even in face of extremely hostile conditions, e.g. in terms of administrative status and social rights, immigrants are «*de facto* members of the community—they work in the city, pay local taxes, are homeowners, tenants, or landlords in the city, send their children to local schools, attend city churches, shop in the city, etc» (de Graauw 2014: 312).

Through their everyday agency, immigrants produce frictions in the very social structure constraining them. Fontanari & Ambrosini (2018) refer to such autonomous spaces as ‘interstices’, i.e., blurry urban spaces at the intersection of European, national, and local jurisdictions, within which migrants and their allies can develop a political subjectivity and, ultimately, mobilize against the hostile conditions they face. Urban interstices thus offer strategic opportunities for immigrant activism (see also Swerts 2017; Pascucci 2017). Monforte & Dufour (2011)—in their studies on undocumented migrants in Berlin, Paris, and Montréal—similarly refer to ‘borderline citizenship regimes.’ In their account, immigrant activism originates from the interaction of contradictory forces. Migrants, while suffering from various layers of exclusion, are also able to react by creating some forms of leeway in their day-by-day lives. Mobilization thus emerge ‘at the border’ of such concomitant conditions. From this perspective, then, hostile power relations generate their own opposition.

What are the implications of these urban dynamics in terms of multi-level governance? Cities are sites of dense relational networks that articulate over multiple territorial scales, meaning that various tiers of government and spheres of power are conflated in

the urban environment. When migrants engage in alliance-building, they can exploit such a ‘fractal’ configuration of urban societies for transcending their immediate local context. As Margit Mayer puts it, «[c]ities are thus more than a mere backdrop, stage or container for social movements; rather, they can be seen as strategic sites for activating complex activist networks» (2018: 5). In other words, urban contentious politics transcends its local scope and enable «aggrieved local actors to transform the local arena into a major front in national immigration battles» (Nicholls *et al.* 2016: 3). Again, as Nicholls puts it,

«[emerging groups] will need to target different geographical arenas, create support among broader publics and tap into a wider variety of resources to sustain longer, harder, riskier and more costly projects. ‘Scaling up’ political projects will likely motivate a group to reach out to potential allies, build bridges and draw on the resources of their broader environment. Scaling up is therefore an intensive networking process characterized by building relations between actors in different geo-political worlds. Cities are strategic arenas for enabling these kinds of connections. [...] Geographic proximity makes it easier to connect to and sustain relations with a plethora of different organizations and groups [...] The greater availability of real and potential contacts makes larger cities better suited to the geographical extension of the group beyond its original location of origin». (2016: 304-5)

In short, thanks to the relational qualities of urban environments, pro-immigrant movements are encouraged to strategically expand their networks with the purpose of scaling up and out, i.e. targeting other geographical arenas (see also Nicholls & Uitermark 2016). It should be noted that, while mechanisms of scale shift are not new in social movement studies (e.g., McAdam *et al.* 2011: 331), an urban lens was missing in this realm.

#### *Urban politics and policy-making: Moving upstream*

Strikingly, such dynamics of upscaling are also emphasized by scholars of urban politics outside the perimeter of migration and social movement studies. Many of these contributions concern environmental policies—another sector heavily characterized by multiple scales of decision-making (cf. Rootes 2013; Verhoeven 2018). For instance, Sapotichne & Jones (2012) account for the strategy enacted by a coalition of city mayors to

counter the decision of the then-President of the US, George W. Bush, not to ratify the UN Kyoto Protocol. Mayors' immediate objective was the implementation of the Protocol's goals (reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions) at the city-level. Yet this also activated a longer-term dynamic of upscaling. In fact,

«[...] city-level innovation sparked federal intervention, which then facilitated and codified urban policy change—a bottom-up-top-down process, if you will. As the issue of climate change gained in status, policy attention and activity cascaded across the US federal system, resulting both in substantial federal change as well as nontrivial transformations in city-level institutions» (Sapotichne & Jones 2012: 444).

Reviewing various empirical studies (e.g., Shipan & Volden 2006; Sapotichne & Smith 2012), the authors introduce the concept of 'vertical venue-shopping' (Sapotichne & Jones 2012: 454-5), meaning that political actors—specifically, governments and interest groups operating at various levels—can target higher/lower tiers of government to bypass unreceptive political environments. For example, city-level advocacy groups can opt to target local governments to address national issues, and vice versa.

Otherwise put, multi-level governance also represents a political opportunity structure, having varying degrees of accessibility depending on the layer considered (cf. Princen & Kerremans 2008). Multivenue policy areas—i.e., policy sectors whose governance is dispersed across a variety of arenas and territorial scales—are the most favorable for policy entrepreneurs (Sapotichne & Smith 2012). Urban policy-makers facing unfavorable environments can access alternative policy venues, within which new actors participate, new rules are adopted, and new policy images are promoted (Pralle 2003: 234). It follows, more broadly, that multi-level governance poses both constraints on, and opportunities for, political actors at the city-level (cf. Le Galès & Harding 1998; Le Galès & Vitale 2014). As Kübler & Pagano (2012) put it,

«[c]ity governance cannot be understood within the confines of the political institutions of a municipal government and the interplay of interest group pressures and political party posturing within city boundaries. [...] City autonomy is thought of as a

form of agency that is structured both by legal rules (constitutional and financial decentralization) and political practice (the access of local elites to higher-level arenas) that shape urban politics and policy, not only by posing limits, but also by providing opportunities» (Kübler & Pagano 2012: 114).

This line of reasoning also confirms how urban social movements can upscale their mobilization, possibly producing policy outcomes beyond the boundaries of local politics. It should be noted, in fact, that venue-shopping is a tactical option normally followed by «policy losers, disadvantaged groups or outsiders» (Fischer *et al.* 2015: 315). Activists—being ‘outsiders’ by definition—routinely resort to venue-shopping. As Pralle puts it, «examples of such behavior are numerous and hail from a variety of causes and campaigns – from the environmental, to civil rights, to anti-abortion movements» (Pralle 2003: 238). Appealing courts, international organizations, media outlets, or the public writ large can be ultimately regarded as instances of (vertical) venue-shopping. From this angle, policy areas whose governance is dispersed across multiple authorities and geographical scales are particularly advantageous for social movements, as they can more easily exploit alternative venues and veto points (cf. Kitschelt 1986).

In sum, urban studies point at the city as a political space that cannot be simply subsumed under the heading of ‘local politics.’ Its drivers, dynamics, and implications are far-reaching and distinctive in many respects. Urban actors—including policy-makers and social-movement activists—can exploit cities’ relational qualities to mold policies at various levels of governance, far beyond the geographical boundaries of the city. As seen, these might be referred as mechanisms of upscaling that, from a policy perspective, consist in deliberate strategies of vertical venue-shopping. It is here contended that urban actors participating at migration policy arenas are likely to embrace similar strategies aimed at rescaling political conflicts. Ultimately, the outcomes that pro-immigrant social movements can produce are thus contingent upon the availability of allies—especially in municipal governments—as well as the institutional ecology around specific migration-related issues. The next section will theorize the plausibility of social movements outcomes based on such insights.

## 2.5 Theoretical framework: The arenas and mechanisms of contentious migration policies

*Setting contention in motion: Epistemological perspectives on arenas of interaction and causal mechanisms*

Structuralist perspectives have become increasingly contested in the scholarly debate, especially by those advocating a relational, strategic-interaction approach to social movement studies and social sciences more broadly (cf. Jasper & Duyvendak 2015; Duyvendak & Jasper 2015; Jasper forthcoming). The POS theory is criticized for being overly deterministic, as if mobilization is a mere product of objective conditions. This would lock analytical endeavors into a motionless picture. As Jasper puts it,

«[i]t sometimes seems, in these theories, as if the structures impose such severe constraints on players that they do not have decisions to make. Although we do not want to deny external constraints, a strategic perspective helps us observe maneuvers within them. These constraints are imposed by the actions and reactions of other players. We must picture politics as a long sequence of interactions among many players, including but not confined to protestors and state players» (Jasper 2015: 16).

Hence, a shift of perspective from *static* structures and agents toward *situational* arenas and players is advanced.

From this angle, social movement outcomes do depend on opportunities and constraints, but not as driving forces in and of themselves. Rather, these are «reflexively and strategically used and played out in the interaction between challengers and targets» (Den Hond *et al.* 2014: 11; see also Chiarello 2013; Arce 2016). Activist groups, as well as their allies, targets, opponents, and third parties are fundamentally interdependent in their moves. Choices are made in anticipation of, and response to, those of the counterparts. Aims are not permanent, but constantly remodeled on the interpretation of past experiences and future expectations. Arenas are the sites and frameworks within which these streams of interactions—including interchanges, communication, bargaining, and negotiation—unfold (Alimi *et al.* 2015).

The focus on arenas and players also help researcher to analyze movement outcomes regardless of the intentions behind them, in so far as *actual* interactions, and not

only *purposeful* ones, produce social and political change (cf. Giugni 1998). When it comes to public policies, this means moving beyond the concept of ‘success’ as outlined by Gamson (1990). As Amenta *et al.* (2010) put it,

«[c]hallengers may fail to achieve their stated program—and thus be deemed a failure—but still win substantial new advantages for their constituents, a situation likely for challengers with far-reaching goals [...]. There may be beneficial unintended consequences [...]. Challengers can do worse than fail; they can induce backlashes, such as repression or increased policing [...]. Challengers’ constituencies may gain political results that challengers do not cause [...].»(Amenta *et al.* 2010: 290).

The classic dichotomy of insiders and outsiders (Tilly 1978) is also interrogated. Interactions among players unfold within arenas whose boundaries are fuzzy, porous, and overlapped, thus there is no fixed, overarching context containing social movements (cf. Jasper 2015). Players themselves are far from monolithic. Usually they are more or less fluid compounds of sub-players, united under the banner of a ‘fictional’ identity. Activists—while perhaps addressing their demands to the state as a generic entity—ultimately interact with specific powerholders, such as members of the executive, police officials, and so on. Social movements usually do not address their demands to the state as a generic entity, but rather target specific authorities, such as members of the executive, the police, and so on. Therefore, ‘breaking down the state’ in components that are analytically relevant is a crucial task (Duyvendak & Jasper 2015). Relatedly, players can be also regarded as arenas in their own right, where cooperation and conflict coexist.

Strikingly, such an analytical move from (macro-institutional) structures to (policy) arenas has been undertaken *also in the specific realm of migration studies*. Specialist on migration have increasingly shifted their focus to the processual dimension of policies, so to unveil the underlying mechanisms of political struggle through which state and non-state actors interact with each other (e.g., Zincone & Caponio 2006). This implies the investigation of their strategic orientation in exerting an influence on the policy process. Recognizing the insufficiency of national legislative frameworks in providing analytical depth, Caponio (2010b) introduces the concept of ‘local migration policy arena’ to depict fields of policy-making in which multiple actors mobilize around migration-related issues, including social

welfare, religious diversity, and citizenship. Fontanari & Ambrosini (2018) similarly refer to the concept of ‘battleground’ to describe how a vast array of actors at different territorial scales (e.g. public authorities, civil society organizations, migrants themselves) struggle to either restrict or expand the rights of (forced) migrants.

Strategic-interaction approaches are often associated—epistemologically and methodologically—with mechanism-based research on contentious politics (for an extensive discussion, see for example Alimi *et al.* 2015). This strand of literature is grounded on the path-breaking book *‘Dynamics of Contention’* (McAdam *et al.* 2001), as well as subsequent studies by its co-authors, who define mechanisms as «a delimited class of events that alter relations among specified sets of elements in identical or closely similar ways over a variety of situations» (*ibid.*: 24). Mechanisms thus enact causal relationships, and produce change, within a given arena of interaction. Also, they are recurrent, that is to say, they manifest and combine in a regular fashion across under various, different circumstances. McAdam *et al.* (2001: 25-26) distinguish between environmental (e.g., economic shocks), cognitive (e.g., legitimation), and relational (e.g., brokerage) mechanisms. Although individual mechanisms are driving forces in and of themselves, they are mutually reinforcing and tend to concatenate with one another along causal sequences, hence constituting a process. Episodes of contention—including campaigns, strikes, revolutions, wars, and other forms of political struggle—involve a multiplicity of these processes.

Because of their focus on tracing causal processes, mechanism-based approaches have been productively applied to study the political (and policy) outcomes of social movements (e.g., Kolb 2007; Andrews 2001)—possibly representing «the major progress in the field» (Bosi *et al.*, 2016: 12). Accordingly, I follow this trajectory to theorize *how* and *under what conditions* pro-immigrant social movements exert their influence on local migration policy-making, i.e., to unveil the mechanisms connecting movement action to political outcomes. I define these processes as contentious migration policies, as the next section will show in detail. Strategic-interaction and mechanism-based approaches appear especially promising in the light of their analytical flexibility. In fact, «[m]echanisms and processes form a continuum» (McAdam *et al.* 2001: 27), meaning that the researcher establishes the boundaries between them. Yet, these choices will be grounded on the most prominent contributions in the field of migration, social movement, and urban studies.

*The arenas and mechanisms of contentious migration policies*

Drawing on the literature reviewed in the previous sections of this chapter, and siding with strategic-interaction and mechanism-based approaches to contentious politics, here I propose a comprehensive framework for studying the outcomes of social movements in the field of local migration policy-making. The concept of *contentious migration policies* is introduced to disclose the black box linking mobilization to policy change.

In general terms, policies can be described as «authoritative lines of action in which states provide goods, protections, and freedoms recurrently to specified groups in a routine fashion to all those meeting specified requirements» (Amenta *et al.* 2019: 452). Activist groups are among the several of subjects that may have an interest at stake in, and seeking to influence, these outcomes, which of course are not under their direct control. Conflicts among those bearing competing interests are more likely to surface when policies are of a redistributive nature—as in the case of immigrant integration programs—because they divert resources from certain groups for the sake of allocating them to others (Lowi 1972). Adversarial and ideologically-driven interaction tend to prevail in these policy arenas (Aurich-Beerheide *et al.* 2015: 3). Also, migration can be regarded as an intractable policy controversy (Schön & Rein 1994) in as much as actors fundamentally disagree on the very issue at stake (Scholten 2013).

The contentious politics framework allow us to capture these conflictual dynamics in migration policy arenas, as well as to avoid a perspective solely focused on social movements, i.e., by considering broader patterns of interaction between claim-makers, elites, opponents, and the state (Ataç *et al.* 2016: 536).<sup>5</sup> Simultaneously, the framework does not prevent use to scrutinize more routinized, less conflictual institutional dynamics, in so far as the idea of contentious politics

«challenge[s] the boundary between institutionalized and noninstitutionalized politics. [...] [T]he study of politics has too long reified the boundary between official, prescribed politics and politics by other means. As an unfortunate consequence, analysts

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<sup>5</sup> By contentious politics, McAdam *et al.* (2001: 5) mean «episodic, public, collective interaction among makers of claims and their objects when (a) at least one government is a claimant, an object of claims, or a party to the claims and (b) the claims would, if realized, affect the interests of at least one of the claimants».

have neglected or misunderstood both the parallels and the interactions between the two». (McAdam *et al.* 2001: 6).

In the remaining of this section, I will design three concentric arenas of interactions deemed relevant for the occurrence of social movement outcomes in the field of local migration policy-making, i.e., the *civil society* arena, the *city politics* arena, and the *multi-level governance* arena. Each of these tend to correspond to a specific causal mechanism, i.e., brokerage, alliance-building, and upscaling, respectively. Despite their position of relative weakness position vis-à-vis other players in the arenas, social movements can create a strategic leverage by means of these mechanisms, which reinforce and concatenate with one another (Bosi *et al.* 2016: 12). The mechanisms under scrutiny thus operate and yield their influence at the meso-level, i.e., they entail interactions among groups/organizations (Alimi *et al.* 2016).

#### (1) The civil society arena

This arena is populated by the vast array of non-state players at the city-level bearing an interest in the expansion of immigrant rights. These include, first of all, immigrants themselves. Everyday city life provides them with assorted opportunities to build inter-ethnic ties (Pratsinakis *et al.* 2017) and be acknowledged as legitimate community members (Varsanyi 2006; de Graauw 2014). These opportunities are also of a political nature. The peculiar qualities of urban spaces—notably, the availability of dense relational networks extended over an array of geographical scales—allow them to create bonds of solidarity, craft alliances, and ultimately turn into vocal political subjects (Nicholls 2008; 2016). Their supporters thus play a decisive role in smoothing such processes of politicization. These include structured organizations (e.g., unions, faith-based associations), radical movements, spontaneous initiatives, and individuals (Fontanari & Ambrosini, 2018: 591).

Hence, the emergence of a vocal pro-immigrant movement that seeks to pose a sustained challenge to powerholders is heavily based on the mechanism of *brokerage*, that is, «the linking of two or more previously unconnected social sites by a unit that mediates their relations with one another and/or with yet other sites» (McAdam *et al.* 2001: 26; cf. Steil & Vasi 2014: 1143). While this mechanism is the bread and butter of any collective

action, it appears essential in the case of immigrant activists, who can hope to surpass their own marginality by building bridges with more influential, often native-born allies acting out of a sense of solidarity (della Porta 2018: 11). In various, contradictory ways, these civil society actors give immigrants material and moral relief, while possibly advocating and legitimizing their aspirations in the political agenda (e.g., Zamponi 2018). Particularly important is the role of NGOs that, over the last decade, have hybridized with social movements in terms of repertoires of action (e.g., participation in protest campaigns) and organizational forms (e.g., overlapping membership, cf. della Porta 2020).

As a result, pro-immigrant movements are far from monolithic. They consist of constellations of heterogeneous players, held together by a common commitment. By the same token, mobilizations *by* and *in solidarity with* immigrants are caught in a plethora of dilemmas and trade-offs. Aside from internal conflicts that are recurrent in activist circles—such as feuds between moderates and radicals<sup>6</sup>—they also suffer from more specific fragilities. Very typical is the Powerful Allies dilemma, which arises «when protest groups make some kind of connection with another player but often find that the other player twists them to its own ends rather than helping the protestors attain their own» (Jasper 2015: 20). These power asymmetries are closely linked to race and ethnicity, with well-resourced native organizations eager to ‘crowd out’ those led by immigrants (e.g., Caponio 2005). Conflictual dynamics thus make pro-immigrant mobilizations intrinsically flimsy and volatile. A favorable political environment at the city-level, however, may represent a powerful incentive for even the most reluctant activist to coalesce in a common platform. These forces unfold in what I refer to as the ‘city politics arena.’

## (2) The city politics arena

This arena contains the manifold urban players with a stake in migration-related urban affairs. Aside from those in the civil society arena, particularly important here are institutional actors—namely elected officials in the city hall, civil servants, and political

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<sup>6</sup> As brokerage mechanisms normally require the crafting of univocal frames and demands to be broadcasted to third parties (Alimi *et al.* 2015), pro-immigrant movements are likely to face internal struggles between advocates of ‘humanitarianism’ and those pushing for more antagonistic discourses (e.g., Fleischmann and Steinhilper 2017).

parties—, but also anti-immigration groups, the media, and the electorate writ large. Institutional politics has a significant impact on social movement dynamics (e.g., Kitschelt 1986; della Porta & Rucht 1991; Kriesi *et al.* 1995), including the realization of successful and meaningful outcomes (e.g., Soule & King 2006). Relatedly, immigrant integration policies are normally crafted through intense, meticulous processes of consensus-building, which can only thrive in a propitious political environment. Civil society groups need to build ties with sympathetic political elites who, in turn, are well positioned to find «the support of native-born elites [...] and to overcome skepticism among native-born voters» (Steil & Vasi 2014: 1143; see also de Graauw & Vermeulen 2016).

Hence, the key mechanism enabling pro-immigrant activists to affect the political process is *alliance-building*, which can be described as «the creation of new, visible, and direct coordination of claims between two or more previously distinct actors» (Alimi *et al.* 2015: 8). Political entrepreneurs have to crystalize the manifold magmatic forces in support of immigrants that gurgle within the urban political realm, clustering them in a potent—albeit variably unstable and internally contested—alliance. After all, urban governance is a process of coordination among state and non-state actors in fragmented and uncertain environments (Borraz & Le Galès 2010).

Activists can engage in alliance-building on the grounds of various strategic leverages. These lie, first of all, in the realm of party politics. Political parties compete in (local) elections (de-)emphasizing a variety of issues—including immigration (Castelli Gattinara 2016). Left-leaning parties can thus embrace the cause of pro-immigrant advocates for the sake of galvanizing their egalitarian constituencies (cf. Hutter *et al.*, 2019; Hutter & Vliegenthart 2018). These considerations resonate with the political mediation argument (Amenta *et al.* 2010), according to which social movements seek to affect politics by altering elites' calculation, i.e., trying to be perceived as potentially facilitating or disruptive for institutional goals. Beside these ideologically-driven relationships with political parties, activists can exert an influence on municipal bureaucrats, too. These latter can capitalize on their discretionary powers so as to craft policies in support of immigrants (de Graauw 2014). For this purpose, non-state actors provide indispensable and otherwise unavailable resources, such as knowledge of social problems 'on the ground', organizational flexibility

in the midst of humanitarian emergencies, and legitimacy among policy target groups (e.g., Caponio 2010a; Mayer 2018; Rast *et al.* 2019; Kaufmann 2019).

Once again, these strategic interactions are subject to significant limits and contradictions. Most notably, at the root of the struggle for immigrant rights is the refusal of nationally-bounded definitions of citizenship; yet, state players are also the ultimate target of demand-makers, who urge public officials to at least partly accommodate their claims (e.g., Darling & Bauder 2019: 13). Social movements may be torn between, on the one hand, their reform-oriented components—which will seek to gain some, perhaps marginal rewards by working within the system—and on the other hand their more identity-oriented or militant sections. Moreover, movement influence is normally indirect and contingent upon the commitment of unreliable allies. In his seminal study on the rent strike movement in New York City, Lipsky (1970) warn about what he defines as the ‘problem of the powerless’, which is «to activate *third parties* to enter the [...] bargaining arena in ways favorable to protesters» (*ibid.*: 2, italics in original).<sup>7</sup>

These insights resonate with scholarly contributions on party-movement interactions. Parties in power tend to move toward the center in order to appeal to the median voter and this can disappoint the activist base that had supported them in the first place (Hutter *et al.* 2019). In this vein, McAdam & Tarrow point out that,

«[a]t first blush, the mobilized power of the movement ‘wing’ of an ascendant party would seem to be a wholly positive factor for those newly elected. And properly managed, the presence of mobilized movement supporters can aid and abet a party in power. [...] But there is an inherent tension between the logic of movement activism and the logic of electoral politics that, at times, has compromised the ability of incumbent parties to retain power. Electoral politics turns on a centrist, coalitional logic. Movements, on the other hand, tend toward narrow—sometimes extremist—views and an uncompromising commitment to single issues» (McAdam & Tarrow 2010: 537).

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<sup>7</sup> More precisely, with third parties Lipsky refers to «the *reference publics* of protest *targets*» (Lipsky 1970: 2, italics in original).

Lastly, another limit is related to immigration politics. Even if the commitment to pro-immigration stances seems convenient from a strategic point of view, left-leaning parties are often eager to chase their far-right challengers in the (often unsuccessful) attempt of neutralizing them (Abou-Chadi & Krause 2018).

### (3) The multi-level governance arena

This arena consists of the vast battleground in which players at different territorial scales (e.g., public authorities, civil society organizations, immigrants themselves) struggle to either restrict or expand immigrant rights (e.g., Caponio & Jones-Correa 2018; Fontanari & Ambrosini 2018). Those mobilized in the civil society and the city politics arenas interact in the multi-level governance arena, too. The apparatus of the central state play a dominant role here, as it reclaims a ‘natural’ monopoly in controlling immigration and regulating citizenship (Varsanyi 2006; Prak 2018). Within this framework, constitutionally subservient local governments are only allowed to bear responsibility in integration policy-making (Penninx *et al.* 2004; Spencer 2018), i.e., to entitle foreign-born residents with civil, political, and social rights *once admitted in a national polity* (cf. Hammar 1985). Immigrant rights are, in fact, most often stratified by and dependent on residency status as established under national jurisdictions (Bolderson 2011).<sup>8</sup> Yet, cities also proved fertile breeding ground in stretching, countering, or circumventing such limitations.

The key mechanism through which social movements can interfere with the multi-level governance of immigration is *upscaling*. McAdam *et al.* (2001) describe scale shift as a «change in the number and level of coordinated contentious actions leading to broader contention involving a wider range of actors and bridging their claims and identities» (*ibid.*: 331). I here refine this notion by drawing on the literature on urban politics, which points out how the relational density of cities allow urban actors to shape the public agenda and access policy arenas at various spatial scales, far beyond their immediate local realms (cf. Bazurli 2020). Again, while upscaling is a recurrent mechanism in processes of movement diffusion, they are all the more important in the case of pro-immigrant movements, which

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<sup>8</sup> This governance regime ultimately produces what Castles defines as a ‘hierarchy of citizenship’ (2007).

can «transform the local arena into a major front in national immigration battles» (Nicholls *et al.* 2016: 3). Institutional actors at the city-level, too, can surpass the limits of local politics through mechanisms of upscaling, notably through strategies of vertical venue-shopping for bypassing unreceptive political environments (Sapotichne & Jones 2012: 454-5). To put it a nutshell, «[a]ll politics is local, but it can have very broad consequences» (Jasper forthcoming: 12).

Particularly important here is the possibility for social movements and local governments to activate upscaling mechanisms *in tandem*, i.e., by mobilizing as an unitary player (an ‘urban alliance’) that targets external players, such as supra-local institutions. These dynamics are well-captured by the concept of governmental activism, which refers to «governmental players joining forces with non-governmental players in contentious actions against policies they want to prevent or redress» (Verhoeven & Duyvendak, 2017: 564). In such cooperative dynamics, partners engage in a «division of oppositional labor» (*ibid.*: 567), meaning that they back each other up by combining their respective political expertise. Notably, the concept of governmental activism breaks down the state into multiple governmental players (cf. Duyvendak & Jasper, 2015).

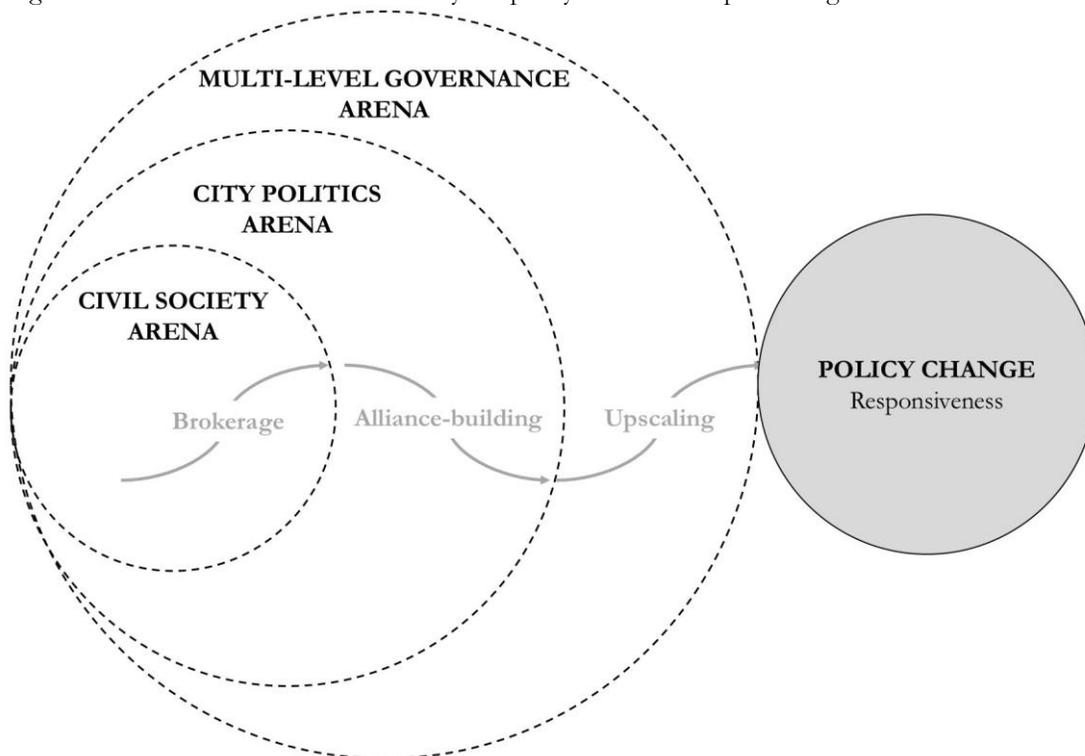
As most of strategic options, governmental activism poses dilemmas for the players involved. On the one hand, governmental players are part of institutional arrangements that set the scope of what they can legitimately do. On the other hand, social-movement activists are not submitted to such institutional rationales. They are committed to a single issue and have greater rooms for maneuver in elaborating their strategy (Verhoeven & Bröer 2015), e.g., opting for civil disobedience. Otherwise put, the benefits of standing together inevitably come at some costs. There is an fundamental gulf between allies inside and outside institutions or, as Mair (2009) put it, an incompatibility between responsiveness and responsibility—between what governments are ‘asked’ to do by citizens and what governments are ‘obliged’ to do by external circumstances.

#### Social movement outcomes, responsiveness, and policy change

It is here argued that the policy outcomes of pro-immigrant movements originate from the arenas and through the mechanisms outlined above. While such arenas and their

corresponding mechanisms have been distinguished from one another for analytical purposes, they tend to deploy their causal efficacy *unitedly*, like notes of the same ‘musical chord.’ The three arenas of interaction are concentric, that is to say, they can be visualized as circles having different diameters but the same center. Players of the civil society arena interact in the city politics arena, whose players, in turn, interact in the multi-level governance arena. Also, the mechanisms of brokerage, alliance-building, and upscaling tend to concatenate, to be mutually reinforcing, and to recur in similar fashions across different sites of interaction. The emergence of meaningful outcomes relies on these concurrences—although variations in the intensity of a single mechanism and in the patterns of combination are commonplace. *Figure 2.1* displays the overall theoretical framework of this study.

*Figure 2.1.* Theoretical framework to study the policy outcomes of pro-immigrant social movements



It can be hypothesized, for example, that players in the civil society arena intensify cooperative exchanges in face of a favorable shift in the city-political environment, such

as the electoral victory of a left-leaning coalition, thus precipitating mobilization on the ground of social ties that were already existent but inoperative until that moment (*brokerage*). Galvanized by the prospect of affecting policy-making, this revamped social movement will seek to build alliances with local political elites, such as ideologically sympathetic office-holders and political parties (*alliance-building*). While bearing different interests, these urban players may craft a united front aimed at opposing what they see as a common threat from the side of national policy-makers, such as a tightening of immigration policies, for instance by seeking to access alternative policy venues at the transnational level (*upscaling*). This sequence of interaction ultimately allow social movements to influence policy-making at various levels and in ways that are favorable to their constituencies. Importantly, these mechanisms and their combination can also work in reverse, thus explaining the *lack of movement success* or the production of ‘collective bads’ and losses, such as repression and policy setbacks (Amenta *et al.* 2019: 451).

Social movement outcomes can be studied in terms of *responsiveness*—which is then the ‘dependent variable’ of interest. Responsiveness can be defined as «the relationship between the manifest or explicitly articulated demands of a protest group and the corresponding actions of the political system which is the target of the protest-group demands» (Schumaker 1975: 494; see also Bosi *et al.* 2016: 14-5). The focus on responsiveness implies an in-depth examination of the targets of social movements, namely state authorities, with the purpose of understanding to what extent policy-makers are *influenced by* demand-makers. This analytical effort is particularly relevant because responsiveness (and the lack thereof) is likely to reshape opportunities and constraints for mobilization over time.

In order to develop a fine-grained analysis of social movement outcomes, it is necessary to draw on insights from migration and policy studies. First, attention is paid to the policy decisions adopted by the local government. Consistently with the research by Caponio (2010a) on migration policy in Italian cities, the aspects to be investigated are: (1) the official priorities; (2) their inherent frames, in order to assess if immigration is prioritized as either a resource or a problem; (3) the amount of financial resources earmarked, i.e. the public expenditure per resident immigrant and the share of social spending allocated for immigrants’ integration; (4) the source of financing, i.e. whether the policies are

financed by the municipal administration through its internal resources or by supra-local authorities that entrust the local ones with the process of implementation.

In addition, a more fine-grained assessment is carried out on the basis of the MIPEX Project (Huddleston *et al.* 2015), which compares immigrants' integration across EU countries through synthetic benchmarks concerning national laws and policies. Such indicators are here adapted for the analysis of local policies, with respect to both official policy decisions and actual practices of implementation. Specifically, municipal welfare services are analyzed according to the following criteria:

- *Eligibility.* It refers to the groups that are entitled with social benefits (i.e. permanent residents, residents on temporary work permits, residents on family reunion permits, asylum-seekers, and undocumented migrants), as well as the kind of coverage they are provided with (e.g. special guidelines and exemptions).
- *Access.* The entitled groups can experience varying degrees of access depending on the support provided by public authorities. Targeted measures can be adopted to increase the effective delivery of services. Examples include financial support, campaigns, orientation centers, administrative discretion and documentation, translations and cultural mediation, training of the administrative staff, collection of data on migrants' condition.<sup>9</sup>

## 2.6 Conclusion

This chapter was aimed at theorizing how and under what conditions social movements can produce outcomes in local migration policy-making—a research field that has been lagging behind. Migration studies, social movement studies, and urban studies shed light on multiple aspects that are crucial for this analytical endeavor. Yet, these insights need to be combined in a systematic, coherent fashion. Bridging these distinct but overlapped

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<sup>9</sup> A concrete example is the access to pre-primary education and compulsory education (cf. Huddleston *et al.* 2015: 30). The support to access provided by the state can consist in targeted measures for both increasing the participation of migrant pupils (e.g. financial support, campaigns) and their successful completion of compulsory education (e.g. early school leaving / second chance programs).

strands of literature, the chapter developed an original theoretical framework for studying the phenomenon under scrutiny.

Migration studies point at migration policy as a matter of multi-level governance. In the EU, nation-states bear the lion's share of immigration policies, i.e., those regulating the conditions for being admitted in their own territory. Power is instead more dispersed in the case of immigrant policies, i.e., those aimed at immigrants' integration once admitted in a national territory. More precisely, local governments are legally subservient to nation-states, but still enjoy large rooms to maneuver in autonomously crafting immigrant policies according to their vision and interests. Both local authorities and civil society organizations are pivotal players in these policy processes. As these local actors are sometimes able to interfere with nationally-defined citizenship regimes, conflicts across government tiers are likely to surface—ultimately making the multi-level governance of migration a contested realm.

Social movement studies show how pro-migrant activism is heavily dependent on the commitment of influential allies, often belonging to native-born social majorities. The configuration of power in local government is crucial for such processes of alliance-building. Mobilizations aimed at expanding migrant rights are more likely to succeed in influencing policy-making when local powerholders are ideologically sympathetic to such demands. On the one hand, social movements need these institutional allies to make their aspirations visible and legitimate in the political agenda. On the other hand, local political elites need the support of grassroots movements for crafting pro-immigrant policies, as they can provide indispensable political and cognitive resources. In short, when ideologically sympathetic, local officials and activists are incentivized to back each other up in enacting pro-immigrant policies at the local level. Social movement studies, however, overlooks how these cooperative dynamics unfold in contexts of multi-level governance.

Urban studies underline the strategic character of cities for political agency. Capitalizing on the peculiar qualities of urban politics—namely, the availability of dense relational networks extended over an array of geographical scale—both municipalities and social movements are able to shape the public agenda and access policy arenas at various spatial scales. These rooms for maneuver are especially large in policy areas whose governance is dispersed across multiple sites of authority, because urban political actors can

strategically upscale their mobilization and influence decision-making through ‘vertical venue-shopping.’ This implies, more broadly, that urban policy-making cannot be simply subsumed under the heading of policy-making with a local scope. The consequences of political agency at the city-level ultimately unfold far beyond the immediate local realms in which urban actors are embedded.

Based on these insights and siding with strategic-interaction and mechanism-based approaches to contentious politics, the chapter presented a comprehensive theoretical framework for studying the outcomes of social movements in the field of local migration policy-making. The concept of *contentious migration policies* was introduced to disclose the black box linking mobilization to policy change. Three concentric arenas are deemed relevant for the occurrence of movement outcomes, i.e., the *civil society* arena, the *city politics* arena, and the *multi-level governance* arena. Each of these tend to correspond to a specific causal mechanism, i.e., brokerage, alliance-building, and upscaling, respectively. Despite their position of relative weakness position vis-à-vis other players in the arenas, social movements can create a strategic leverage by means of these mechanisms, which reinforce and concatenate with one another. In the next chapters this theoretical framework will be applied to the study of contentious migration policies enacted in Milan and Barcelona.

# Chapter 3

## Methods: How to study migration policies and social movement outcomes in South European cities

«A *case study* may be understood as the intensive study of a single case where the purpose of the study is—at least in part—to shed light on a larger class of cases (a population)».

(Gerring 2007: 20, italics in original)

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter draws on seminal contributions in the field of social science methodology for laying the methodological foundations of the research project. In the next section ([Section 3.2](#)), the research design and the rationale behind case selection are presented. Contentious migration policies will be compared across two large South European cities—Milan and Barcelona. To justify this strategy for case selection, similarities and dissimilarities across relevant dimensions will be assessed in detail. Subsequently, [Section 3.3](#) presents the sources, the methods, and the techniques used in this study. Data draw on extensive fieldwork conducted in Milan and Barcelona in 2017-19 and entailing 57 semi-structured interviews with public officials, social movement spokespersons, other relevant civil society actors, and experts. Interviews have been subject to comparative qualitative analysis and triangulated with other sources, namely policy documents, movement releases, media outlets, official statistics, and the secondary literature.

### 3.2 Research design and case selection

The theoretical arguments of this dissertation will be explored through case study research, which entails the rich and holistic description of a few instances of a social phenomenon (della

Porta 2008a). Thanks to this research method, the causal pathway connecting mobilization and policy change can be scrutinized in-depth, according to a plausible fashion (Gerring 2007). Moreover, the processes under investigation will be traced and compared through a mechanism-based research strategy (e.g. Alimi *et al.* 2015). The ‘episodes-processes-mechanisms’ approach to the study of contentious politics is, in fact, inherently tied to case study research (McAdam *et al.* 2001). Ultimately, this kind of ‘black-box investigation’ is effective for carefully assessing the relative importance of intermediate variables and reducing the risk of spurious explanations, i.e., mistaking correlation for causation (Héritier 2008). This would eventually ensure external validity, that is to say, the elaboration of research findings holding beyond the immediate contexts of investigation.

Migration policies enacted in the Italian city of Milan and in the Spanish city of Barcelona are selected as units for an intensive comparative analysis. Cross-city and cross-country comparative efforts in the study of migration policy are challenging and rare, but still very promising and realizable through the control of crucial dimensions across different contexts (Caponio & Borkert 2010). Such endeavors are included also in the research agenda of urban scholars, who argue that the institutional frameworks of South European countries is favorable for implementing comparisons across cities located in this geographical area (cf. Sapotichne & Jones 2012: 19).

The Italian and Spanish contexts are similar in many respects that are relevant for the comparative study of local government, such as the recent authoritarian past and the Napoleonic administrative tradition (Lidström 1998). Both the countries have a ‘Southern Model’ of welfare systems, i.e., a state corporatist model in pensions, unemployment, and labor market policies, a universalistic model in education and health, and very limited provisions when it comes to social assistance, social care, and family support (Ferrera 1996; León & Pavolini 2014; Petmesidou & Guillén 2017). The institutional trends of decentralization, fragmentation, social spending retrenchment have further strengthen such elements of convergence (Catalano *et al.* 2015; Andreotti & Mingione 2014; Bifulco 2016; Pavolini *et al.* 2015). Relatedly, because of the austerity measures implemented during the Great Recession, the expenditure capacity of local institutions has been sensibly compressed, with an increasing pressure for providing public services in a context of shrinking resources.

As for immigration, Italy and Spain are areas of recent settlement that have traditionally experienced emigration, as well as the inversion of this trend since the 1980s, when the first

relevant waves of foreign migration occurred. The most powerful ‘pull’ factors have been their geographical location, the shortage of labor force, and the initial absence of national legislations on immigration (e.g., Zincone 2011; González-Enríquez 2009; King *et al.* 1997). The two countries have thus faced similar structural changes in terms of rapid and numerous arrivals, especially from the Middle East and northern Africa.

In both the countries, such structural transformations resulted in a regulatory model that is likely to *produce* undocumented immigration, in a pendulum between restrictive policies (e.g., residence permits are increasingly conditional on immigrants’ employment status) and frequent mass regularizations (e.g. Caponio & Graziano 2011; Castelli Gattinara 2016; Zincone 2011; González-Enríquez 2009). Such weak planning capacities and the logic of emergency that often permeates policy-making have put local actors at the forefront in handling immigration. This has generated a long-lasting legacy in migration governance, as municipalities and civil society organizations still bear the lion’s share.

The two countries are different from a macro-institutional perspective. On the one hand, Italy is a relatively centralized country that, however, undertook relevant processes of decentralization and institutional re-arrangement from the 1970s onwards. In the 1990s, moreover, major reforms<sup>10</sup> attributed an increased fiscal and decisional autonomy to municipalities (Cotta & Verzichelli 2007; Bobbio 2005). On the other hand, Spain has a decentralized structure, characterized by asymmetric regionalism, i.e., regions have diverse degrees of autonomy vis-à-vis the central government.

Aside from these general differences, similarities exist in the division of competences among government tiers *with specific regard to immigration*. The central states are almost fully responsible for immigration policy and international protection, while immigrants’ integration is generally planned and financed by regions, and eventually formulated and implemented at the municipal level (Campomori & Caponio 2017; Zincone 2011; i Cudolà 2004; Bruquetas-Callejo *et al.* 2011). As Cappiali & Triviño-Salazar point out, «Italy and Spain are two important cases because their high degree of decentralization leaves to the sub-national level ample attributions on the reception and accommodation of immigrants» (2018: 13).

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<sup>10</sup> Law 142/1990 and Law 81/1993 are the most important institutional reforms in this respect.

Within this framework, Milan and Barcelona are particularly suitable for a comparative investigation, being similar in terms of demography, economy, and society (key figures are summarized in *Table 3.1*). Milan is the capital of the Lombardy region and the second largest Italian municipality. Its economy is strongly based on finance, fashion, and high-tech. Since the 1970s, the transition to the service economy went hand in hand with a rapid growth of the foreign population. Integration policies have been enacted since the outset of these waves of migration. Barcelona, capital of the Autonomous Region of Catalunya, is also the second largest city in Spain. Logistics, ICT, real estate, and tourism have been the sectors in greatest expansion in recent decades. Foreign immigration rose since the 1990s. Barcelona and Catalunya have an enduring legacy of integration policies and are deemed pioneers even beyond the Spanish context. While affluent, the two cities experienced severe social inequalities, especially during the Great Recession (cf. Caponio 2014; Garces-Mascreñas 2014).

*Table 3.1.* Socio-economic indicators of Milan and Barcelona

	<b>Milan</b>	<b>Barcelona</b>
Population (2017)	1,380,873	1,620,809
Foreign-born as a proportion of population (2017)	19.3%	17.6%
GDP per capita in US\$, metropolitan area (2015)	51,768	45,752
Share of the GDP per capita (metropolitan area) over the national value (2015)	156.1%	143.9%

Population data are drawn from respective local government statistics; GDP data are drawn from OECD Regional Statistics.

In terms of institutional politics, the two cities experienced relevant changes over the last decades. From 1993 to 2011, Milan was governed by a center-right coalition that also included the anti-immigrant party of the LN (Lega Nord – Northern League). Since 2011, instead, the local government has been led by a center-left coalition with the PD (Partito Democratico – Democratic Party) as the main partner. Giuliano Pisapia—city mayor from 2011 to 2016—has a biography rooted in leftist militancy. During his legal career he has defended many activists and, in 1996-2006, he served as a member of the Italian Parliament for PRC (Partito della Rifondazione Comunista – Communist Refoundation Party). Large sectors of Milan’s activist organizations—ranging from progressive Christians to leftist welfare associations—supported Pisapia’s candidacy for mayor. Yet he won the center-left primaries and local elections as an

‘outsider.’ His victory was especially disruptive due to the long-standing hegemony of the Mil-  
anese center-right. Migration-related issues have been among the thorniest ones during the 2011  
local electoral campaign (Castelli Gattinara 2016). Beppe Sala succeeded Pisapia in 2016. While  
having a softer leftist profile than his predecessor, Sala’s government expressed a substantial  
continuity in terms of its political personnel and agenda (Pasini & Regalia 2016).

Remarkable shifts in local politics occurred in Barcelona, too. The first municipal elec-  
tions in 1979 saw the beginning of an enduring engagement between urban movements and city  
governance. The PSC-PSOE (Partit dels Socialistes de Catalunya – Socialists’ Party of Catalonia),  
which uninterruptedly ruled the city until 2011, consolidated its hegemony by answering de-  
mands coming from neighborhood committees—especially through the expansion of welfare  
provision and the establishment of democratic forms of policy-making. Yet this model of gov-  
ernance—commonly referred to as ‘Barcelona Model’ (Blanco 2009)—gradually eroded. While  
Barcelona was emerging as a leading global city, the movements’ ties with municipal power  
weakened and eventually vanished in 2011, when the conservative CiU (Convergència i Unió –  
Convergence and Union) took over city hall.

However, activists soon stepped back into institutional politics. Since 2015, Barcelona’s  
government has been ruled by BeC (Barcelona en Comú – Barcelona in Common), a platform  
born in 2014 upon the initiative of a small group of activists and intellectuals. It drew in sections  
of Barcelona’s social movements, mobilized around multiple issues, and crafted its policy agenda  
through a sustained process of participation (Eizaguirre *et al.* 2017). Left-wing parties, including  
Podemos (We Can), also joined the coalition. In the 2015 municipal elections, BeC obtained the  
biggest share of votes (25 per cent) and started ruling in a minority government (Rodon & Hierro  
2016). Ada Colau, spokesperson of the Spanish housing movement, became the city mayor  
(Blanco *et al.* 2019; Flesher Fominaya 2015).<sup>11</sup>

This outcome has to be interpreted in the light of the 15M/*Indignados* movement, which  
emerged in 2011 and inspired similar ‘square movements’ worldwide such as Occupy Wall Street.  
Amid economic crisis and austerity, the 15M protesters demanded a deepening of democracy

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<sup>11</sup> This quite unique movement-party experiment is particularly relevant for the purposes of this research. To describe this local ad-  
ministration, it is worth resorting to the categories of ‘institutional activists’, i.e., social movement actors having access to institutional  
power and resources and taking advantage of their positions to promote the fulfilment of movement demands (Pettinicchio 2012;  
Wald and Corey 2002; Santoro and McGuire 1997), and ‘governmental activism’, i.e., «governmental players joining forces with non-  
governmental players in contentious actions against policies they want to prevent or redress» (Verhoeven and Duyvendak, 2017: 564).

and social justice while pointing an accusing finger at political and economic elites. The great intensity of Spanish anti-austerity mobilizations was mirrored in the crisis of the established party system, smoothing the rise of new parties (della Porta *et al.* 2017). On the left, this space was subsequently occupied by Podemos. BeC was founded precisely to funnel the aspirations of urban social movements into the electoral arena. As for immigration, BeC electoral program has been characterized by radical stances, such as the equal treatment of every resident regardless of their administrative status.

Overall, this strategy for case selection allows us to hold constant numerous contextual factors at both the country-level (e.g., welfare systems, immigration patterns, models of migration governance) and the city-level (i.e., urban demography, economy, and society). Simultaneously, variations can be observed with respect to the realms of migration policy-making. Under the leadership of mainstream and far-right parties, Milan’s administration enacted assorted exclusionary policies to criminalize sections of the immigrant populations and exclude them from various rights and benefits. Once in office, center-left parties dismantled most of these law-and-order provisions. Moreover, amid the 2010s ‘refugee crisis’, the new administration also engaged with asylum policy-making, which became one of the hallmarks of Milan’s local government (so-called ‘Milan Model’). Barcelona, too, played a decisive role amid the ‘refugee crisis.’ The BeC’s administration indeed supported growing numbers forced migrants by means of urban asylum policies. Also, it enacted far-reaching provisions in favor of undocumented immigrants, who became one of core policy targets of this radical-left administration.

*Table 3.2* summarizes this strategy for case selection. This research design thus allows us to unpack the causal mechanisms linking mobilization to policy change. Also, by unveiling how these mechanisms concatenate and recur across different contentious migration policies, the research will allow us to draw generalizable research findings on social movement outcomes in the field of migration.

*Table 3.2* Rationale for case selection

Dimension	Overall assessment
Administrative tradition	Similar
Authoritarian past	Similar
Welfare system	Similar
Structural changes	Similar
Role of local government and civil society	Similar
Contentious migration policies	Different

### 3.3 Sources, techniques, and data analysis

The research relies on a multiplicity of sources and techniques that will be consistently combined in order to enhance data internal validity. The main data source of this study derives from field-work carried out in 2017-19 and entailing 57 semi-structured interviews (25 in Milan and 32 in Barcelona). In the tradition of qualitative research, the sampling of interviewees have relied on prescribed selection criteria. Relevant actors in local migration policy arenas were identified on the basis of the typical combination of positional, decisional, and reputational approaches (cf. Knoke 1993: 29-31; Fischer *et al.* 2015: 317; Denzin and Lincoln 2011). Interviewees were eventually selected through a purposive sampling procedure (Ritchie *et al.* 2003) so as to represent multiple perspectives and milieus that symbolize those characteristics deemed relevant to the research topic. As provided by the reputational approach, a snowball technique was used in order not to miss any relevant actor, meaning that each interviewee was asked to provide the name of further actors that, in their perspective, played a decisive role in policy-making. In each city, the phase of interviewing was interrupted at the point of theoretical saturation, i.e. «when additional data failed to uncover any new ideas» (Bowen 2006: 17).

Four sets of respondents in Milan and Barcelona were included in the sample: (1) policy-makers, i.e., elected and appointed officials and other local government employees, (2) social-movement spokespersons and other activists covering a strategic role in their group/organization, (3) other key civil society actors, such as NGO leaders, trade unionists, and journalists, and (4) experts in the fields of sociology, political science, law, and economics. All the interviewees had a prominent role or an expertise in migration affairs in their respective cities and beyond (cf. *Table 3.3*). To protect anonymity, interviews will be cited by referring to the first letter of the relevant city (M = Milan; B = Barcelona) and a number (cf. Appendix for the list of interviews).

*Table 3.3.* Interviews conducted in Milan and Barcelona

	Milan	Barcelona	<b>Total</b>
Public officials	6	7	13
Social-movement spokespersons	7	11	18
Other civil society actors	6	7	13
Experts	6	7	13
<b>Total</b>	25	32	57

Questions have been focused on the multi-level governance of migration, the structures of opportunity, the systems of coalition, the availability of resources, the strategic orientations, the cooperative and adversarial interactions, the responsiveness to external demands, and the outcomes of policy processes—so to develop an in-depth depiction of policy processes and causal mechanisms. It is worth noting that interviewing policy-makers represents an innovative endeavor in the study of social movement outcomes. State authorities are the typical target of protesters, hence their reaction vis-à-vis movement demands can ultimately account for their degree of *responsiveness* while taking public decisions, i.e., to what extent policy-makers are *influenced by* external demand-makers (cf. Bosi *et al.* 2016).<sup>12</sup>

All the interviews were recorded and fully transcribed verbatim, in some cases with the support of Happy Scribe, an automatic transcription software.<sup>13</sup> Transcripts were subsequently uploaded in NVivo<sup>14</sup> and subject to qualitative data analysis. Specifically, this has been performed following the procedure of Cross-Case Analysis (CCA) proposed by Miles & Huberman (1994). This method is especially suitable for comparing similarities and differences across cases and using multiple sources of evidence so as to support theoretical generalizability. CCA consists of four and consequential analytical activities. The first two activities consists of Within-Case Analysis (WCA), meaning that each case is explored in-depth as a standalone entity to (1) describe what the case and what are its main components ('what' questions), and (2) elaborating preliminary explanations/predictions. Subsequently, CCA is performed in order to (3) explore patterns across cases and assess similarities and differences, and (4) order the cases by type and explain underlying causal relationships ('why' and 'how' questions).

Inherent to WCA and CCA is the coding procedure, which consists in assigning meanings onto data so as to gather, retrieve and organize them. In this research, coding tasks have been performed mainly through a deductive approach, meaning that the coding scheme has been first crafted based on the main concepts of the theoretical framework. Yet 'moments of serendipity' (Schmitter 2008) have taken place in order to make sense of the discrepancies between

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<sup>12</sup> For such purposes, theoretical frameworks that set the analysis at the meso-level are particularly fruitful (Alimi *et al.* 2016), as relationships among groups/organizations can be scrutinized.

<sup>13</sup> See <https://www.happyscribe.co/>.

<sup>14</sup> Nvivo is a software for qualitative and mixed-method research that allows to store, organize, analyze, and visualize vast amount of qualitative and quantitative data. For more information, see <https://www.qsrinternational.com/nvivo/home>.

theoretical concepts and empirical data. To put it in a nutshell, this process has involved «analytical deduction and induction for summarizing, coding, structuring, and analyzing the content» (Sotirov & Winkel 2015: 10).

Interviewing diverse groups of actors is essential in order to assess the validity of individual answers. This implies «selecting these individuals carefully» as well as «monitoring the consistency of and argumentation behind their estimations» (Oosterwaal & Torenvlied 2011: 206). However, interviews might be insufficient for such purposes. The study thus includes a wide array of additional (qualitative and quantitative) data, in order to both complement and triangulate the answers of interviewees with different sources (cf. Erzberger & Kelle 2003).

First, policy documents have been extensively analyzed. These include official legislations of the EU as well the Italian and Spanish authorities, municipal ordinances by the city governments of Milan and Barcelona, and policy reports produced by both state and non-state actors. Various documents of this kind have been provided by the respondents before, during or after the interviews, either in paper or digital format. The analysis of such documents is essential not only for making sense of policy-making processes, but also to disentangle jurisdictional frameworks in the multilevel governance of migration. Second, social movement releases have been retrieved both online and during public events—e.g., demonstrations—occurred at the time of fieldwork. Third, local, national, and international media outlets have been analyzed in order to enrich the account of relevant events and processes. Fourth, the secondary literature on Milan and Barcelona, as well as Italy and Spain, is abundant and updated, and it has been thus included in the empirical analysis. References to all these materials will be included in the next chapters of the manuscript.

The study will also rely on quantitative evidence drawn from official statistics and other research projects. The sources are manifold. OECD national, regional, and metropolitan statistics have been used to account for key demographic and economic figures of the relevant cities and their respective countries. Data on immigration and international protection have been drawn from Eurostat (especially for the study of the EU Common European Asylum System), UNHCR (e.g., data on international protection, sea and land arrivals), national and local government statistics (e.g., data on immigrant population). Data on undocumented immigration have

been retrieved from various sources, such as the CLANDESTINO research project<sup>15</sup> and a number of national research institutes (e.g., ISMU foundation, based in Milan, and the Barcelona Centre for International Affairs). Moreover, the study will rely on the IMPIC<sup>16</sup> and MIPEX<sup>17</sup> research projects, which provide quantitative and qualitative evidence on immigrant integration at the country-level. The LOCALMULTIDEM research project<sup>18</sup>—a study of migrant political inclusion conducted in 2006 in 9 European cities, including Milan and Barcelona—will be also taken into account (cf. Morales & Giugni 2011). All the research outputs of the project are available on Harvard Dataverse.<sup>19</sup> These include evidence on national and local policies, local discursive environments (i.e., ‘discursive opportunity structures’, cf. Koopmans 1999; 2004), migrants’ social networks, individual characteristics, and political mobilization. All these sets of quantitative data will be analyzed descriptively in order to make sense of local dynamics within their national and supranational environments, as well as to provide a solid picture of the structural contexts in which local migration policy arenas are located.

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<sup>15</sup> See <http://clandestino.eliamep.gr/>.

<sup>16</sup> See <http://www.impic-project.eu/>.

<sup>17</sup> See <http://www.mipex.eu/>.

<sup>18</sup> See <https://www.unige.ch/sciences-societe/incite/welcome-to-the-incite-website/data/1/>.

<sup>19</sup> See <https://dataverse.harvard.edu/>.

# Chapter 4

## Context: Multi-level migration politics and policy in Italy and Spain

### 4.1 Introduction

Local migration policy-making and migration-related mobilizations do not unfold in a vacuum, but are embedded in a political environment shaped by long-enduring historical trajectories. This chapter illustrates the main structural factors imposing constraints on, and creating opportunities for, urban migration governance and contestation in Milan and Barcelona. First, [Section 4.2](#) provides a snapshot of immigration toward Italy and Spain, a phenomenon that transformed these countries at a rapid pace and in relatively recent times. Next, the main contents and dynamics of migration policy-making at the national and EU levels are described in [Section 4.3](#). A diachronic perspective is adopted to explore the policy-politics nexus, that is to say, to understand how fluctuations in the politicization of immigration were mirrored in governance arrangements. [Section 4.4](#) then offers an overview of local governments in Italy and Spain, both in general terms and with specific respect to their competencies in the field of migration. [Section 4.5](#) outlines some key sociological features of Milan and Barcelona. Final remarks are presented in [Section 4.6](#).

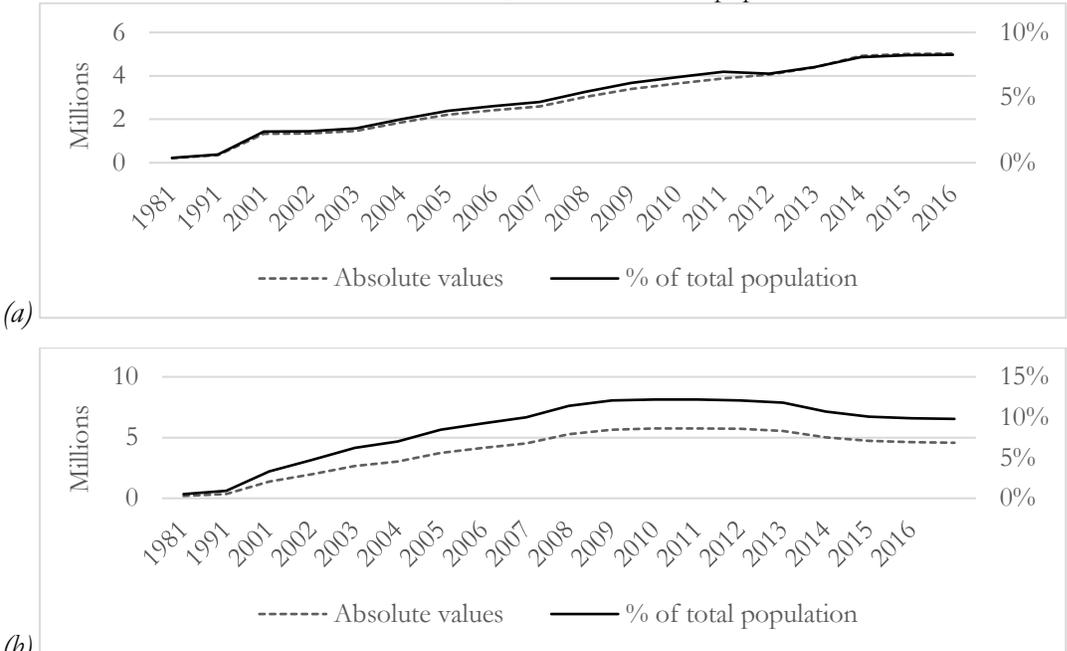
### 4.2 Immigration at a glance: A recent and rapid transformation

Italy and Spain are nowadays multicultural societies, with a demography not too dissimilar to traditional immigration countries of north-western Europe. Yet this structural condition is the result of a very recent and rapid transformation. Italy's net migration rate became positive in 1973, after nearly a century of mass emigration towards industrialized areas, such as the Americas and northern Europe, as well as of internal migration from the rural South to the industrialized North of the country (Castelli Gattinara 2016: 54). As displayed in *Figure 4.1*, foreign immigration

began to grow at a dramatic pace in the early 1990s. The number of resident immigrants has increased more than tenfold in 1991-2011, shifting from 356,159 to 3.9 million (i.e. from 0.6% to 7% of the population). The Great Recession notwithstanding, such figures kept on growing in the following years, too. In 2017, foreign-born residents in Italy were more than 5 million, thus representing 8.3% of the total population.

A very similar trend occurred in Spain, which became a country of immigration in the mid-1980s. Until then, and for nearly a century, vast numbers of Spaniards moved from rural areas, such as Andalusia, Extremadura, and Galicia, to industrialized ones, either in Spain (mostly Catalonia, the Madrid Metropolitan Area, and the Basque Country) or abroad, especially Germany, France, and Latin America (Bruquetas-Callejo *et al.* 2011: 292). Also here, foreign immigration grew steadily and considerably in the 1991-2011 period, when the immigrant population shifted from 360,655 to 5,751,487, i.e. from 0.91% to 12.10% of the total population (cf. *Figure 4.1*). Differently from Italy, however, such figures decreased starting from 2012 as a consequence of the Great Recession, in conjunction with restrictive immigration laws (see below). In 2017, the immigrants settled in Spain were 4,572,807, thus representing almost a tenth of the total population.

*Figure 4.1.* Foreign population in Italy (a) and Spain (b), 1981-2017  
 Absolute values on the left axis; Share of the total population on the right axis.



Sources: respective national institutes of statistics.

The variety of immigrants' nationalities is an additional sign of the two countries' multicultural character. This diversity is the result of multiples waves of migration that made the phenomenon deeply ingrained in society—as proven, for instance, by the growing numbers of women, households with children, and students among the immigrant population (cf. Menonna & Blangiardo 2014). Romanians constitute the most sizeable community in Italy, although their arrival prevalently occurred in the last fifteen years (differently from other ones, such the Chinese, the Moroccan, and the Albanian, whose presence started to be significant already in the 1990s or before). The dramatic pace of settlement from Romania is largely due to the process of country's accession to the EU, accomplished in 2007 and preceded by the liberalization of touristic visa in 2002 (e.g., Tragaki & Rovolis 2012; Cvajner & Sciortino 2009).

As for Spain, the largest foreign communities are nowadays the Maghrebi (foremost the Moroccan), the central and eastern European (particularly from new EU member states such as Romania and Bulgaria), as well as the ones from former Latin American colonies (also due to the relatively 'friendly' legislation and the long-lasting social networks, cf. Bruquetas-Callejo *et al.* 2011: 294). EU15 citizens are also a relevant part of the immigrant population (Ros and Morales 2015: 120), especially pensioners from more affluent countries such as the UK and Germany, as well as young workers from other south European countries, primarily Italy (cf. Instituto Nacional de Estadística 2017).

Such similarities in immigration patterns across the two countries are not accidental. In addition to 'push' factors in areas of origin, such as conflicts and poverty, specialists on migration identify a set of 'pull' factors that are peculiar to south European countries as contexts of recent and rapid settlement (e.g., King *et al.* 1997; Bonifazi *et al.* 2009; Calavita & Kitty 2005; Zincone 2011). These are, first of all, geographical in nature, being these countries overlooking the Mediterranean Sea. Second, economic factors played a decisive role. From the 1950s to the 1980s, many native workers have been absorbed in high-productivity sectors. Immigration has then satisfied the demand for cheap labor in low-productivity ones, especially in the informal economy. From the 1980s onwards, the booming of the service economy dramatically punctuated these socioeconomic trends. Third, and relatedly, these factors are nested into political ones. Immigration laws were virtually non-existent when waves of foreign migration began; this made

South European countries an attractive destination as compared to traditional destinations in North-western Europe, where policies were becoming increasingly restrictive.

The third set of (political) factors begot long-term consequences in terms of both immigration and its regulation. Since the mid-1980s, along the process of European integration, both Italy and Spain have gradually tighten the conditions for legally accessing their national territory—yet achieving quite opposite outcomes, with irregular immigration *de facto* becoming a massive phenomenon and the most common way of entry.

In Italy, the first quota system has been introduced in 1986, but it resulted largely ineffective. Seven mass regularizations that have been implemented in 26 years (1986-2012), regardless of the ideology of national incumbents. Mass amnesties—formally ‘exceptional’ but actually ‘routinized’—activated a ‘vicious cycle’ by which immigrants with expired documents have been incentivized to stay for the prospect of possible future regularizations. Irregularity is indeed a transitory condition experienced by large numbers of newcomers that seek to settle in the long term (Bonifazi *et al.* 2009; Ambrosini 2013a). The Ministry of Interior estimated that the number of undocumented immigrants at the end of 2017 was approximately 490,000.

Very similar dynamics unfolded in Spain, where the misfit between policy prescriptions and social reality is apparent, too. Seven mass amnesties—implemented between the 1980s and the 2000s—regularized the administrative status of 1.1 million immigrants. Moreover, on the top of these ‘exceptional measures’, since 2004 an ordinary mechanism for individual regularization is available (the so-called *arraigo*, i.e., ‘rooting’) for immigrants that have been settled in the country for two years and have established a work relationship of at least one year (*arraigo laboral*) or settled for three years and with the prospect of entering into a work contract (*arraigo social*), cf. Bruquetas-Callejo *et al.* 2011: 305. In sum, the easiest and most common way to obtain a legal status is to enter with a tourist visa, work illegally for a while, and then get regularized through either exceptional or ordinary mechanisms.

In sum, in both the countries, immigration policy has been characterized by the use of *extraordinary* amnesties as an *ordinary* instrument for keeping pace with growing number of immigrants in society, and for immigration management more in general. Faced with the continuous, large-scale, unplanned arrival of immigrants since the 2000s, the central governments fluctuated from extraordinary regularization measures and retreat to control policies. The supposed ‘migration emergency’ has been tackled through restrictive norms on visa permits, which made foreign

residents more likely to become undocumented (e.g. while losing a job and seeking for another one), but also more prone to wait for a possible amnesty – in a pendulum between ‘zero regulation’ and ‘hyper-regulation’ (cf. Zincone 2011; Gonzalez-Enríquez 2009). As residence permits are generally short, many regular(ized) immigrants tend to fall (back) into irregularity. In face of highly restrictive policies, irregular migration immigration has been *de facto* accepted as a common way of entry. This model of governance owes to multiple factors, including the weak planning capacities and the logic of emergency that often permeates policy-making, as well as the compliance with free-market rules, especially in the vast informal economy (whose labor demand is, by definition, difficult to estimate). As summarized by Ambrosini (2013a),

«Researchers have often spoken, in recent years, of a Mediterranean migration model [...], or of a Southern European model, as opposed to the Northern European migration model: legal and regulated immigration, well placed in the formal economy and endowed with social rights, on the one hand, versus largely spontaneous and irregular immigration, positioned in the informal economy, without social protection or union rights, on the other» (Ambrosini 2013a: 189-90).

Finally, Italy and Spain share numerous similarities in terms of immigration trends (e.g., timing, size, drivers) and migration governance (e.g., undocumented immigration, routinized mass amnesties, scarce planning capacities). The following section adopts a diachronic perspective to review the key laws and policies enacted in the two countries, with a particular focus on the political dynamics behind these governance arrangements.

### 4.3 Migration policy and politics

#### *1980s-1990s: from consensual policy-making to increasing contestation*

Immigration accessed the Italian political agenda in the mid-1980s, having gained some first visibility after the 1981 Census (Ambrosini 2013a; Sciortino & Colombo 2004). As mentioned, the first legislation on the issue—approved in 1986—established a quota system of entry while enacting the first mass regularization of undocumented immigrants.<sup>20</sup> While being a tentative and incomplete policy endeavor, its contents was relatively liberal and aligned with international

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<sup>20</sup> Law 943/1986.

laws. Natives and foreigners were entitled with equal social rights and sociocultural integration was set as a policy principle (Zincone 2011). Yet, no funds were purposely allocated for pursuing these objectives, *de facto* attributing such responsibilities to regional and local authorities, whose fiscal autonomy was limited at that time.

Public budget—though of narrow size—was first earmarked in 1990 through the ‘Martelli Law.’<sup>21</sup> This piece of legislation was formulated as an exceptional response to emergent crucial junctures, such the Albanian ‘refugee crisis’ and the growing contention unfolding in several urban areas (e.g., lack of housing, illegal squatting, natives’ protests, far-right violence). Equal welfare treatment was maintained as a policy principle and, in addition, there was an incremental advancement of integration policies – mostly due to bottom-up pressures from ‘pioneer’ local governments that were already experimenting innovative policy solutions, as in the case of social housing (Ponzo 2008; Zincone & Caponio 2006). More than 90% of the members of the national parliament voted in favor of such measures, an almost unanimous consensus that, however, has not persisted in the following years.

Conflict over migration eventually surfaced in the late 1990s. Approved in 1998 by the center-left Prodi I Cabinet, the *Testo Unico sull’Immigrazione*<sup>22</sup> (also referred as ‘Turco-Napolitano Law’) represents a watershed for Italy’s migration policy and politics. This overarching legislation – still in force today, though severely amended and only partly implemented (Graziano & Caponio 2011) – frames migration as a permanent phenomenon and acknowledges immigrants as legitimate members of the Italian society. On the one hand, principles of solidarity were deepened. A visa permit for job-seeking immigrants was introduced and the National Fund for Migration Policies (*Fondo Nazionale per le Politiche Migratorie*) was set. The creation of this fund also implied the attribution of fiscal and political autonomy to subnational governments in this policy area. Equal treatment was maintained for most of welfare provisions. Also, undocumented immigrants were entitled with the right to education and basic healthcare services (Ambrosini 2013a). On the other hand, restrictive measures were also introduced, such as tighter patrol of borders and, most controversially, the establishment of CPT (Centri di Permanenza Temporanea – Temporary Permanence Centers) to detain undocumented migrants with identification and deportation purposes.

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<sup>21</sup> Law 39/1990.

<sup>22</sup> Law 40/1998, then Consolidated Act no. 286/1998.

In political terms, this contradictory mix of progressive and repressive measures has to be explained in the light of the advocacy of pro-immigrant groups (especially Catholic ones) and, simultaneously, the reception of supranational policy inputs in the direction of restriction, being Italy a sensitive component of the EU Schengen Area. Immigration finally became a heated political arena within which political parties, as well as their internal factions, confront each other (Zincone 2011). This political change followed some events that received extensive media attention, such the 1997 ‘Albanian emergency’ and numerous arrivals from former Yugoslavia in 1999-2000, which were prevalently depicted in securitarian terms by the media (Urso 2018: 373).

In Spain, too, migration accessed the political agenda in the mid-1980s and remained mostly de-politicized until the late 1990s. The first Foreigner Law was passed by the central parliament in 1986 (for an extensive account, see Bruquetas-Callejo *et al.* 2011). The main trigger of policy-making was not immigration per se, as numbers were extremely limited at that time, but rather the access of Spain into the European Communities. Indeed, as reported by Ros & Morales (2015: 121-122), this first legislative framework was – to a great extent – a copy of immigration laws adopted in other, and socially different, European countries. Also, provisions were extremely meagre, mostly focused on conditions for accessing the Spanish territory and labor regulations, and then devoid of any recognition of rights as well as anti-discrimination measures.

From this point of departure, a first policy change occurred in 1990, when the parliamentary group of the IU (Izquierda Unida – United Left) advocated the regularization of undocumented immigrants and put the issue of integration onto the institutional agenda for the first time. The initiative was successful. The Socialist government (Cabinet González III) implemented an exceptional procedure of regularization in 1991, with the support of most relevant civil society organizations. The majority of the 120,000 applications submitted were accepted and led to the issue of residence permits. In addition, integration policies gradually gained salience in the policy agenda. Most of parliamentary groups committed to draft a comprehensive legislative framework, and a national strategy (Plan for Social Integration of Immigrants) was formulated in 1994. Social provisions were eventually introduced in 1996 as amendments to the 1986 Foreigner Law. The large consensus of parliamentary forces on these issues is reflected, more broadly, on the low levels of politicization of immigration observed in Spain until the early 2000s (cf. Ros & Morales 2015).

These incremental policy changes notwithstanding, these first pieces of legislation were basically aimed at immigration control and management. A quota system of entry was introduced in 1993 and, in the light of the strict criteria posed to foreigners for settling in the country, the overwhelming majority of them have kept on accessing the country illegally and/or became undocumented after the expiration of their residence permits (so-called *ilegalidad sobrevinida*, i.e., ‘supervening illegality’). As pointed out by Garcés-Mascreñas (2014: 6), the law framed immigration as a security-related phenomenon to be managed according to the needs of the labor market. This explains why most of the competences were attributed to the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Labor. Mass amnesties started to be implemented as post-hoc measures for regulating the arrival of foreign workers and give legal status to all those (the majority) excluded by the law owing to long and complicated administrative procedures, both at the time of arrival and when residence permits had to be renewed.

All in all, at the end of the 1990s Spain had a more incomplete and security-oriented legislation on immigration as compared to Italy, where a comprehensive legislative framework—that also included a vast array of welfare provisions—was adopted in 1997. Yet a number of similarities are also apparent. In both the countries, migration policy-making began in the mid-1980s following to the first waves of foreign migration, and especially upon the input of European institutions along the process of integration. Also, migration has been barely politicized in both the countries, with most of the political forces sharing similar priorities and engaging in consensual policy-making. As it will be shown, such elements of convergence became less evident in the following decade.

#### *2000s: a securitarian escalation?*

In Italy, immigration contestation dramatically escalated since the early 2000s. The Berlusconi Cabinet II (2001-2006) took office after an electoral campaign having immigration at the core of the competition. Subsequently, the governing center-right coalition set immigration as a policy priority and framed it in fiercely oppositional terms. Illegal entries and the permanent settlement of immigrants were discursively constructed as detrimental to social order. When

moving from ‘talks’ to ‘decisions’, however, such anti-immigration stances were less straightforward (Geddes 2006). The 2002 ‘Bossi-Fini Law’<sup>23</sup>—which amended the 1998 *Testo Unico*—is the main policy enacted in these years and its contents are in fact contradictory.

As far as integration policy is concerned, previous welfare provisions remained almost unmodified. In the context of a quasi-federalist reform, however, financial instruments were profoundly reshaped. Specifically, the National Fund for Migration Policy was incorporated in a larger *Fondo Nazionale Sociale* (National Social Fund), then disengaging social spending from specific aims of migrants’ integration. The new fund – still in place today – is allocated to regional governments, which are then autonomous in designing welfare provisions (Campomori & Caponio 2017). In addition, the National Social Fund has been severely downsized because of the austerity measures implemented after the outburst of the Great Recession (Costa & Sabatinelli 2017).

The mismatch between political discourses and policy decisions is even more apparent when looking at immigration policy, especially in terms border controls and visa policy. The securitarian frame was very pronounced in this realm. The Bossi-Fini Law restricted the quota system of entry, tightened the patrol of borders, and augmented the number of deportations (Bonifazi *et al.* 2009). Also, visa policy became more restrictive. The possession of a job contract was set as a pre-condition for obtaining a residence (*Contratto di Soggiorno-Lavoro*, cf. Ambrosini 2013a). The purpose was making immigrants as temporary workers rather than permanent members of society – somehow importing the Northern European guest-worker model (Caponio and Graziano 2011). The same Cabinet, however, regularized 634,728 migrants. As mentioned before, the paradox of ‘producing’ undocumented immigration (through restrictive immigration policy) while regularizing it (through mass amnesties) is inherent to Italian migration policy.

In a nutshell, the Italian center-right has politicized immigration in negative terms while both repressive and liberal principles co-exist in its policy-making. Once again, this inconsistency has to be explained in the light of multiple interests and advocacy groups pushing decision-making in opposite directions (e.g., Geddes 2006; Colombo & Sciortino 2003). Welfare entitle-

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<sup>23</sup> Law 189/2002.

ments remained largely untouched because of the influence yielded by Catholic groups and business associations. The UDC (Unione Democratica di Centro – Centrist Democratic Union) was part of the governing coalition and played as a ‘mediator’. It mobilized the Roman Church for watering down the most controversial policy proposals. Moreover, business owners represented a significant electoral constituency of center-right parties, foremost of *Forza Italia* (Go Italy, i.e., Berlusconi’s party), and their interest was to loosen the rules for accessing the Italian territory, being immigration a convenient source of labor force. On the other hand, governing parties on the populist and/or radical right, namely the LN and AN (Alleanza Nazionale – National Alliance) were more tenacious in maintaining their repressive electoral resolutions.

The precarious equilibrium between such opposite forces was undermined following the appointment of the Cabinet Berlusconi III (2008-2011), whose opposition to undocumented immigration and multiculturalism was possibly harsher than before—in a sort of securitarian *crescendo* (Castelli Gattinara 2016: 63). The absence of the centrist component in the governing coalition was also determinant. The overlap of immigration and security issues led to the approval of two ‘Security Acts.’<sup>24</sup> These highly contested legislations introduced a vast array of repressive measures, such as the introduction of the ‘clandestine crime’, the increased period of detentions for undocumented immigrants (from two to eighteen months), the restricted access to various social rights (e.g., housing), and the forced census of Roma populations living in unauthorized camps in the outskirts of Milan, Rome, and Naples. Also, city mayors gained greater autonomy on law-and-order affairs as a response to alleged urban emergencies. In line with the measures adopted by the previous Berlusconi Cabinet, caregivers and domestic workers were granted with a mass amnesty in 2008.

Similarly to the Italian case, migration has become increasingly politicized in Spain since the early 2000s—but to a much more limited extent. In 1999, while the conservative PP (Partido Popular – Popular Party) was concluding its mandate in a minority government (Cabinet Aznar I, 1996-2000), public debates on migration revamped. Parties converged upon the need of reforming the 1985 Foreigner Law in the light of new immigration trends in the country. Such debates led to the approval of an Organic Law on migration at the beginning of 2000.<sup>25</sup> While

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<sup>24</sup> Laws 125/2008 and 94/2009.

<sup>25</sup> Law 4/2000 of 11 January 2000.

not bringing major policy changes, the legislation represented an new attempt to expand integration policies. Importantly, a set of social rights—such as education and health—were granted to any foreigner residing in Spain, regardless of their administrative status. Anti-discrimination measures were also introduced, together with a set of rights to political participation (Ros & Morales 2015: 122). As for immigration policy, the new law was also intended to revise the quota system of entry so as to decrease the need for regularization procedures.

However, shortly after, Spanish migration politics and policy went through major upheavals. Amid increasing arrivals to the country, episodes of contention began to mushroom. As reported by Ros & Morales (2015), the peak was reached when a Moroccan immigrant murdered a Spaniard in the village of El Ejido, in the southern region of Andalusia, in February 2000. The crime triggered a long and violent anti-immigration protest in that locality, a strike by Moroccan immigrants claiming better working and housing conditions, and a public debate on integration across the whole country.

The timing of such events have coincided with the general election campaign. The PP won an absolute majority of seats and formed a new government (Cabinet Aznar II, 2000-2004) that soon reversed the liberal principles of, and the consensual approach to, migration policies that had been adopted until then. The government raised concerns about the allegedly too soft and generous approach to undocumented immigration. A new Organic Law was then adopted at the end of 2000,<sup>26</sup> thus only a few months after the previous one (cf. Bruquetas-Callejo *et al.* 2011: 299). Social rights for immigrants without a residence permit, as well as their opportunities for regularization, were sensibly restricted. Also, administrative sanctions against these immigrants and their ‘accomplices’ were introduced. Further restrictions were adopted in 2003.<sup>27</sup> Integration policies were sensibly tightened, too. The government approved the *Programa Global de Regulación y Coordinación de la Inmigración en España* (GRECO – Global Program of Immigration Regulation and Coordination in Spain), which in fact frame immigration as a temporary phenomenon and thus affirm the priority of return policies.

The PSOE (Partido Socialista Obrero Español – Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party) won the next general elections in 2004 and formed a new government (Cabinet Zapatero I, 2004-2008). The most relevant initiative in the realm of migration was the development of a new

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<sup>26</sup> Law 8/2000 of 22 December 2000

<sup>27</sup> Law 14/2003 of 20 November 2003

regulation of the Foreigners Law, adopted at the end of 2004.<sup>28</sup> The powers of regional and local governments were substantially enhanced, especially when it comes to integration policies. Many of these sub-national institutions often deploy such new competences for reversing the restrictive provisions adopted in the previous years and for developing autonomous, often progressive, integration policies. Also, in 2004 the ordinary mechanism for individual regularization (*arraigo*, i.e., ‘rooting’) was introduced (see above). These policy changes notwithstanding, migration was barely politicized during these years. A relevant exception occurred during the summer of 2006, when more than 18,000 thousands African immigrants reached the coasts of the Canary Islands by *cayucos* (traditional fishing boats), resulting in a serious humanitarian crisis (cf. Ros & Morales 2015).

Further reforms<sup>29</sup> of Spanish migration policy were carried out in 2009 by the Cabinet Zapatero II (2008-2011), especially with the aim of aligning the national legislation to key decisions adopted by the Spanish Constitutional Court in 2007 as well to a set of new EU directives mostly concerned with the tightening of border controls. The Directive 2008/115/CEE was the one most harshly criticized by pro-migrant organizations (which renamed it as the Directive of Shame, i.e., *Directiva de la Vergüenza*), as it provides—among other things—for the detention of undocumented immigrants up to 18 months. In 2012 the new conservative government (Cabinet Rajoy I, 2011-2015) restricted healthcare provisions,<sup>30</sup> in fact excluding undocumented immigrants and foreigners who do not contribute to Social Security, on the basis of the alleged unsustainability of the health system.

Overall, while many elements of convergence can be recognize in Italian and Spanish migration policies until the late 1990s, divergences became more apparent over the following decade. Immigration reach the core of the Italian political agenda and became a key issue of political competition and policy-making. Anti-immigration parties—which have governed the country for most of the 2010s—fueled a securitarian *crescendo*, by which immigration has been increasingly framed as a law-and-order emergency. Policy-making had a less straightforward trajectory, in a sort of mix between highly repressive measures and the implementation of numerous mass regularizations. Migration has been far less politicized in Spain, basically only for very

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<sup>28</sup> Royal Decree 2393/2004 of 30 December 2004

<sup>29</sup> Ley Organica 2/2009

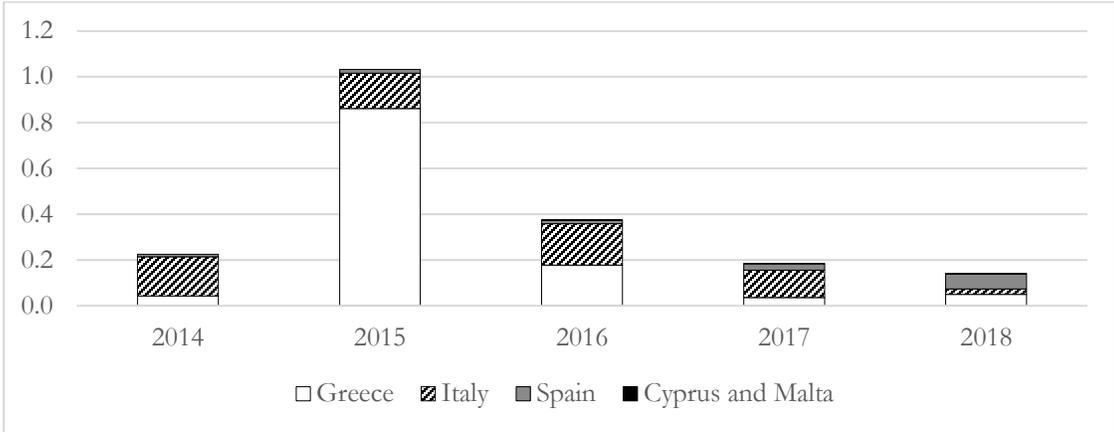
<sup>30</sup> Royal Decree-Law 16/2012

limited time spans, as a result of crucial junctures or humanitarian crises. During these years, both the scope of integration policies and the jurisdiction of local authorities have been enhanced, while immigration policies remained quite restrictive, especially upon the input of EU institutions.

*2010s: Italy and Spain amid the European ‘refugee crisis’*

The 2010s has been the decade of the European ‘refugee crisis.’ During these years, sheer numbers of migrants from Africa and the Middle East landed in Europe or lost their lives trying to. The arrivals have overwhelmingly concerned Italy and Greece, which received 99 per cent of the migrants that reached the Southern frontier in 2014-16 (*Figure 4.2*). Landings in Greece fell after March 2016 because of the EU-Turkey agreement, which outsourced controls at the Greek border to the Turkish government. In February 2017, Libya’s Government of National Accord and the Italian executive, in cooperation with the EU, also signed deals to externalise immigration control outside the continent. The sea route from Libya to Italy has been gradually closed since then. Subsequently, Spain became the main port of entry in 2018.

*Figure 4.2.* Millions of migrants arriving in Greece, Italy, Spain, Cyprus and Malta, 2014-18. Arrivals include sea arrivals to Italy, Cyprus and Malta, and both sea and land arrivals to Greece and Spain.



Source: UNHCR, ‘*Refugee situations*’. Available online at: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean>

Overall, the ‘refugee crisis’ resulted in humanitarian emergencies and fragmented patterns of settlement across the continent. Far from being the by-product of a social anomaly that ‘spontaneously’ hit South European cities, governance choices (and non-choices) at the national

and supranational levels played a decisive role, with their effects then flooding cascade-like towards the local level.

Among the most problematic aspects of the EU Common European Asylum System is the Dublin Regulation. It establishes that asylum-seekers should submit their protection request in the first country of arrival, which is then responsible for the procedure. Aimed at preventing applications in multiple jurisdictions, the rule eventually resulted in social unrest in South European ‘frontline’ states, where migrants have been forced to request sanctuary (Campomori 2018: 430). In 2015 the EU launched a relocation mechanism to resettle migrants across member states and uncork the legislative bottleneck, yet this achieved negligible results in terms of implementation (European Commission 2018). This mostly owed to its voluntary character, that made numerous executives reluctant to accept their assigned quota (above all the Višegrad group).

Scholars point at multiple but concurrent causes to explain this governance regime, including the weak harmonization and the intensive transgovernmentalism of EU migration governance (Guiraudon 2000; Toshkov & De Haan 2013; Scipioni 2018), the conflictual relationship between Member States and the EU (Caponio & Cappiali 2018), the logic of exceptionality followed by policy-makers (Castelli Gattinara 2017; Fontanari & Ambrosini 2018), and their more general preference for restrictive policies (e.g. McMahon & Sigona 2018; Crawley & Skleparis 2018). But in addition to the restrictive character of EU migration governance, the condition of migrants and receiving communities in Italy and Spain was further complicated by the poor national asylum systems.

Although the 1948 Constitution recognizes the right of asylum,<sup>31</sup> international protection played a minor role within the Italian legislative context for a long time. In the 2014-15 period, spurred by the rising number of asylum-seekers reaching South European shores, Italian authorities made some steps toward a stable and far-reaching reception system (Campomori 2019: 12-13). This reform process culminated with the so-called ‘Reception Decree’,<sup>32</sup> crafted on the basis of a previous agreement between national, regional, and local authorities,<sup>33</sup> as well as asylum-

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<sup>31</sup> Article 10.3.

<sup>32</sup> Decree Law no. 142/2015.

<sup>33</sup> *Conferenza Unificata*, July 10, 2014, see: [http://www.prefettura.it/venezia/contenuti/Intesa\\_tra\\_stato\\_regioni\\_ed\\_enti\\_locali\\_territoriali\\_10.7.2014-156822.htm](http://www.prefettura.it/venezia/contenuti/Intesa_tra_stato_regioni_ed_enti_locali_territoriali_10.7.2014-156822.htm)

related EU Directives.<sup>34</sup> The new law clarified the jurisdictional ecology of asylum-seekers reception, i.e. by allocating competencies to different actors and levels of government and dividing the reception process into three stages (first aid and assistance, first reception, and second-line reception). This reform notwithstanding, however, the Italian system remained too limited in scope as compared to the increased number of asylum-seekers, whose overwhelming majority was receipt through large-sized, poorly-provided emergency accommodation centres (see [Section 7.2](#) for more details on Italy's asylum policies).

In face of these dynamics, the politicization of immigration skyrocketed in Italy (Castelli Gattinara 2017). The central government, while being led by centre-left coalitions in the 2013-18 period, embraced a restrictive discourse on asylum and immigration at large. With far-right forces on the rise (foremost the League, led by Matteo Salvini since 2013), national incumbents partly conformed to the security-oriented discourse of their opponents as a defensive strategy.

This is well-epitomized by their approach to search-and-rescue (SaR) operations in the Central Mediterranean. Between 2014 and 2018, 14,768 migrants lost their lives in this sea area, meaning that the migration route from Libya to Italy was the deadliest in the world. Following to the tragic events occurred on 3 October 2013, when the shipwreck of a boat caused the death of at least 366 migrants, the Italian government launched *Mare Nostrum* ('Our Sea'), a large-scale search-and-rescue operation with both humanitarian and military purposes led by the Italian Navy. According to the Minister of the Interior Angelino Alfano (Cabinet Letta, 2013-2014, and Cabinet Renzi, 2014-2016), *Mare Nostrum* saved the life of more than 100,000 people. However, it was dismissed one year after and replaced by *Triton*, conducted by the EU agency Frontex. This operation had a more limited budget and a mandate focused on border control rather than rescue (Caponio & Cappiali 2018: 118-9).

Assorted NGOs then began to implement sea-and-rescue operations so as to fill in for the voids of European and Italian authorities, but their agency has been increasingly criminalized and obstructed. Marco Minniti, member of the PD and Minister of Interior of the Cabinet Gentiloni (2017-2018), introduced a controversial Code of Conduct<sup>35</sup> that imposed highly restrictive conditions on NGOs' humanitarian action, including presence of armed police forces on board.

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<sup>34</sup> Directives 2013/32/EU and 2013/33/EU.

<sup>35</sup> 'Codice di condotta per le ONG impegnate nelle operazioni di salvataggio dei migranti in mare', see: [http://www.interno.gov.it/sites/default/files/codice\\_condotta\\_ong.pdf](http://www.interno.gov.it/sites/default/files/codice_condotta_ong.pdf)

This was justified on the ground of a 2017 Frontex’s document<sup>36</sup> asserting that SaR operations allegedly work as a pull factor for those fleeing Libya (Campomori 2018: 433)—a thesis however refuted by empirical studies (Cusumano & Villa 2019; Steinhilper & Gruijters 2018). In addition, the Gentiloni Cabinet reached an agreement with the Libya’s Government of National Accord to prevent migrants’ departure from Libyan shores (see above), eliminated the right of asylum applicants to appeal denied requests, and extended the system of detention of undocumented immigrants.

While motivating these decisions on the ground of more ‘efficient’ immigration management, the mainstream left has, to a large extent, incorporated the preference for security-oriented policies, thus chasing right-wing populist parties rather than opposing them (Castelli Gattinara 2017: 9). For instance, in July 2017, Matteo Renzi—prime minister and leader of the Democratic Party in 2014-2016—declared that immigrants have to be ‘helped at home’, emulating a typical slogan of the Italian far-right. Anti-immigration politics reached a new peak following 2018 general elections, which led to the formation of the Cabinet Conte I (2018-2019), supported by a coalition among the ideologically eclectic M5S (Movimento 5 Stelle – Five Star Movement) and the far-right League. As newly appointed Minister of the Interior, Matteo Salvini enacted hard-line rhetoric and policies, criminalizing and stigmatizing migrants and their pro-beneficiaries, especially through the ‘Security Decree’<sup>37</sup> (that drastically curtailed the already deficient national asylum system) and the ‘Security Decree II’<sup>38</sup> (that introduced administrative sanctions for safe-and-rescue operations). Since summer 2018, several NGO’s vessels were prevented from disembarking (cf. AIDA 2019a: 23-26), in contrast with international laws and, in some occasions, with national criminal laws. This approach, however, seems to deepen—rather than to change—the policy trajectories adopted by previous center-left governments.

In Spain, too, asylum policy has not traditionally played a substantial role in migration governance (González-Enríquez 2009). As mentioned above, until 2017 the number of arrivals in Spain was lower than in Italy or Greece. The EU relocation mechanism has proven a largely uninfluential remedy. Data updated on 31 October 2018 show that only 1,359 migrants resettled in Spain, whereas this country had committed to accept 15,000-19,000 (European Commission

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<sup>36</sup> See [https://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/risk\\_Analysis/Annual\\_risk\\_Analysis\\_2017.pdf](https://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/risk_Analysis/Annual_risk_Analysis_2017.pdf)

<sup>37</sup> Decree-Law 113/2018

<sup>38</sup> Decree-Law 53/2019

2018; Alcalde & Portos 2018). The conservative governments led by Mariano Rajoy (2011-16 and 2016-18), while occasionally defining international protection as a moral duty for Europe, refrained from accepting the assigned quota on the grounds that Spain was supposedly ‘saturated’ by undocumented immigration. The Minister of the Interior Jorge Fernández Díaz opposed the mechanism from the very start of the negotiations, claiming that it could work as a ‘pull factor.’

Such a restrictive approach was even more apparent in the case of border patrol. Ceuta and Melilla are two Spanish enclaves surrounded by Morocco and the Mediterranean Sea. Being such sensitive ‘frontline’ areas, they have been heavily militarized over the decades so as to prevent immigration, notably from Sub-Saharan Africa. The migrants that succeed in illegally crossing the border are systematically subject to the practice of ‘push-backs’ (*devoluciones en caliente*), meaning that they are forcedly brought back to the Moroccan territory. Introduced by the left-wing Cabinet Zapatero I and pursued with continuity by the successive governments, push-backs have been legalized by the Cabinet Rajoy I in 2015, thus becoming a pivotal policy instrument for the management of the ‘refugee crisis’ (for a detailed account, see Garcés-Mascareñas 2016: 323-7; CEAR 2017: 25; 2018; AIDA 2019).

Opponents claim that the summary expulsion of people with no assessment of their eligibility for asylum protection and health conditions is evidently in contrast with international laws. In 2015, Amnesty International and the CEAR (Comisión Española de Ayuda al Refugiado – Spanish Refugee Aid Commission) submit almost 95,000 signatures to the parliament for abrogating the law and the then-European Commissioner of Human Rights, Nils Muiznieks, asked the government for explanations. However, the European Commission endorsed push-backs in May 2016 (Arango *et al.* 2016: 22). This style of border management—based on the cooperation with neighboring countries’ authorities and the conditionality of development funds to ‘repatriation’ agreements—has been vaunted as a ‘best practice’ by the Rajoy governments, which advocated its replication in other sensitive frontline areas across the continent. As shown by some scholars, the governance regime adopted in Ceuta and Melilla has indeed worked as an ‘experiment’ later replicated at the Greek-Turkish and the Italian-Libyan borders (see for example Gabrielli 2017).

As reported by Arango *et al.* (2018), the socialist government led by Pedro Sanchez (2018-2019) pushed for some incremental policy changes in a less restrictive direction, both at a symbolic and a substantive level. The case of the *Aquarius*—a search-and-rescue vessel chartered and operated by the NGOs SOS Méditerranée and Doctors Without Borders—attracted extensive media coverage in June 2018. After rescuing 629 migrants in the Central Mediterranean, the Italian and Maltese governments denied the vessel to disembark. Spain then allowed it to dock in the port of Valencia. Also, the new Spanish executive approved two laws<sup>39</sup> that expanded the resources allocated to the assistance of asylum-seekers and refugees and re-established the universal access to the national health system for any migrant, regardless of administrative status (see above).

Even though the number of arrivals to Spain has been quite limited until 2018, the condition of asylum-seekers has represented a crucial challenge for Spanish municipalities. As [Section 7.4](#) will show in detail, this is largely the result of the deficient national system of international protection, named SAI (Sistema de Acogida y Integración – Reception and Integration System)<sup>40</sup>. Spain’s asylum policies, in fact, left high numbers of asylum seekers without any form of protection, especially in the case of migrant who completed an integration programme and then became undocumented (receiving a negative response to their asylum application) and newcomers without access to state services (before starting their application). These problems have heightened since 2018, when Spain became the main destination for migrants landing in southern Europe (cf. *Figure 4.2*).

As compared to Italy and most European countries, however, immigration remained more at the periphery of the Spanish debate during the 2010s (Arango *et al.* 2015: 21; Garcés-Masareñas 2016). The long-standing absence of relevant radical right parties from the electoral arena has surely played an important role in this scarce politicization (Alonso & Kaltwasser 2014). While this ‘Spanish exceptionality’ has come to an end in 2018, when the far-right Vox (People) has made its electoral breakthrough at the regional level, Spaniards still have a largely positive view of immigration and do not consider it as a major policy problem. The increase number of arrivals in 2018 has not substantially changed such favorable attitudes (Arango *et al.* 2018).

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<sup>39</sup> Royal Decree-Law 6/2018 and Royal Decree-Law 7/2018.

<sup>40</sup> Gobierno de España, Ley no. 12, 30 October 2009.

All in all, Italy and Spain have both coped with relevant challenges related to the reception and integration of forced migrants. Major global transformations and flaws in multi-level governance have ‘flowed downstream.’ Global migration, restrictive immigration management, lack of inter-state cooperation, and poor national asylum governance are all factors that lie outside the competency of local authorities, but turned out to be critical questions for policy-makers at the city-level, who have been forced to ‘pay the bill.’ As [Section 7.2](#) will contend, the predictability of increased arrivals from the Global South, as well as their stabilisation over time, make the notion of a ‘refugee crisis’ largely misleading. Rather, what has occurred is a *crisis in the governance* of migration. In turn, this can be interpreted as a more profound crisis of democratic legitimacy in western Europe (Castelli Gattinara 2017). The next section precisely focuses on the role of Italian and Spain local governments, both in general terms and with specific regard to immigration.

#### **4.4 Local government in Italy and Spain**

##### *Overview of local governance*

The prominence of Italian and Spanish subnational institutions has grown over the last decades. In Italy, the republican form of government established in 1946 was markedly centralized, but profound processes of decentralization have been undertaken since 1970, when Regions were established. This trend has sensibly accelerated in the 1990s, especially after the grand corruption scandal named *Tangentopoli* (Bribes City) and the electoral breakthrough of the LN, which had regionalists claims at the top of its agenda. Nowadays, the Italian state is a quasi-federal one.

Numerous reforms have increased the relevance of municipalities (*comuni*), cf. Cotta & Verzichelli (2007); Bobbio (2005). Most notably, the direct election of mayors (*sindaci*) was introduced in 1993. Mayors appoint and revoke the members of their cabinet (*assessori*) without the approval of the municipal council (*consiglio comunale*), whose role is mostly limited to the passage of major strategic policies, such as the approval of the municipal budget. This shift boosted the prerogatives, the visibility, and the popularity of the member of municipal governments – to the detriment of councils and political parties. Mayors of large cities are prominent political figures, whose carrier often reach the national stage before or after the local one.

As for Spain, the transition from dictatorship to democracy in the late 1970s marked the end of a highly centralized organization of the state. The 1978 Constitution establishes three territorial tiers of government, namely the central government, the regional tier (*Comunidades Autónomas* – Autonomous Communities), and the local tier. Also, decentralization has gone hand in hand with the creation of the welfare state (cf. Gallego & Subirats 2011). The Spanish institutional system is often described in terms of ‘asymmetric regionalism’, meaning that Autonomous Communities enjoy different degrees of autonomy vis-à-vis the central state—a provision aimed at recognizing the plurality and the specificities of national identities that coexist in the Spanish territory. The territorial cleavage is a long-standing feature of the Spanish society, which periodically resurge with extreme intensity, as in the case of the major institutional-political crisis driven by the confrontation between Catalan pro-independence forces and the central state during the 2010s (see for example Barrio *et al.* 2018).

According to the Spanish constitution, municipalities (*ayuntamientos*) are the basis of the territorial organization of the state, and the first level of the citizens’ participation in public affairs (cf. Tomás 2017: 246). Directly elected councilors compose the municipal council (*pleno*) and elect, in turn, the mayor (*alcalde*). The indirect election of mayors is then a major difference with the Italian system. One key implication is that, when electoral forces do not obtain the absolute majority of seats in the council, they may seek to forge post-electoral alliances, for example in the form of coalition or minority governments. Yet, since the late 1990s, various reforms have gradually increased the power of Spanish mayors and their executives, as well as the autonomy of large cities (Zafra Víctor 2003: 107-8; Rodríguez Álvarez 2010: 88; Tomás 2017). Also, in 2006, the cities of Madrid and Barcelona were given special regime as the largest Spanish cities.

#### *Local governments and immigration policy*

Zooming in to the realm of migration, in both the countries immigration policy lie under the jurisdiction of the central state. As mentioned in [Chapter 2](#), this is also mirrored in the inter-governmentalist character of EU migration governance, in fact dominated by the executives of member states, especially their security-oriented components. The role of Italian local governments is limited to the management of critical social problems and humanitarian emergencies related to immigration—especially in interaction with prefectures (*prefettura* – the local branches

of the Ministry of the Interior) and police headquarters (*questure*). Also, national authorities consult their local and regional counterparts for defining the three-year programmatic plans of immigration control and the yearly quotas regulating the inflow of foreign workers (Castelli Gattinara 2016: 64-65). It is worth noting, however, that the power of mayors in the field of law-and-order has been sensibly extended through the Security Packages approved by the Cabinet Berlusconi III (see above). The Ministry of the Interior and municipal governments can set agreements which attribute relevant responsibilities and resources to local administrators for dealing with urban law-and-order.

As for Spain, the Constitution establishes that the central state has «exclusive jurisdiction» over immigration policy.<sup>41</sup> Yet local authorities have much greater competences in this area as compared to their Italian counterparts. The registration of residency in the municipal census (*padrón*) is a pre-condition to access basic welfare provisions and—following the new Foreigner Law of 2004—also to initiate individual regularization procedures (*arraigo*, i.e., ‘rooting’, see above). In turn, regularized immigrants are entitled to claim family reunification. Municipalities are in charge of registering immigrants in the census and drafting the individual reports required to apply for regularization. These procedures, while formally of an administrative nature, *de facto* give wide discretion to local governments. They may opt for enacting inclusive practices, for example registering immigrants of no fixed abode—then granting them access to basic social provisions—and drafting favorable reports to enhance their prospects of regularization. Restrictive practices can be also enacted, although the registration of undocumented immigrants is mandatory in any case. In sum, municipal competences have crucial implications in terms of legal status, welfare access, and immigrant rights at large (for a detailed review, see Garcés-Mascareñas 2014: 5-6).

#### *Local governments and immigrant policies*

As for integration policies, it should be first noted that Italian and Spanish sub-national authorities are pivotal components of national welfare systems. Following long-standing processes of decentralization, local authorities have become the most relevant tier of government

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<sup>41</sup> Article 149.1.2

for the implementation and delivery of social policies. Migration policy is no exception. As already mentioned, local governments have often been at the forefront in coping with immigration as an emerging societal transformation. The legislative voids of central authorities incentivized local administrators to introduce innovative policy solutions then transposed at the national level. On the other hand, the Great Recession and consequent austerity measures sensibly enhanced their dependence on the central state and the pressure for providing welfare services in a context of shrinking resources (cf. Del Pino & Pavolini 2015).

As for Italy, the competences of regional and local governments in the area of immigrant integration were made explicit in the 1998 *Testo Unico sull'Immigrazione* (articles 34-46). These include employment, health, education, housing, and civic participation. Regions were in charge of implementation and to craft, in cooperation with municipalities, integration programs to be funded through the National Fund for Migration Policies (Caponio 2014: 8-10). However, the 2001 federalist reform attributed full autonomy to regions in the field of social policy—including immigrant integration—and thus in prioritizing areas of welfare intervention. As mentioned above, the National Fund for Migration Policies was merged into a broader National Social Fund (sensibly curtailed following the Great Recession). Consequently, nowadays municipalities enjoy large rooms for maneuver in integration policies, but their enactment is contingent upon the financial resources that central authorities allocate to regional ones for social policies and, within such framework, to the funds that regional governments allocate for integration policies (Castelli Gattinara 2016: 64-5; Campomori & Caponio 2016).

The division of competences is very similar in Spain. Over the decades, national policy-makers have concentrated their efforts almost exclusively on border control and immigration management—to the detriment of integration policies. In addition to this approach to national policy-making, it should be considered that Autonomous Communities detain most of the prerogatives in the field of welfare, most notably health, education, employment, and housing (Garcés-Mascreñas 2014: 6-8; Bruquetas-Callejo *et al.* 2011: 307-15). As a result, immigrant integration fall into the areas of competence of regional and local authorities—which have filled in for the voids of central ones. Some regions and cities have represented ‘avant-gardes’ in the formulation and implementation of these policies. As [Chapter 6](#) will show, this is especially the case for Catalunya and Barcelona, which have produced their first integration plans in 1993 and 1997 respectively. The first substantive integration plan (*Plan Estratégico de Ciudadanía e Integración* –

PECI) was adopted at the national level in 2006, but regional and local governments kept on covering the lion's share in defining the policy objectives and instruments. As Garcés-Mascareñas (2014: 7) put it, «the PECI should be understood as a national framework in which to fit *a posteriori* (partly through budgetary allocation with a total of about 200 million euros a year) the policies that were already in operation at regional and local levels».

Last, asylum policy should be treated separately. In both the countries, asylum rights are an exclusive prerogative of the central state. This is established by both the Italian (articles 10 and 117) and the Spanish (articles 13 and 149) Constitutions, which are also shaped on international laws on asylum protection. In Italy, the ordinary system of asylum reception is based on the cooperation of the Ministry of Interior, municipalities, and civil society organizations. It is widely considered as an 'avant-garde' precisely because of its polycephalic governance structure. The downsizing of this system in 2018 by mean of the 'Security Decree' will likely marginalize local governments in asylum governance. Yet the impacts of this policy cannot be fully assessed at the moment of writing. For instance, major implementation stalemates have been caused by both courts and municipalities. The Italian 'emergency' system, instead, lies in the full jurisdiction of central authorities, which can set up reception centers without consulting municipal governments (for a detailed overview, cf. Campomori 2018: 432-3). The role of Spanish local governments, instead, is virtually non-existent, as the central state is fully in charge of national asylum policies.

Overall, Italian and Spanish local governments play a decisive role for migration policy—especially in the realm of immigrant policies. In Spain, municipalities enjoy greater autonomy when it comes to immigration policies, as they can drive regularization and family reunifications procedures. As for asylum policies, instead, Italian municipalities have more extended prerogatives as compared to their Spanish counterparts. Lastly, it shall be noted that local governments are *de facto* in charge of dealing with urban issues even when laying outside of their jurisdiction. This is especially the case for undocumented immigrants, as municipalities often take the responsibility of their integration on a 'voluntary' basis. Spanish local governments have greater rooms for maneuver in this respect, as they must register irregular residents in their municipal census – a procedure that grant access to basic welfare provisions.

## 4.5 Milan and Barcelona: Key sociological features

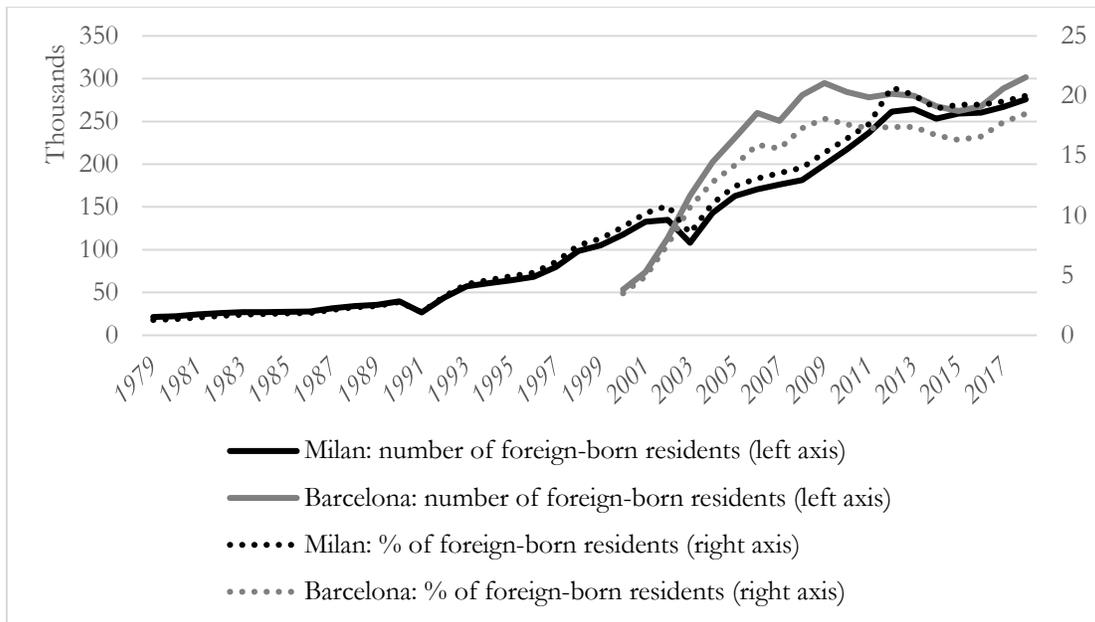
Both Milan and Barcelona are post-industrial, relatively affluent global cities with a highly diverse population (see also [Section 3.2](#)). Milan was part—with Turin and Genoa—of the so-called ‘Industrial Triangle’ of modern Italy and then a fundamental motor of the country’s economic development, especially since the aftermath of the World War II. Departing from this production model, however, the city accomplished a transition towards a service-oriented economy over most recent decades. These societal transformations went hand in hand with two different waves of migration (cf. Foot 1999). The first one occurred in the 1950s-1960s, and mainly consisted of Italians from southern regions seeking employment in the industrial sector. The post-industrial shift corresponded to a second wave of migration from abroad since the 1970s. Yet, the settlement of foreign-born residents became considerable and diversified in the 1990s.

Developments in Barcelona were similar in many respects. The city emerged as a large industrial center at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Throughout the following decades, economic growth was sustained by the settlement of a large immigrant community coming from rural Catalunya and the rest of Spain. In the wake of a second economic boom driven by the service economy, growing numbers of foreign immigrants—from both the rest of Europe and the Global South—started to settle in the city since the early 1990s. The prevalent sectors of employment among foreign immigrants in the two cities are domestic caregiving, catering, manufacture, and self-employment in food and ethnic services (for more details, see Caponio 2014: 7-8; Castelli Gattinara 2016: 66-8; Garcés-Mascareñas 2014: 3-4; Morén-Alegret *et al.* 2016).

*Figure 4.3* shows the number of foreign-born residents in the two cities. In Milan, resident immigrants represent approximately one fifth of the total population (275,818 foreign-born residents on 1,378,689 inhabitants in 2018), which means that the city hosts the second largest foreign community in Italy (after the capital city of Rome). The three most sizeable nationalities are Filipinos, Egyptian, and Chinese. Altogether, they account only for the 41% of the total foreign population, a figure highlighting the diversified, multicultural character of immigration in Milan. The local government further estimates the presence of approximately 30,300 undocumented immigrants who face precarious conditions in terms of employment status, housing, and labor integration (Comune di Milano 2012: 33). Milan also hosts one of the largest Muslim community in Italy (approximately 40% of the foreign-born population, cf. Bombardieri 2011).

Barcelona, with its 301,626 foreign-born residents (18.5% of the total population in 2018), has a highly diverse immigrant population, too. As compared to Milan, however, the quota of Europeans is far more considerable. The three largest foreign communities are the Italian, the Chinese, and the Pakistanis, which together account for the 23.6% of the foreign-born population. Another difference with the case of Milan owes to the possibility for undocumented immigrants to register in the municipal census of Spanish cities. In the case of Barcelona, the numbers reported in *Figure 4.3* thus include also this part of the immigrant population. A study released in 2017 estimates that 54.6% of immigrants in Catalunya are undocumented.<sup>42</sup>

*Figure 4.3.* Foreign-born residents in Milan (1979-2018) and Barcelona (2000-2018).



Source: respective local government statistics.

The diverse ethnic composition of the Milanese immigrant population is among the factors explaining the low levels of spatial segregation, as the concentration of single ethnicities in restricted urban areas becomes less likely. Specifically, the vast and scattered semi-peripheral neighborhoods are those preferred by migrants for their settlement, also because of the availability of vacant apartments (usually ill-kept but affordable) and the concentration of the elderly needing domestic caregiving in such areas (Mingione 2009; Borlini *et al.* 2008). Barcelona, too, is

<sup>42</sup> See <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/7158/undocumented-migrants-on-the-rise-in-catalonia>

characterized by low levels of ethnic segregation across the urban territory. The city increasingly shows segregation patterns, but this is mostly due to gentrification processes driven by high-skill workers rather than ethnic factors (García Lopez *et al.* 2017). Barcelona has been defined as a ‘superdiverse’ city (Morén-Alegret *et al.* 2016: 94-5) due to the great variety of religions, languages, cultures and socio-economic statuses stemming from several waves of migration. The native population itself is linguistically and culturally diverse (Catalan and Castilian-Spanish are co-official languages). The strong civil society organizations of the city—and especially its long-standing tradition of neighborhood associations—greatly smoothed the social integration of newcomers (*ibid.*: 96).

## 4.6 Conclusion

Italy and Spain became immigration countries very rapidly and in relatively recent times. They turned into multicultural societies between the 1970s and the 1990s as a consequence of similar ‘pull factors’—including their geographical position, labor market, and national legislation. As in the case of other South European countries, policy-making has been traditionally characterized by scarce planning capacities and driven by emergency logics. In face of growing, unplanned numbers of newcomers, central authorities management persistently shifted between restrictive measures (producing massive undocumented immigration) and ‘exceptional’ regularizations (for coping with it). The securitarian character of EU migration policies played a role in driving these policy outcomes, too. Integration policies were gradually introduced since the 1990s—foremost due to bottom-up pressure coming from ‘pioneer’ sub-national governments.

Immigration became a contested topic in the late 1990s, when political parties began to politicize immigration for pursuing electoral rewards. But while in Spain this happened only amid rare crucial junctures, such as humanitarian crises, Italy experienced a securitarian *crescendo* since the early 2000s, with immigration ranking high in the political agenda and being systematically conflated with law-and-order issues. These governance arrangements and political trends appeared most forcefully in the 2010s, amid the so-called ‘refugee crisis’, with sheer numbers of forced migrants reaching European shores from the Global South. The rudimentary framework of national asylum policies, the highly restrictive character of EU migration governance, the rise of anti-immigrant forces, and the spread of moral panic concurred to produce humanitarian

crises in localities of transit and settlement, foremost national frontiers and densely populated urban areas.

Within this framework, regional and municipal governments have been at the forefront in coping with immigration as an emerging societal transformation, filling in for the voids of central authorities and sometimes driving policy change beyond their local contexts. The competences of local governments are limited in the case of immigration policies, which traditionally under the jurisdiction of national governments – although Spanish municipalities can interfere with centrally-defined provisions to a significant extent when it comes to individual regularization and family reunification procedures. As for immigrant policies, regional and local authorities, in partnership with civil society organizations, play a decisive role in designing and implementing integration programs, yet in a context of financial austerity and jurisdictional subordination. Milan and Barcelona well-symbolize these societal and political changes. In the wake of their transition to post-industrial economy, large and diverse immigrant communities have settled there over the last decades. As the next chapters will show, these two cities have been important sites for migration policy-making and pro-immigrant activism, too.

# Part II: Empirics

# Chapter 5

## Exclusionary policies and social movement outcomes: Milan, 2006-2019

«[W]hen Pisapia became the mayoral candidate of the center-left, all the associations of migrants, antifascists, antiracists started playing an active role in electoral campaigning. [...] Pisapia won also thanks to a base of supporters that was not “his own” base, but which was strongly looking for a change».

(Interview M19, Milanese immigrant activist)

### 5.1 Introduction

The city of Milan went through major political upheavals over the last decades. Conservative and anti-immigration parties uninterruptedly led the city government in the 1993-2011 period. Over the 2000s, within the context of a securitarian escalation in Italian politics, the city government enacted policies aimed to exclude specific sections of the immigrant population and ethnic minorities—including the undocumented, Romani families, and Chinese shopkeepers—from various rights and benefits. The victory of a center-left coalition at the 2011 local elections, however, put an end to the long-standing hegemony of right-wing forces and marked important changes in terms of migration policy and politics. This chapter examines how Milan’s pro-immigrant movement contributed to the production these outcomes during its various life phases, moving from a condition of strong repression and marginality to become a vocal and yet fragile player in city politics.

The chapter is structured as follows. [Section 5.2](#) describes the actors, the processes, and the contents of local migration policies since their origins in the 1970s to the present days, pointing out the continuities and discontinuities in the approach of local incumbents. The emergence and main characteristics of the Milan’s pro-immigrant movement are recounted in [Section 5.3](#).

Next, [Section 5.4](#) traces a link between mobilization and local exclusionary policies. It shows that, in face of particularly hostile conditions, social movements have been able to shape policy outcomes only to a limited extent and by means of a highly contentious strategy. The chapter then focuses on the role of pro-immigrant activists in favoring the electoral victory of the left-leaning parties in 2011 and the consequent dismissal of most exclusionary policies by new local incumbents ([Section 5.5](#)). These latter have acted as ambivalent allies of social movements, on the one hand elevating them to a position of legitimate stakeholders in local policy-making, and on the other hand granting limited benefits to their constituencies. Last, [Section 5.6](#) summarizes the main findings and bring them into dialogue with the theoretical framework of the study. This allows us to elaborate preliminary statements on social movement outcomes in the case of local exclusionary policies.

## 5.2 Local migration policy-making in Milan, 1980s-2010s

*From the origins to the Moratti's administration: Pushing immigrants at the margins*

In the 1970s-80s, the first policy responses to foreign immigration were provided by Catholic charities, which arranged basic facilities—such as shelters and canteens—across the Milan's territory. At that time, immigration was prevalently addressed as a matter of extreme deprivation and marginality, with public institutions playing a limited role in service provision (Artero 2018: 120). However, soon thereafter, other actors began to organize in immigrant associations—foremost by Eritreans, Egyptians, and Iranians—and trade unions, which formed a committee named *Coordinamento Migranti* in 1985 (cf. Caponio 2014: 10-12). These groups put forward an alternative frame focused on welfare equality, political participation, and the recognition of diversity. The municipality proved very receptive toward such demands. In the second half of the 1980s, a Municipal Consultative Committee and a Foreigners' Centre were set up for enabling immigrants' participation in urban governance and delivering a range of social policies (e.g., housing), later funded through the national framework of the 'Martelli Law' (see [Section 4.3](#)).

Yet this governance model rapidly showed deficiencies. Immigrant associations proved unable to effectively represent their constituencies and lacked expertise in service delivery (*ibid.*).

Also, administrative irregularities and petty crimes occurred in various municipal facilities, attracting widespread media attention. The reception center located in Via Corelli well-epitomized the lacunae of local migration policy-making at that time. As reported by the historian John Foot,

«[v]ia Corelli quickly became the symbol of the failure to deal with the immigrant housing problem. By 1991, the center was seriously over-crowded, the prefabs were not being maintained and there were constant reports of violent incidents. The law also required that such housing should only be provided for a maximum of six months, so the need to periodically evict all Via Corelli's inhabitants created a situation of fear and police intimidation (in reality, the occupants stayed for an average of three years). [...] In April 1993 the site was described as a 'powder-keg' and 'unmanageable'. The original decision to contract out the management of the centers to co-operatives had proved disastrous in the Corelli case, as they were unable to keep any kind of control over the inhabitants» (Foot 1999: 163).

The growing tensions linked to immigration were soon politicized by the local far-right. The closure of Via Corelli became a key promise in the electoral program of Marco Formentini (LN), who eventually became city mayor in 1993. His victory broke the long-standing hegemony of the Milanese center-left, which had governed the city since the end of World War II. Also, amid the collapse of the Italian party system, this election sealed the national breakthrough of the LN, which took over the administration of the largest municipality of northern Italy. Part of Formentini's success indeed owed to his law-and-order narrative on immigration. As an expert put it, the core of his message was «we will erect a wall around the city to keep the stranger out» (M2).

The image of 'Fortress Milan' was corroborated by the adoption of an assimilationist approach to integration, thus fully refraining from previous administrations' multicultural policies. The closure of most controversial reception centers went hand in hand with the exclusion of immigrant associations from policy-making, which were substituted by Catholic organizations as legitimate stakeholders (cf. Caponio 2010a). Most notably, the vice-president of the Italian Voluntary Movement—an influential faith-based association—was appointed as head of the department for social services in 1995. Such a reshaping of the policy network was consistent with an emergent policy frame that viewed immigrants as needy individuals to be assisted rather than collective actors involved in urban governance.

At the center of this new policy network was the Foreigners' Office, whose civil servants gained a substantive discretionary power in managing the migration-related municipal budget. Service delivery was contracted out to (mostly Catholic) third sector organizations, which also gained substantive influence in autonomously designing policy interventions. These included basic housing facilities, vocational training, and language courses for most vulnerable immigrants, such as refugees and trafficked woman, while cultural integration was basically disregarded. In the words of a long-standing third sector figure,

«Milan has [...] a strong administrative apparatus that has always enacted *policies beyond politics* – especially over the years of right-wing incumbents. Proclaiming the enactment of some policies was not convenient for those political parties but, with a certain pragmatism, [...] civil servants were allowed, *de facto*, to develop a set of social interventions» (M10, emphasis added).

Conservative parties led the local government until 2011 and maintained a continuity in terms of migration policy-making. The Moratti's administration (2006-2010), however, showed some peculiarities in this respect. Most notably, the city government embraced a harsher anti-immigration discourse, especially spurred by some visible political figures, such as Riccardo De Corato (vice-mayor and member of AN) and Matteo Salvini (leader of the LN's group in the city council). Immigrants and ethnic minorities—especially the undocumented and the Romanies—were described as criminals guilty of a 'security emergency' and as a threat to the cultural identity of Milan.

This resulted in a competitive dynamic between governing parties and a 'race to the bottom' in terms of political discourse. Although mayor Moratti generally took less aggressive stances as compared to De Corato and Salvini, she also tended to chase her allies in the field of anti-immigration politics. For instance, the most right-wing exponents of the local government organized a demonstration in favor of 'legality' on 26 March 2007.<sup>43</sup> By deciding to join the march, the mayor further legitimized their law-and-order stances. In the following days, Matteo

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<sup>43</sup> See La Repubblica Milano, 6 April 2017, "Tutti i nemici di Letizia Moratti in campo. E i tre motivi di una strana guerra".

Salvini succeeded in transferring €400,000 of the municipal budget from social policies to the security department.<sup>44</sup>

Several exclusionary policies were indeed carried out during those years. These targeted, first of all, undocumented immigrants. These latter were already banned from most social services (cf. Caponio 2014: 14-5), but Moratti's administration enacted further restrictions. For instance, seniority criteria based on official residency for accessing public housing were introduced and the children of undocumented immigrants were excluded from municipal kindergartens.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, these immigrants were intensely targeted by local police forces in public spaces, and most notably in public transports. When found with no valid residence permits, migrants were forcibly accompanied to local police headquarters.<sup>46</sup> Opposition parties accused incumbents of «repressive exhibitionism» while one interviewee defined these practices as «mere mopping-up operations» (M17). In the words of an immigrant activist, being an immigrant in Milan in those years meant

«living with the police that could ask you for the residence permit in any moment. If you were caught on the tram with no ticket you were in real troubles, and if you had no permit you could easily end up in an immigrant detention center» (M15).

The Chinese community was affected by ethnic profiling, too. Conflicts of space allocation between Italian residents and foreign shopkeepers escalated in the Milanese Chinatown, located in via Paolo Sarpi, a central neighborhood with a high concentration of Chinese retailers. While this immigrant community lamented the unfair and systematic issuing of fines by local police, native-born residents were discontent with the high concentration of foreign shops. The municipality established a negotiating table that eventually relocated several Chinese stores to the city outskirts, as Italian residents had demanded (cf. Mingione 2009: 232-3). Contention over ethnicity and space was even more severe in the case of Roma families precariously settled in unauthorized camps—a pattern of segregation that is common in Italian cities. These communities have been repeatedly targeted by far-right protests and violence (Salvini himself launched ‘weekly patrols’ in many camps of the city), intense stigmatization by media outlets, and local

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<sup>44</sup> See *La Repubblica Milano*, 3 April 2007, “‘Vince la Lega, la Cdl taglia i fondi destinati alle politiche sociali’-

<sup>45</sup> See [https://www.aduc.it/index.php/notizia/milano+circolare+niente+asilo+figli+immigrati\\_96194.php](https://www.aduc.it/index.php/notizia/milano+circolare+niente+asilo+figli+immigrati_96194.php)

<sup>46</sup> See *La Repubblica Milano*, 30 May 2008, ‘Campi sgomberati, vigili sui tram. Scoppia la polemica immigrati.’

authorities' repression. The municipality adopted a hardline approach, refusing to acknowledge the Roma community as a legitimate stakeholder and implementing several evictions as a strategy of repression and (unsuccessful) deterrence (cf. Sigona 2008; Vitale 2008).

It has to be noted that these exclusionary local policies were enacted in the context of a securitarian *crescendo* at the national level (see [Section 4.3](#)), which also resulted in the delegation of security competences to local authorities. City governments and the Ministry of Interior crafted 'Security Pacts' for the allocation of exceptional resources, most often employed to cope with migration-related issues. Milan's city council approved the *Patto per Milano Sicura* (Pact for a Safe Milan) on 18 May 2007 (cf. Castelli Gattinara 2016: 65).

The analysis of official policy documents adds further nuance to this account. The *Piani di Zona* (Area Plans) are the most relevant policy tools for the planning of social policies in Italian municipalities. Normally they are prepared every three years and also provide for the inclusion of non-institutional actors in policy formulation and implementation (Catalano *et al.* 2015). The first Area Plan approved by Moratti's administration (2006-2008) is indeed characterized by an assimilationist frame (cf. Comune di Milano 2006). The assistance of most vulnerable individuals is combined with a law-and-order approach to 'social deviances.' Integration is justified on an individual basis, as long as this path is strictly compliant with local laws and 'values.' Most notably, the policy document repeatedly points at immigration as a problem, for instance blaming the Roma population of being responsible for urban crimes (p. 33), setting the prosecution of undocumented immigrants as a priority (p. 43), and interpreting inter-ethnic marriages as a social threat (p. 55).

Strikingly, however, the Area Plan 2009-2011 has a much more liberal understanding of migration and diversity (Comune di Milano 2009). Although references to the 'traditional family' and 'Christian values' are present, the social and cultural integration of foreign communities is introduced as a new policy principle—especially when it comes to school integration and support for second-generation immigrants. Policy analysts have interpreted such a shift as a consequence of the city's international branding strategy in view of the 2015 World Fair (cf. Caponio 2014: 18). This also brought to some tentative steps for (re-)including foreign communities in local governance. One of the interviewee was among the experts appointed for mapping immigrant associations in the city, designing calls for public financing, and arranging a series of meetings with the leaders of these organizations. In her words, «the administration's idea was to get in

touch and support these groups so as to construct an ‘intermediary body’ to interact with» (M6). Yet these interactions were not eventually institutionalized and ‘native’ Catholic associations kept on bearing the lion’s share of integration policies.

In sum, after a first phase of fragile multiculturalism, Milan’s local government turned to a much stricter approach to policy-making in 1993, when conservative and anti-immigration parties took over the city hall. Exclusionary policies—including welfare-chauvinist provisions and deliberate ethnic profiling and segregation—became the hallmark of the Moratti’s administration (2006-2011). By conflating law-and-order into immigration issues and deploying a harsh nativist rhetoric, the most right-wing component of the governing coalition ultimately dominated agenda-setting dynamics. This also entailed a media-savvy strategy that included protest-oriented actions, such as street demonstrations and vigilantism. An assimilationist approach prevailed in the realm of integration policies, with extremely needy individuals deemed the only ones deserving assistance. The predominance of Catholic third sector organizations as policy designers and service providers was mirrored in the marginality of immigrants’ associations, although some tentative steps toward their incorporation were made since the late 2000s, as a consequence of the city’s international branding strategy in view of the 2015 World Fair.

*The center-left in office: Toward a partial integration of immigrants into the urban life*

Immigration and diversity were of the thorniest topics during the 2011 local electoral campaign. The main candidates were the mayor Moratti—seeking second term with her conservative and anti-immigration coalition—and Giuliano Pisapia, a leftist civil rights lawyer who won the center-left primaries as an ‘underdog’ (see [Section 3.2](#)). Pisapia’s political platform openly embraced multiculturalism by declaring immigrants as fully-fledged members of the Milanese community and openly refuting the migration-criminality nexus. Policy proposals included the establishment of a one-stop office delivering migration-related services, the promotion of immigrants’ voting rights in local elections, and the building of the first Milan’s Mosque—a long-standing demand of the local Muslim community. Conservatives fiercely criticized Pisapia for his allegedly ‘naïf’ and soft approach to immigration and claimed the goodness of the restrictive approach adopted till then. Center-right campaign rhetoric was particularly harsh and frequently resorted to alarmist tones, falsehoods, and ethnic discriminations (cf. Castelli Gattinara 2016:

100). For instance, chief competitors were accused of yearning to transform Milan in a ‘gypsyland’ (*zingaropoli*). The center-left eventually won the electoral race and Pisapia became city mayor on 1 June 2011.

The shift toward multiculturalism was evident when it comes to the discursive side of policy-making. Pisapia’s administration broadened the boundaries of the ‘Milanese identity’ so as to include many of those excluded until then—notably ethnic and immigrant minorities (Artero 2018: 121). The 2012-2014 Area Plan and its successive amendments put great emphasis on the recognition of social rights and cultural diversity (Comune di Milano 2012; 2015). When publicly presenting the 2012 policy document, the new Deputy Mayor for Social Policy, Pierfrancesco Majorino, recognized undocumented immigrants as legitimate members of the community and declared that their children «have been considered a bothersome background noise for too long» (Majorino 2012: 3). In addition to the already existing social interventions (i.e., basic assistance for extremely deprived or vulnerable individuals, cultural mediation, vocational training, and schooling, cf. Comune di Milano 2009), the 2012 Area Plan introduced a new set of priorities, such as immigrants’ political participation, health-related provisions, and the establishment of an ‘Immigration Center’ (i.e., one of the flagship initiatives of the center-left electoral campaign).

Moving from ‘talk’ to ‘walk’, policy outcomes under the center-left administration were mixed. Among the first public acts of Pisapia as mayor of Milan, in July 2011, was to prevent local police from checking travel documents and residence permits on public transports. Another post-electoral initiative was to oppose the decision of the Italian government of re-opening Via Corelli as an Immigrant Detention Center, widely known for the extremely poor living conditions of inmates. In 2014, following extensive negotiations with central authorities, the municipality succeeded in reconverting this facility into an accommodation center for asylum-seekers who were massively transiting through the city since the previous year. Policies in favor of forced migrants were possibly the most relevant ones enacted by the new administration and will be treated separately in [Chapter 7](#).

In addition to these highly visible and symbolic decisions, the administration enacted a range of provisions aimed at the long-term settlement of immigrants. The *RaggiungiMi* project (Join Me)—funded by the Ministry of Labor and based on the cooperation of multiple institu-

tional actors—was launched for facilitating family reunification procedures and providing psychological assistance to recently-settled family members (cf. Caponio 2014: 15). The access of these migrants to educational services—especially language courses—was favored through a website<sup>47</sup> that achieved relevant results in its first two years of operation (116 schools involved, 33,000 visualizations, 500 daily contacts, 7,000 emails received and replied, cf. Comune di Milano 2015: 15).

Other relevant initiatives targeted second-generation immigrants. The GLab office was set up to provide information on education, employment, and naturalization opportunities. Also, the municipality launched an initiative named *Una finestra sui tuoi diritti* (A Window on Your Rights) for favoring the acquisition of citizenship by immigrants' children. According to the Italian law, those born of immigrant parents on the national territory, once they turn 18, have one year to apply for citizenship. Once this time window is closed, 10 more years are necessary for a successful application. The municipality thus started to contact all eligible subjects, as many are not familiar with, or aware of, such procedures. After one year since its launch, the number of naturalized children in the city increased by 39% (Costa and Sabatinelli 2017).

However, the Pisapia's administration was also marked by relevant policy gaps and failures. The Immigration Center—a prominent electoral promise and policy priority of new incumbents—was, in fact, never established. A less far-reaching infrastructure—the *Centro delle Culture Migranti* (Center of Migrant Cultures)—has been established instead (Comune di Milano 2015: 15-6). Originally, the one-stop office was indeed intended to gather all immigration-related services 'under one roof' so as to ease both user access and back-office coordination (Comune di Milano 2012: 144). The plan thus required relevant actors involved in multi-level governance (e.g., municipal and regional authorities, police forces, third sector organizations) to strengthen cooperation. Such exchanges, however, proved rather difficult. One local public official claimed that «the confrontational attitude [of the Deputy Mayor of Social Policies] had obstructed many possible collaborations» (M14). Another civil servant reported that

«[i]nter-institutional cooperation was the greatest ambition [of the Immigration Center]. The project eventually consisted in gathering all the municipal offices dealing with immigration

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<sup>47</sup> See <https://milano.italianostranieri.org/>

in one seat. [...] [c]ompared to the original plan, the outcome has been a bit disappointing or, at least, different from the expectations» (M16).

Another case in point is immigrant political participation. On the one hand, the administration sought to transform the Area Plan from a «bureaucratic fulfilment» to «an opportunity for [...] jointly defining the meanings, the decisions, and the interventions» of municipal welfare (Majorino 2012: 1). The new Area Plan indeed pointed at the enlargement of policy networks to broader ranges of participants—especially NGOs—as a new «inspiring principle» of urban governance (Comune di Milano 2012: 10). The document was actually prepared on the basis of several public venues occurred in the previous months (*ibid.*: 14-5) and through the establishment of a permanent deliberative arena, named FTS (Forum del Terzo Settore – Forum of Third Sector Organizations, *ibid.*: 95). As a leading third sector figure put it, «the method of the Pisapia’s administration consisted in engaging the city in conversation and establishing new bridges» (M18).

Such an enlargement of the policy network, however, barely concerned immigrant associations. Local incumbents involved these actors as partner organizations of the 2015 World Fair—as the Moratti’s administration also did—by establishing the Milan World City Forum. However, no further structures for participation in policy-making were built. Lacunae are evident also in the case of religious diversity and cultural recognition. In 2012, the municipality established an official register of religious organizations in the city (Caponio 2014: 18-9), but more far-reaching interventions were absent and, most importantly, the electoral promise of building a Mosque was not delivered. In sum, beside a greater discursive emphasis on political and cultural inclusion, no substantive policy changes were achieved by the new local incumbents.

Finally, Pisapia’s administration was marked by a sharp discursive change in local migration policy-making. Multiculturalism was openly embraced, to the detriment of previous assimilationist approaches, and migration-related issues largely ceased to be conflated into security ones. A set of new initiatives were launched to enlarge the rights of immigrants, especially when it comes to second-generation ones, family reunification procedures, and forced migrants. Also, more democratic forms of policy-making were allowed by involving a plethora of new actors in the design and the delivery of social interventions. Yet the administration was also characterized by major policy failures, most notably the missed establishment of the Immigration Center and

the first Milan's Mosque, as well as the scarce inclusion of immigrant associations in urban governance—substantially in line with the previous administrations' trajectory.

### 5.3 The emergence of pro-immigrant activism in Milan

Immigrant activism in Milan started blooming in the 1970s, mainly with a focus on homeland politics. Yet, as foreign communities became more sizeable, activist groups increasingly mobilized on issues related to their context of settlement. This was the case, for example, of the Eritrea Popular Liberation Front and the Eritrea Liberation Front, which gradually turned into advocates of Eritrean workers' rights (cf. Caponio 2005: 938-40). With further immigrant associations mushrooming and politicizing—foremost the Egyptian and the Iranian—the *Coordinamento Migranti* emerged in 1986 as an umbrella organization aimed at affecting urban politics (see above).

A fully-fledged pro-immigrant movement eventually emerged in the late 1990s, concomitantly with the breakthrough of immigration as a contested policy issue on the national stage. As recounted by one longtime activist,

«I began to focus on migration with a 'movement approach' in 1998. Participation had been feeble 'til then [...] In 1998, an antiracist committee began to gather [...] virtually every group mobilized over migration in the city, as all were deeply shocked by [...] the establishment of the CPTs [i.e. immigrant detention centers]. [...] That was a true turning point. I can date back to that moment my decision to get involved. Dealing with immigration really began to mean dealing with politics at large» (M7).

Not by chance, the first relevant contentious actions of the movement concerned the center of Via Corelli—whose purpose of use was converted from reception to detention and expulsion precisely with the Law 40/1998. As reported by John Foot, «huge barriers were built around the area which was referred to as a 'concentration camp' by protest groups» (1999: 164).

The Global Justice Movement (GJM) played a decisive role in both the upscaling and the latency of the city's pro-migrant movement over time. As an activist put it, «[the 27<sup>th</sup> G8 Summit in] Genoa meant a lot to us, because that repression first affected the organization at the global level and, in the next years, let's say after [the social forums in] Florence, [...] also at

the national and the city levels» (M7). The ‘embeddedness’ in the GJM—often defined as a ‘movement of movements’—is also reflected in the variety of organizations involved, which range «from Catholics to the social centers» (della Porta & Mosca 2007: 9). Milan’s pro-immigrant movement, in fact, consists of two co-existing souls, one more radical and contentious—including left-wing trade unions and welfare associations, radical left parties, squatters, and sections of immigrant associations—and the other more moderate and ‘institutionalized’—basically consisting of progressive faith-based associations. Such a dual identity relates, more broadly, to the industrial history of the city and its traditional solidarity networks (cf. Casaglia 2018; Membretti & Mudu 2013).

In the account of another longtime activist and trade unionist, the «interweaving between a culture of rights and a culture of solidarity» originated from already existing networks committed with issues that gradually became *related to migration*—such as the condition of prisoners, homelessness, poverty, and employment (M23). In her own words, that was

«a slow process of relationship-building that did not directly depart from immigration. [...] [L]ittle by little, as the immigration phenomenon grew, the idea of making policies, of acting, began to take shape [...]. We did our first reflections on best practices of integration and, eventually, reached out for institutions for demanding their intervention» (M23).

This also points to another feature of Milanese pro-migrant activists, namely the engagement in both social volunteering and political activism, which is referred to as «the cement» of Milan’s activism (M23). Healthcare, legal assistance, social housing, vocational training are prominent instances of welfare services that are both provided and advocated by civil society organizations. These two repertoires of action are mutually interdependent. Non-state actors, in fact, enact practices of ‘welfare from below’ as a response to state failures or tightening policies. As an expert put it,

«immigrants have a body. [...] [Those] excluded from official policies get sick, need a place to sleep, to eat, they might want to learn Italian, find a job, and get regularized. Restrictive policies create greater rooms for civil society in responding to such concrete needs» (M1).

Simultaneously, she added, these bottom-up responses are «implicitly political.» Direct social actions have produced a capital of legitimacy and credibility when engaging in political claim-making (cf. Zamponi 2017). This process is well-described by one spokesperson of an activist organization with long-standing experience in providing welfare services for undocumented immigrants (see also Ambrosini 2015: 122-5):

«[Our organization] is mainly engaged in pragmatic initiatives, and this is a form of pressure on the municipality in itself. By delivering roughly 15,000 medical examination per year, we necessarily interact with the municipality and—in a rather contentious manner—with the Region. We are in asylum reception centers, in the jails, we work with sex workers in the streets, we access dismissed areas. These activities are *channels of influence* by themselves. [...] *We speak by doing*» (M7, emphasis added).

In a similar fashion, the leader of a faith-based association asserted that her organization «does politics through services» (M10).

The Milan's pro-immigrant movement—while multifaced in its composition and repertoire of action—has been typically characterized by the relative marginality of immigrant activists. Numerous scholars studied immigrant associations and immigrants' political participation in the city (e.g., Caponio 2005; Pilati 2012; Caselli & Grandi 2011). Most of these studies point at these associations as highly fragmented (most often on an ethnic basis), poorly structured and resourceful, and scarcely able to interact with institutional players. As mentioned above, the municipality indeed tended to interact with more experienced, native-led, mostly faith-based civil society organizations, which acted as partners of administration and 'indirectly' represented immigrant interests. Being hardly recognized as relevant stakeholders, the intermediation of autochthonous organizations indeed proved crucial for influencing urban governance, especially in times of closed political opportunities (Morales & Giugni 2011; Pilati 2012). In the next paragraphs, the dynamics of interaction and the outcomes of pro-immigrant activism will be analyzed by focusing on specific contentious policy arenas.

## 5.4 Mobilizing against exclusion: Social movement outcomes in face of hostile conditions

This section explores how activists can affect anti-immigration policies by focusing on the exclusionary provisions enacted by the Moratti's administration. During these years, pro-immigration mobilizations were characterized by highly conflictual interactions, extreme ideological distance, and virtually no rooms for compromise. Activists described these years as a «black hole, our darkest hour» (M23) and lamented to be «never accepted as a counterpart—and this is why we used to take the streets to put our claims forward» (M19). A public official agreed with this view, stating that «no dialogue has ever taken place, there was too much ideological divergence» (M14). However, she added, protest groups often had the role of signaling urgent societal problems:

«Because of their pressure, their role of 'goads', [social movements] always had an almost positive role [...] Their contestation [...] denoted a genuine concern for the city and indicated where urban critical problems were heightening. With hindsight, free of emotional reactions, I can say that contestation [...] has always been useful for soliciting the municipality and the police—that means, institutions—to take a stance and intervene» (M14).

Collective actions were generally oriented at opposing unwanted policy decisions or preventing even less desirable outcomes to occur. One common strategy was resorting to court litigations. For instance, a Moroccan undocumented woman—with the back-up of solidarity activists—filed an appeal at the Court of Milan to oppose the exclusion of her child from municipal kindergarteners (see above). The judges declared the municipal ordinance as discriminatory in 2008, one year after its adoption, on the following grounds: «minors in Italy cannot be considered as irregularly staying and therefore they cannot be excluded from the provision of a public service they have the right to benefit from» (cf. Delvino & Spencer 2014: 20).

On certain occasions, the repertoire of action was more confrontational and included risky demonstrations, such as hunger strikes and occupations. This was often the case when unauthorized Roma camps were coercively cleared. As one activist recalled, «we resorted to passive resistance each time a camp was evicted, we were there to at least ensure compliance with

human rights—especially of children—during the operations» (M17). On 31 October 2007, following the eviction of a camp located in Via Donigi and the consequent expulsion of its inhabitants from the municipal dormitory of Via Ortles, a group of Romani families remained homeless. Subsequently, a group of activists occupied the office of Marolina Moioli, Deputy Mayor of Social Policies. The episode had wide media resonance also thanks to Franca Rame—a famous Milanese actress, then-member of the Italian parliament—who publicly supported the protest. Romani families were eventually relocated in the Ortles center, a municipal dormitory, until definitive solutions were found.<sup>48</sup> One activist recall that day in detail:

«I was in front of the City Council with the moms and the kids. [...] Franca Rame was walking nearby while going to a television studio for an interview and jokingly told me: ‘C., why are you always making messes around?’, so I explained her the situation. Then she called the TV studios and told them to come there, and so they did. [...] She was very media savvy. At that point [the mayor] Moratti called Moioli and told her [...] to solve the problem before things get worse» (M23).

Another instance of radical action was the occupation of Torre Imbonati—a smokestack of a dismissed factory located in Milan’s northern outskirts—on 6 November 2010. Inspired by a similar mobilization that was taking place in the city of Brescia (cf. Cappiali 2016), undocumented protesters targeted the Cabinet Berlusconi III for the exceptional regularization implemented in the previous months (so-called *sanatoria*, cf. [Chapter 4](#)). They criticized the limited scope of this measure—addressed to domestic workers and caregivers only—and the bureaucratic burden on eligible subjects. The prospect of regularization indeed pushed many immigrants to do whatever in their means for a successful application. Frauds proliferated under such circumstances, with undocumented migrants becoming easy preys of false information and profiteers. As a trade unionist working on migrant rights put it, amnesties are «absurd limbos in which anything can happen and which testify the failure of the law» (M3).

While opposing this measure—referred to as a ‘swindle-act’ (*legge truffa*)—protesters also put forward demands concerning citizenship and political rights, such as the expansion of inter-

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<sup>48</sup> La Repubblica Milano, 1 November 2007, “Rom Sfolati Occupano il Comune”.

national protection, the conferment of Italian citizenship to second-generation immigrants, voting rights for those residing in the country for at least 5 years, and easier procedures related to residence permits.<sup>49</sup> Protest banners summarized such demands with slogans as «We are not illegal, we are the new citizens» and «Amnesty for all».<sup>50</sup> The group self-proclaimed as *Comitato Immigrati* (Immigrants' Committee).

Activists found the support of several allies. Assorted groups—including radical left parties, base unions, welfare associations, and progressive Christians—expressed solidarity by camping at the base of the tower and organizing many other protests in the city. Also prominent political and religious figures endorsed the occupation—further boosting the media resonance around such an extreme action. Giuliano Pisapia, then-candidate for mayor, declared: «I consider this demonstration as a relevant moment [...] to oppose the anti-immigrant politics propagated by the mayor Moratti in Milan and by Berlusconi at the national level.»<sup>51</sup> The protest had its momentum and succeeded in obtaining a bargaining table with the local prefecture, which was keen to accommodate at least some of the protesters' demands (cf. Camozzi 2011: 38-40).

The mobilization, however, was also marked by relevant pitfalls. Conflictual interactions unfolded not only vis-à-vis national and local incumbents—with the vice-mayor De Corato defining the action as «a seizure of the whole neighborhood» and urging for the deportation of undocumented protesters—<sup>52</sup>but also *within the movement itself*. Internal splits owed to the conflict between immigrant activists and their 'native' allies, accused of patronizing decision-making and illegitimately profiting from the protest's visibility.<sup>53</sup> As political self-determination was at the core of immigrants' claim-making, this conflict proved especially acute. One immigrant activist recalled that «the struggle for immigrants' leadership within the antiracist movement had been extremely tough» and eventually «broke up the *Comitato*» (M19).

Its initial success notwithstanding, the protest indeed failed after 28 days of occupation. Activists did not succeed in setting up a univocal strategy for negotiation with the prefecture and

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<sup>49</sup> See <https://immigratiautoorganizzatimilano.blogspot.com>

<sup>50</sup> See [https://milano.corriere.it/milano/notizie/cronaca/10\\_dicembre\\_2/imbonati-torre-carlo-erba-immigrati-ciminiera-finita-protesta-1804294571002.shtml](https://milano.corriere.it/milano/notizie/cronaca/10_dicembre_2/imbonati-torre-carlo-erba-immigrati-ciminiera-finita-protesta-1804294571002.shtml)

<sup>51</sup> See [https://milano.corriere.it/milano/notizie/cronaca/10\\_novembre\\_8/immigrati\\_imbonati-1804121406527.shtml](https://milano.corriere.it/milano/notizie/cronaca/10_novembre_8/immigrati_imbonati-1804121406527.shtml)

<sup>52</sup> See [https://milano.corriere.it/milano/notizie/cronaca/10\\_dicembre\\_2/imbonati-torre-carlo-erba-immigrati-ciminiera-finita-protesta-1804294571002](https://milano.corriere.it/milano/notizie/cronaca/10_dicembre_2/imbonati-torre-carlo-erba-immigrati-ciminiera-finita-protesta-1804294571002)

<sup>53</sup> See <https://immigratiautoorganizzatimilano.blogspot.com/2011/01/bilancio-via-imbonati.html>

the occupation gradually became less viable due to harsh weather conditions and the deteriorating state of health of occupiers. Authorities did not accommodate any of the demands and also deported one of the undocumented protesters as soon as the demonstration was concluded. One interviewee defined the protest as a «major failure» and pointed at the so-called ‘Powerful Ally’ dilemma as outlined by James Jasper (2015: 20). In fact,

«Italian supporters exploited immigrants, their problems, and their demands, as ‘spearheads’ in their own battles. [...] [They] have used and damaged them. [...] Immigrants need somebody’s support to mobilize, but these supporters have their own agenda, which does not necessarily overlap with migrants’ one» (M1).

A unionist working on immigrant rights agreed with this view and stated that deportable immigrants have been «instrumentalized» and «irresponsibly used as cannon fodder» (M3).

In a nutshell, activism has been highly conflictual and barely influential in the case of anti-immigration local policies. In face of a denied access to institutional channels of policy-making, mobilizations were prevalently of a disruptive kind and oriented toward ‘resistance’ and ‘damage limitation.’ Some gains were obtained when opposing the exclusion of immigrants’ children from municipal kindergartners—a decision that the administration was forced to withdraw—and when trying to mitigate the most detrimental consequences for evicted Romani families. These outcomes, however, could only be achieved by means of extreme, highly visible actions of ‘last resort’ (e.g., hunger strikes and illegal occupations) or venue-shopping strategies (e.g., court appeals). Importantly, mobilization even led to remarkable and unintended losses, such as the deportation of undocumented activists. Such weaknesses were further exacerbated by the fragmentation of the movement itself, which suffered from acute internal conflicts over the ethnicity-paternalism nexus.

### **5.5 Necessary, unreliable allies: Sympathetic political elites favoring and obstructing the success of social movements**

The electoral victory of Pisapia marked a shift from a minimalist and technocratic understanding of local welfare toward a more expansive and participatory model. As for migration, local incumbents took a leadership position in advocating pro-immigrant politics and incorporating new

demands in their policy agenda. This approach greatly differs from Moratti's, with blame-avoidant politicians staying 'in the shadow' and delegating integration policies to non-elected actors—foremost civil servants, appointed experts, and service providers. As mentioned above, the center-left administration indeed enlarged the policy network beyond the existing 'inner circle' of Moratti's privileged, mostly Catholic partners.

Progressive civil society organizations positively received such political and policy reversals. One third sector figure stated that «the Moratti's main concern was not doing an inch more of what was strictly necessary, [...] while the new government's approach is 'we are interested in whatever is social'» (M5). In the words of a civil servant, «there has been a shift from a model based on the mere provision of services to a participatory one—both in the implementation and the formulation of policies. [...] We would have never done what we have done for immigrant integration without the fresh participation of civil society» (M8).

The FTS was the highest expression of such a renewed model of urban governance. This policy venue replaced the so-called *tavoli di lavoro*, i.e. technical working groups. As recounted by one activist, «under the Moratti's administrations these working groups were slightly more than symbolic; games were made outside. We used to attend them just to know what was 'brewing up'» (M7). According to the head of a third sector organization, these venues were

«nothing more than expert meetings. They did not involve the city at large on a political and cultural level. [...] [a]t that time, shedding too much light on what was going on it was not appropriate, at least in the sector of immigration, being so politically sensitive. [...] The FTS has been a platform for putting innovative ideas on the table, which the administration has sometimes took charge of» (M10).

Similarly, a key figure of the FTS stated that «[the Moratti's administration] used to send us the Area Plan and, the day after, hold a meeting saying 'you have 30 minutes for your comments, now or never'». Differently, he described the FTS as «a state of mind more than a policy venue» (M18).

Within the context of this different style of policy-making, social movements benefited from a greater access to institutional spaces. This outcome has to be interpreted also as a consequence of the 2011 local electoral campaign. Pisapia's candidacy was indeed endorsed by a wide

range of progressive supporters, including activists on the radical left. The prospect of moving beyond a hostile political season galvanized diverse groups into supporting the center-left electoral platform. Pro-immigrant organizations—as an expert put it—«were waiting for the election of Pisapia as water in the desert» (M2). One activist confirmed that «there was a strong push for the victory of Pisapia, because [the previous administration] had put forward a disgusting way of doing politics; this is why an alliance emerged within a previously fragmented landscape of social activism» (M23). Similarly, another activist recounted that «when Pisapia became the mayoral candidate of the center-left, all the associations of migrants, antifascists, antiracists started playing an active role in electoral campaigning. [...] Pisapia won also thanks to a base of supporters that was not ‘his own’ base, but which was strongly looking for a change» (M19).

Perceiving the opening of favorable political opportunities, previously unconnected groups were thus incentivized to engage in alliance-building so as to affect local migration policy-making (Steil & Vasi 2014). The Milanese center-left was capable of taking the political leadership of this activist base and crafting a large and cohesive coalition around a progressive political vision (Liu *et al.* 2010). By granting access to existing policy venues, and by establishing new ones, local incumbents ‘rewarded’ their supporters so as to consolidate their political consensus (Hutter *et al.* 2019).

Substantive gains, however, have been quite limited for pro-immigrant activists, especially during the first years of the Pisapia’s administration. Many interviewees perceived policy changes to be more symbolic than concrete and lamented that their greater access to decision-making did not translated into remarkable results—an outcome that might be defined as ‘access without influence.’ In the words of one unionist working on migrant rights, «I see grand declarations of principle, I see the will of weaving a different narrative, but [...] [Majorino] should be more concrete in his daily activities, otherwise it’s quite useless» (M3). In the account of another interviewee, the change of color of the city government did not ensure any ‘easy win’; rather, gains were achieved through a sort of ‘confrontational cooperation’:

«The victory of Pisapia [...] didn’t help much from a concrete point of view. But, at least, we finally engaged in a dialogue with the municipality. Our relationship consisted in keeping on pressure on the city government, but it was not a friendly relationship. [...] Our tactic was to wrest some promises and then keep them accountable on that. So it is not easy» (M19).

However, more substantive gains were achieved following the so-called ‘refugee crisis’ and the election of Beppe Sala as city mayor in June 2016. As [Chapter 7](#) will show in detail, in fact, the city government has extensively cooperated with urban social movements while coping with an unprecedented humanitarian emergency in the city, especially in the 2014-16 period. This crucial juncture opened further rooms for cooperation, with pro-immigrant activists seizing the moment to broaden their demands beyond the case of asylum-seekers and refugees.

The most significant instance concerned the issue of registration in the municipal census. Far from being a mere bureaucratic question, in Italy *residenza* is a pre-condition to access assorted basic services, including healthcare, social housing, and income support schemes (e.g., Gargiulo 2017). No One Is Illegal (NOII)—an activist network emerged amid the ‘refugee crisis’—staged a number of protest events in June-July 2017 demanding the registration of all subjects devoid of (1) fixed abode, (2) ‘regular’ abode (i.e., living in illegally occupied buildings), and (3) residence permit. The Italian law recognizes the right of residence to the first category only, but many local governments do not comply with this provision either. This was also the case of Milan’s. Activists thus urged the city government to both *conform with* and *move beyond* national provisions. Specifically, they claimed

«the immediate respect for the civil rights related to the registration in the municipal census and the extension of these rights to the entire citizenship, meaning [...] whoever is habitually resident in the Milanese territory, without discrimination of nationality».<sup>54</sup>

These rights should be ensured by «establishing fictitious residence address [*residenza fittizia*]». This provision would represent «a first step to make Milan more similar to ‘sanctuary cities’, such as Barcelona with its local ID cards» (see [Chapter 6](#)).<sup>55</sup>

Some of these demands were accommodated. Following an official meeting with NOII’s activists on 25 July 2017, the municipality launched a project named *Residenza-Mi* that settled four fictitious residence address across the city.<sup>56</sup> Residence rights were then guaranteed to not

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<sup>54</sup> See <https://www.facebook.com/notes/nessuna-persona-%C3%A8-illegale/la-residenza-anagrafica-e-un-diritto-negato/400247753703301/>

<sup>55</sup> See <https://www.facebook.com/events/486304245094760/>

<sup>56</sup> See [https://milano.repubblica.it/cronaca/2019/02/19/news/senzatetto\\_milano\\_sportelli\\_residenza\\_fittizia-219551691/](https://milano.repubblica.it/cronaca/2019/02/19/news/senzatetto_milano_sportelli_residenza_fittizia-219551691/)

only subjects devoid of fixed, but also those with no ‘regular’ abode—thus derogating the Decree Law 47/2014. The provision, however, did not include undocumented immigrants. In launching the project, the deputy mayor Majorino embraced many activists’ claims by declaring:

«Residence registration is an essential condition to access a set of basic services. We thus want to make sure that everyone benefits from the rights guaranteed by the Constitution, first of all the access to healthcare through the National Health System».

The receptiveness of the city government—as one activist put it—«has astonished the antiracist movement» (M15). One NOIP’s spokesperson recounted the interactions with the municipality as follows:

«I still don’t fully get why they made this political choice, because the national Democratic Party has taken a totally different path. Perhaps precisely because of their relative isolation vis-à-vis national counterparts, [...] the mayor and Majorino have shown a degree of openness that is unique for nowadays’ institutional politics. [...] We had formal meetings with top politicians and high-ranked civil servants – something I was very surprised of – especially on the topic of the municipal census. We discussed, exchanged documents, they read them, told us what was feasible and what was not, made promises and kept them. They accepted all our requests, except for the registration of undocumented migrants—something that the municipality can’t do anyway, but which is an important question of principle for us. If they accepted this too, that would really be a lot. In sum, we’re having exchanges that were not there before, and I find it very useful and productive» (M7).

While largely positive for the pro-immigrant movement, this achievement of this outcome sheds light on two interrelated factors that can obstruct the responsiveness of local governments to demand-makers. First, multi-level governance plays a decisive role in shaping such interactions at the city-level. One public officials involved in the meeting with activists referred that

«some demands are mostly idealistic. [...] If there is an availability from the side of the central government, the prefecture, and the police, then we can do something, otherwise it’s impossible. [...] Our job is also to let people understand which are the responsibilities of each

institution, so that they don't miss the target. I know it's simpler to talk with us and Majorino, but most of what we can do is to mediate [...] with the prefecture and the police. We can't do more, for instance changing the laws» (M13).

As the PD deepened its restrictive positions while leading the Italian government (2013-2018), the rooms for progressive local policies became narrower. Yet, this also incentivized Milan's local government to employ 'unconventional means' to pursue its policy objectives, in some cases even overstepping its jurisdictional boundaries.

The second aspect concerns what can be referred to as the 'legality-legitimacy nexus.' In the case of the municipal census, the gap between movement demands and policy responses ultimately depends on the legal limits faced by institutional players. These latter are part of institutional arrangements that set the scope of what they can legitimately do. As one expert put it, «local institutions have merely administrative functions, so they must respect national and regional laws. They can't imagine a sort of 'independent republic'» (M2). Social movements, instead, are not submitted to such institutional rationales (cf. Verhoeven & Bröer 2015). They consider social justice as a higher priority than compliance with the law. In Milan, the activists interviewed referred to these different logics as 'the legal divide' (*faglia della legalità*) and perceived it as the ultimate limit to their success.

In the words of a movement spokesperson,

«In our view, legality is either possible or doesn't exist—and if it doesn't exist we simply don't care. Since here in Italy you cannot legally settle, we use the term 'impossible legality.' We discussed this with the municipality, but most [of public officials] are embedded in a very 'legal' culture, by which what is legal is legitimate, and all the rest stays outside. The problem, however, it's that *everything* stays outside. Therefore, there's a debate across Italian municipalities about the huge difficulties of delivering welfare services to subjects that are not legally entitled to. They are half a million people on the Italian territory, at least. [...] We have less conflicts with the administration when it comes to asylum-seekers. Why? *Precisely because of the 'legal divide.'* Asylum-seekers are legally entitled subjects. But what about other marginal subjects? People with no income and residence permit. This is the 'legal divide' and makes all the difference» (M7, emphasis added).

Consistently, a public official refers that «the harshest conflicts occurred with [...] stakeholders that prioritize (what they claimed to be) the defense of rights over the respect of rules that public administrations must necessarily comply with» (M8).

In sum, the 2011 election of Pisapia as Milan's city mayor opened new opportunities for pro-immigrant mobilizations in the city. The center-left administration promoted a more inclusive vision of urban citizenship and a more participatory model of policy-making, marking a significant shift from the approach pursued by the previous conservative incumbents. The prospect of political change incentivized pro-immigrant activists to mobilize already during the 2011 local electoral campaign. When it comes to policy-making, however, outcomes were mostly limited to a greater access to decision-making procedures but scarce substantive benefits for movement constituencies. This scenario changed following the 2013-17 'refugee crisis.' Activists were able to establish meaningful ties with local political elites, which were induced to register subjects with no fixed or regular abode in the municipal census. While partly successful, the struggle over municipal registration also epitomized the limits experienced by social movements when relying on institutional allies. These latter are normally anchored to a legally-bounded notion of rights entitlement, whereas social movements advocate a universalistic vision of urban citizenship, based on the principle of membership upon residency. Sympathetic political elites thus appear essential and yet unreliable partners in the accommodation of activists' demands.

## **5.6 Conclusion: Arenas and mechanisms of social movement outcomes in the case of exclusionary policies**

The city of Milan experienced important political changes over the last decades. Conservative and anti-immigration parties took over the city hall in 1993 and remained in office until 2011, when a center-left coalition won the local electoral race with the back-up of many progressive civil society organizations. Such a shift was mirrored in drastically different frames and contents of local migration policies. The chapter examined the role of pro-immigrant activists in the production of these outcomes, with a specific focus on their opposition to local exclusionary policies. This section wraps up the main findings and bring them into dialogue with the theoretical framework of this study ([Section 2.5](#)).

The approach of the Moratti's administration (2006-2011) to migration-related affairs can be summarized in terms of hardline exclusionary policies, assimilationism, and highly selective access to decision-making processes. Far-right governing parties—namely the LN and AN—crafted a corrosive discourse on migration and ethnic diversity, framing foreign-born residents as an economic, cultural, and security threat. Their discourse ultimately prevailed in agenda-setting dynamics and was translated into assorted exclusionary policies.

The children of undocumented immigrants were barred from municipal kindergartners, immigrants were policed in public spaces on an ethnic basis for the sake of detention and deportation, Roma communities living in unauthorized camps were systematically evicted, and several Chinese shopkeepers were forced to resettle in the urban outskirts. Moreover, on the grounds of an alleged nexus between immigration and security issues, a considerable share of the municipal budget was reallocated from social welfare to law-and-order provisions. Not by chance, anti-immigration politics was concomitantly escalating at the national level, too.

The Moratti's administration moreover adopted an assimilationist, minimalistic, and technical approach to integration policies. Access to integration services—including housing, vocational training, and language course—was normally granted only to most vulnerable individuals and immigrant communities were included in policy-making only to a limited extent. Catholic third sector organizations bear the lion's share in the realm of policy formulation and service delivery and migration governance ultimately unfolded in restricted and specialized institutional venues.

How did social movements affect these policy changes? Pro-immigrant activists only achieved marginal benefits when opposing exclusionary policies. In some instances, the city government was forced to dismiss some of its initiatives. The ban on the children of undocumented immigrants from kindergartners was abolished roughly one year after its adoption because of a court judgment—spurred by an activists' initiative—which found it unconstitutional. Also, a group of homeless Roma families were settled in municipal housing facilities following an illegal occupation of municipal offices that was endorsed by prominent, highly influential allies. In other circumstances, however, collective action went to the detriment—rather than benefit—of the immigrant population. This was the case of the Torre Imbonati's occupation. The protest targeted the Italian executive for the tight conditions imposed to undocumented immigrants for

their regularization and demanded the expansion of citizenship and political rights. After attracting considerable support from assorted allies and protracted media attention, the demonstration was eventually unsuccessful and even led to the deportation of one insurgent.

The mechanisms at play can be summarized as follows. In face of a very unfavorable balance of forces in the *city politics arena* (i.e., hostile political elites), alliance-building mechanisms could be activated only on an occasional basis and by resorting to highly contentious actions, including illegal occupations and hunger strikes. Moreover, activists faced major obstacles in activating brokerage mechanisms in the *civil society arena*, which was dominated by faith-based associations having strong ties with local powerholders. The emergence of controversies over paternalism and ethnicity between potential allies have marginalized pro-immigrant activists even further. The difficulty of building a solid pro-immigrant coalition at the city-level eventually impeded the activation of meaningful upscaling mechanisms in the *multi-level governance arena*, with the exception of rare, successful strategies of venue-shopping (e.g., court appeals). In sum, collective action was barely influential and prevalently driven by a logic of ‘damage limitation.’

This scenario has changed following to the victory of left-leaning parties at the 2011 local elections – an institutional outcome that was indeed buttressed by social movement themselves. The Pisapia’s (2011-2016) and Sala’s (2016-present) administrations marked a considerable shift from the previous model of local migration governance. Local incumbents promoted a more inclusive vision of urban citizenship and rejected the immigration-criminality nexus. They dismantled some extant exclusionary policies and expanded the array of municipal integration policies, for instance in the realm of family reunification (*RaggiungiMi*), education, and access to citizenship rights (*Una finestra sui tuoi diritti*). Yet policy pitfalls were evident too, including the failure to deliver relevant electoral promises and the protracted exclusion of immigrant associations from main governance processes.

The expansion of these social rights went hand in hand with the establishment of a more participatory governance model, foremost through the FTS, a newly-established institutional venue that could be accessed by a wider set of civil society organizations at the stage of policy formulation. This meant a significant change as compared to the highly technical and selective governance arrangements operating until then. Fully refraining from the previous blame-avoidant policy style, local incumbents—and above all the Deputy Mayor of Social Policies—

took a leadership position and crafted a large and cohesive coalition around a pro-immigration political vision.

Again, these outcomes are explained by the dynamics unfolding in three arenas of interaction. Brokerage mechanisms in the *civil society arena* intensified amid the 2011 local electoral campaign. The ties between pro-immigrant became stronger over time as activists perceived the opportunity to tap into influential allies for introducing their demands into the institutional space after a long period at the margins of the scenes. While having more radical stances as compared to parties on the mainstream left, social movements understood the importance of moving beyond a highly repressive political season and mobilized in support of the Pisapia's candidacy for mayor. Over the following years, a fully-fledged pro-immigrant alliance was crafted in the *city politics arena*. By expanding the governance network and establishing new policy venues, left-leaning local incumbents gave activists the chance to participate at policy venues where their voice could be finally heard. Yet, aside from these procedural gains, more substantive benefits were hardly achieved.

These ambivalent dynamics culminated with the battle over the municipal census. As this bureaucratic procedure grants access to several welfare provisions, social movements demanded the registration of all individuals with no fixed or regular abode. Following several protest events and negotiating sessions, local incumbents accommodated this request by establishing fictitious residence addresses. Yet, they refused to register undocumented immigrants residing in their jurisdiction. This procedure is, in fact, prohibited by the Italian law under any circumstances. The city administration refrained from breaking these rules, as this would have implied overstepping its the boundaries of their competencies. Social movements thus had limited leverage to activate upscaling mechanisms in the *multi-level governance arena* and eventually failed in ensuring the inclusion of undocumented immigrants in the municipal census. As the next chapter will show, the support to the undocumented has been at the core of policy-making in Barcelona—a policy outcome that can be explained with a more profound link between activists and local officials as compared to Milan.

# Chapter 6

## Policies in support of undocumented immigrants and social movement outcomes: Barcelona, 2015-2019

«We don't forget who we are and why we are here».

(Ada Colau, Mayor of Barcelona, 24 May 2016)

«Here in Barcelona there are many groups that speak in [our] name [...]. We decided to organize ourselves and speak with our own voice».

(Interview B23, spokesperson of the street vendors' union of Barcelona)

### 6.1 Introduction

Spain's anti-austerity protests of the early 2010s paved the way to the participation of social movements at many municipal elections. City-level coalitions—the so-called candidacies of change (*candidaturas del cambio*)—spread across the country to access institutions and deliver social change 'from the inside.' The Barcelona's city government is a prominent instance. Since May 2015 it has been led by a platform coalescing movements and parties on the radical left (BeC). Protesters began ruling the local administration headed by the city mayor Ada Colau, formerly a leading activist of the Spanish housing movement.

If Milan was an excellent ground for studying the challenges of social movements to exclusionary provisions, Barcelona allows us to unveil their impact on policies of totally opposite sign. More precisely, the city has been as a spearhead of the battle for the rights of undocumented immigrants in Spain and beyond. To drive policy change, the city government and social movements have systematically resorted to 'governmental activism' (Verhoeven & Duyvendak 2017), meaning that they joined their forces in contentious actions aimed to oppose and transform

Spain's citizenship regime. These cooperative exchanges allowed pro-immigrant activists to achieve successful and meaningful outcomes—but not without contradictions. The case of a 'rebel city' led by left-wing radicals is indeed so exceptional that poses more general questions on the opportunities and limits of a social movement taking office within a national-capitalist context.

This chapter is structured as follows. First, an extensive account of local migration policy-making from its origins until the present days is presented ([Section 6.2](#)). Although Barcelona and Catalunya have an enduring legacy of inclusionary policies, it is shown how the BeC's administration has further expanded and radicalized them. [Section 6.3](#) recounts the emergence and main features of Barcelona's pro-immigrant movement and explain why the city has represented a fertile breeding ground for the flourishing of this activist network. Next, the chapter sheds light on the issue of social movement outcomes ([Section 6.4](#)). It shows how the inclusionary provisions enacted to support undocumented immigrants have to be interpreted as a by-product of intensive cooperative dynamics between activists and local officials. These strategic interactions, however, were far from immune to internal conflicts. The 'dark side' of governmental activism is thus explored in [Section 6.5](#) by focusing on the plight of Barcelona's street vendors—mostly West African undocumented immigrants who formed a very vocal collective to counter deprivation and police repression. The city government has hardly alleviated these grievances, breeding contestation from various fronts. [Section 6.6](#) summarizes the main findings and bring them into dialogue with the theoretical framework of this study.

## **6.2 Local migration policy-making in Barcelona, 1990s-2010s**

*From the origins to the Trias' administration: Barcelona as an intercultural city*

The municipality of Barcelona began engaging with migration policy-making in the late 1990s, when the number of foreign-born residents in the city was close to zero. The first policy strategy—named *Pla Intercultural* (Plan for Interculturality)—was adopted in 1997 and established the backbones of Barcelona's approach to migration and diversity, namely the equality of rights and opportunities for all city residents, regardless of their administrative status, and the recognition of diversity as an intrinsic quality of the city.

The blueprints and programs crafted in the following years built upon these basic pillars and further specified key policy precepts. For instance, equality of rights and opportunities was deemed to be pursued through the ‘mainstreaming’ approach to integration (*normalització*), meaning that generalist provisions should be preferred to immigration-specific ones, where appropriate. Also, it was established that all aspects of urban governance had to become diversity-sensitive (so-called ‘transversality’) and that civil society had to be directly involved in policy-making. In sum, the municipality of Barcelona gave rise to a particularly inclusive model of urban citizenship and pioneered migration policy-making in the Spanish context and beyond.

The peculiarities of this governance model become apparent when it comes to concrete administrative practices. As explained in [Chapter 4](#), the registration in Spanish municipal censuses (*empadronamiento*) is a condition for accessing assorted basic services, including healthcare, housing, and education. Also, since 2004, undocumented immigrants registered in the census for at least three years are eligible for regularization—provided that they are ‘socially rooted.’ Municipalities are in charge of assessing these conditions, as they prepare the reports on social integration, as well as the housing reports related to family reunification procedures. Hence, far from being mere administrative executors, municipalities enjoy remarkable rooms for maneuver not only in the delivery of integration policies, but also in the implementation of immigration laws, with major implications for the inclusion or exclusion of foreign-born residents.

Given such prerogatives, the municipality of Barcelona normally took a very accommodative stance, for instance by registering residents with no fixed abode in its census and adopting a flexible interpretation of the conditions related to regularization procedures (knowledge of the Catalan language) and family reunification procedures (housing reports).

The main municipal structure providing integration services in the city is the SAIER (Care Service for Immigrants, Emigrants and Refugees), a one-stop office established in 1999, funded by the city government, and outsourced to civil society organizations. Services are freely accessible to any resident and include psychological assistance, legal counselling, labor market orientation, and reception services for newly-arrived immigrants. The relevant departments in local migration policy-making are the Immigration Department (within the larger Department of Citizen Participation, Solidarity and Cooperation), the Office for Religious Affairs, and the Office for Non-Discrimination (both within the Department of Civil Rights).

An additional institutional unit is the CMIB (*Consell Municipal d'Immigració* – Municipal Immigration Council), which is aimed at the involvement of civil society organizations in the governance of migration (Però 2007). Since most of non-EU immigrants in Spain are devoid of voting rights, the mission of the CMIB is primarily intended as a ‘participatory counterbalance.’ Precisely for this reason, the share of ‘native’ organizations admitted in this venue cannot exceed the 25% of the total.

The inclusive model of urban citizenship promoted by the municipality has to be contextualized within its broader regional framework. The Autonomous Community of Catalunya, too, launched its first integration programs in the 1990s—well in advance of central authorities (see [Section 4.3](#)). The Catalan government’s approach to migration-related issue also focuses on the equality of rights to be achieved through ‘normalization’ and the recognition of diversity. As summarized by Gebhardt,

«[s]temming from its predominant understanding as a minority nation with its own language, Catalonia has a particularly ambitious policy agenda also in the field of immigrant integration where it leads more comprehensive and directive policies towards immigrants than any other autonomous community» (Gebhardt 2016: 853).

These governance arrangements have been mirrored in the local politics of immigration. In fact, all political parties in Catalunya—except the conservative PP—have formally refrained from exploiting migration-related issues for the sake of electoral competition (Generalitat de Catalunya 2008). A similar agreement was made also by parties in the Barcelona’s city council (Ajuntament de Barcelona 2010).

Hence, the accommodative policies enacted in the region have to be interpreted in the light of such a consensual political landscape. Indeed, in the case of Barcelona, migration policies were first crafted when the socialist PSC was in office (1979-2011), but the policy agenda remained basically untouched when the conservative CiU took over the city hall in 2011. In the account of interviewees, intercultural policies are «part of the city’s DNA» (B2) and this also owes to the continuity ensured by civil servants, that have «instructed each politician on how to approach the issue» (B1).

*Migration policy-making under the BeC's administration: Barcelona as a 'quasi-sanctuary' city*

Given this departure point, the BeC's city government has sought to deepen, rather than deviating from, pre-existing trajectories. As a long-standing administrative figure put it, «the hard core of previous policies, their main concepts, remained the same» (B15). In a similar vein, one elected official asserted that

«Barcelona's migration policies have always been quite advanced and inclusive, regardless of the political color of the incumbents. The focus hasn't changed that much. [...] We took a more radical stance to support migrants' demands, but we didn't reject anything of what has been done before» (B19).

The enhancement of prior policies mainly concerned three domains, namely the condition of undocumented immigrants, cultural and religious diversity, and asylum protection. The latter represented the greatest challenge for the new city government. The BeC's electoral victory was indeed concomitant with the peak of the European 'refugee crisis'; hence, a new policy area was *de facto* inaugurated as a consequence of this structural transformation. Barcelona's asylum policies will be treated separately in [Chapter 7](#).

As for undocumented immigration, the municipality fully embraced the inclusive model of urban citizenship already in place at both local and regional level—so as to radicalize it further. The plight of irregular residents became—in the words of one public official—«the utmost priority» (B15). The most important and comprehensive policy document adopted in this realm is entitled 'Government Measures to Favor Regularization and Prevent Supervened Irregularity' (Ajuntament de Barcelona 2017), with €581,252 earmarked for the 2017-18 period (*ibid.*: 41-2). It first provides a critical understanding of EU and Spanish immigration laws, which are deemed responsible for «institutionalizing» irregularity through their own restrictions (*ibid.*: 10-8). The role of cities is then emphasized as decisive to transform «illegal foreigners» into «residents with an irregular status» and secure «full citizenship rights» to all (*ibid.*: 20-7). As explained by one civil servant, «an official document—approved during the plenary session of the municipal council—frames irregularity in positive terms. This is extremely innovative. Normally, in this domain, you do many things but without explaining them» (B15).

The strategy for materializing these principles consisted in *interpreting* Spanish immigration laws as progressively as possible, yet without *breaking* them. As recounted by one elected official,

«[w]e are categorically opposed to the Foreigner Law—and we took a clear stance on that. However, municipal employees must execute several administrative procedures for its application. [...] Thus, without changing any article, we sought to change things by enacting a rights-based [*garantista*] interpretation of the law and by possibly modifying its inherent guidelines» (B16).

As eloquently summarized by another public official, «we stretched the Foreigner Law like a chewing gum» (B11).

To this end, the municipality implemented five action guidelines aimed at (1) securing universal access to municipal services; (2) smoothing regularization procedures; (3) detecting and preventing ‘supervened illegality’; (4) preventing detentions and expulsions; (5) driving policy change at Spanish and EU level. Each of these guidelines comprises a set of concrete administrative practices. One of the most significant measure is related to the municipal census, as the administration sought to minimize street-level bureaucrats’ discretion in registering individuals with no fixed abode. One public official reported that roughly 8,000 new residents «emerged» throughout 2017. In her estimation, roughly 99% of actual city residents were included in the census at the end of that year (B19).

With respect to regularization procedures, the administration resorted to *Barcelona Activa* (the municipal unit responsible for economic development) for implementing individualized plans for employment (*plans d’ocupació*). Irregular immigrants are hired in cooperatives funded by either third-sector organizations or the municipality itself for a 12-month period, at least. According to the national law, in fact, a one-year job contract and a two-year period of residence are sufficient conditions to apply for regularization. This measure was tested in a pilot project in 2017 to be scaled up in the following years.

The issue of local ID cards (*document de veïnatge*) is another—possibly one of the most controversial—provision adopted by the city government. This measure is aimed at preventing expulsion proceedings and/or confinement in Immigration Detention Centers (CIEs). In legal

terms, it was justified on the grounds that national laws do *not* forbid local administrations to release complementary identification papers for the sake of affecting juridical procedures (*ibid.*: 37-8). By adopting a principle of proportionality, in fact, courts normally assess the existence of family, working, and social ties when formulating their judgments, possibly opting for economic sanctions instead of expulsion when such ties are deemed sufficiently strong. According to the expectations of the local incumbents, the ID card is going to be regarded as a proof of integration into the urban community. Ultimately, this would minimize the odds of an expulsion order.

The document can be requested by every adult immigrant settled in Spain for at least one year and registered in the municipal census for at least six months. When submitting their request to municipal offices, applicants are asked to present any available evidence of their social bonds (e.g., language skills, professional trainings, economic conditions, civic engagement).

As argued by Kaufmann (2019), these local bureaucratic membership policies are implemented as a solution of last resort in the case regularization is not a viable option (see also de Graauw 2014). As the implementation phase started in September 2017, its effectiveness cannot be assessed at the time of this study. Yet municipal officials showed confidence in this regard. As one of them put it, «we are not in the situation of US sanctuary cities [...] that have the chance of not complying with national immigration laws, [...] because the Spanish state is much more centralized. But we can still interfere with the application of its measures» (B16). The tensions across levels of government is well-described in the account of another official:

«This is really an experiment, the first initiative of this kind in Spain. [...] I believe it's the most a local government can do within the framework of the national law. Its approval was burdensome from a juridical point of view, because you need to defend yourself with a plethora of argumentations. The PP filed an appeal against the administration, contending that this is a competency of central—rather than municipal—authorities. We rebutted that the document merely testifies people's residency, which is something local. [...] [T]hus, judges are free to take it into account or not. [...] I think the measure is [legally] 'bulletproof.' [...] The central state could file an appeal against us through the State Attorney, but it didn't. So the document is legal and [...] [has] a legal effect» (B15).

The measures reviewed thus far were formulated and implemented *within* the interstices of supralocal provisions. However, the local administration also sought to move *beyond* these

boundaries by overtly opposing its national counterparts. The dispute over the CIE located in the Barcelona’s Free Zone is a case in point.

Seven CIEs are established over the Spanish territory. These are situated in areas where the immigrant population is large (Barcelona, Madrid, Murcia, Valencia), as well as in border regions where unauthorized crossings are most often attempted (Algeciras, Las Palmas, Santa Cruz de Tenerife)—cf. *Figure 6.1*. This geographical pattern is indeed reflected in the individual conditions that make migrants susceptible of confinement. In fact, detainees are: (1) undocumented immigrants who settled with no residence permit or experienced ‘supervened illegality’; (2) migrants intercepted while seeking to access the Spanish territory illegally (for whom detention is often considered as a ‘customary’ stop-off point along their migration route); (3) immigrants who concluded a period of penitentiary detention. All inmates are accommodated in the same structures, regardless of these different backgrounds. Since the translation of the EU ‘Directive of Return’ into national law (see [Chapter 4](#)), their internment can last up to 60 days.

Figure 6.1. CIEs in Spain, 2017



Source: González Beilfuss (2017: 306)

Extant reports point at the poor living conditions in these centers—although considerable variations in terms of quality standard exist between them. Healthcare, psychological support, cultural mediation, and other provisions are generally scarce. Physical contact between detainees and visitors is prohibited. Dormitories are poorly furnished, sometimes devoid of bathrooms

and locked from the outside. The existence of holding cells and the misuse of force by security personnel has been also recounted. Moreover, reporting on these centers is a daunting task due to their opaque administrative arrangements and poor accessibility (for a detailed overview, see for example Morán *et al.* 2012; González Beilfuss 2017).

Critics of the CIEs not only resort to humanitarian arguments, but also to juridical ones. The detention on administrative rather than criminal grounds is deemed unconstitutional, because people are detained for ‘what they are’ rather than for ‘what they have done.’ The Foreigner Law<sup>57</sup> asserts that these centers do not have a penitentiary character and should provide assorted social, legal, cultural, and healthcare services. Paradoxically, however, living conditions in the CIEs are generally worse as compared to ordinary penitentiary centers *precisely because of their non-penitentiary character*, as they are not supposed to conform with the minimum requirements into force for criminal prisons. Finally, CIEs are criticized for their practical ineffectiveness, as only a minority of detainees are ultimately ‘repatriated’ (e.g., 47.77% in the 2011-2016 period, cf. González Beilfuss 2017: 311)

The Barcelona’s CIE is criticized on similar grounds. Systematic violations of detainees’ rights were reported, including the confinement of minors—a practice deemed illegal by the Ministry of Interior itself (see for example Fundación Migra Studium 2016; 2017). Since its establishment in 2006, three people died in this center (Idrissa Diallo, Mohammed Abagui, and Alik Manukyan) and inmates repeatedly resorted to hunger strikes for protesting against their living conditions. While all Spanish CIEs are chronically overcrowded as compared to their ‘theoretical capacity’, this problem is especially severe in the case of Barcelona where, at times, the actual number of detainees was almost ten times the available seats (212). Relatedly, the share of ‘repatriations’ on the total number of detainees is low and decreasing year by year (cf. *Figure 6.2*). This is due to the fact that most of detainees are undocumented and originally from Sub-Saharan African countries, with which bilateral re-admission agreements are rare.

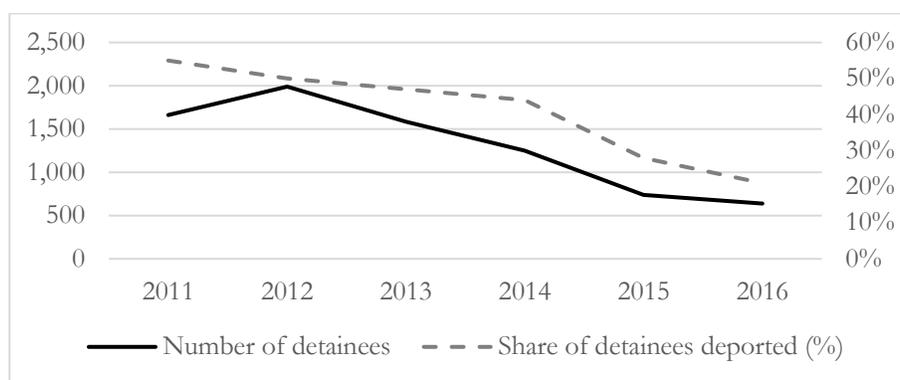
The Barcelona’s city government embraced a particularly contentious stance for confronting this situation. The resolution of closing the CIE was first inserted in the BeC’s electoral platform and reaffirmed by Ada Colau on 20 June 2015 (World Refugee Day), soon after her appointment as city mayor, during a public venue held in front of the center. The first official

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<sup>57</sup> Article 60.

act is dated 24 November 2015, when the city council demanded the Barcelona’s CIE not to be re-opened (the center was shut down from November 2015 to July 2016 following a judicial order commanding the execution of renovation works intended to cease the violation of detainees’ fundamental rights). This decision was approved by both left-wing and Catalan nationalist parties and endorsed by assorted social organizations—whose joint action was referred as a «common front». The Catalan regional parliament also passed an analogous resolution.

Figure 6.2. Barcelona’s CIE, number of detainees (left axis) and share of deported detainees (right axis), 2011-16.



Source: González Beilfuss (2017)

The leading figure of this policy process was Jaume Asens, Deputy Mayor of Citizen Rights in the BeC’s administration, who crafted a strategy for closing the CIE through an administrative expedient. The city council indeed issued a closure order on 7 July 2016 based on two main legal loopholes: (1) the center’s operating license was dated 1992, meaning that it was released before the CIE was established and thus did not conform with its actual institutional purposes; (2) fire services did not comply with essential safety requirements. Importantly, the fulfilment of such legal requirements are under the municipal jurisdiction.

As Asens put it, «such black holes have no place in a city of rights. [...] It is *our responsibility*, and thus *our obligation*, to request the corresponding operating license and the compliance with safety regulations» (emphasis added). Also, he claimed that «nobody, not even the Ministry of Interior, is exempt from complying with the municipal legislation», while also announcing that the city government was ready to do «whatever it takes for asserting [its] authority». The

Ministry did not file any appeal against the municipal order—which then came into legal effect—but it also refrained from complying with, in fact keeping the CIE operational. Subsequently, the city government initiated a legal proceeding against the Ministry. Since September 2017, the dispute is carried out at the Supreme Court of Spain, which is in charge of settling such cases of inter-institutional conflict. In sum, by overturning the ‘hierarchy’ of institutional competencies, the BeC’s administration ultimately transformed law enforcement into a political battleground.

As anticipated, initiatives on diversity have also been of utmost importance. Again, Barcelona already had a strong record in this field, but the new administration have considerably expanded and radicalized pre-existing arrangements.

This is apparent in the case of religious diversity. Although the Office for Religious Affairs was first established in 1999, related municipal initiatives remained quite limited until 2015 (cf. Garcés-Mascareñas 2014: 24-5) and the 2010 Interculturality Plan intentionally refrains from dealing with religious affairs (Ajuntament de Barcelona 2010). The appointment of Lola López as Commissioner for Immigration, Interculturality, and Diversity gave new impetus to such a policy domain.

During her municipal mandate (2015-19), López—then-Director of the Barcelona Center of African and Intercultural Studies and life-long antiracist activist—prioritized religion as a fundamental human right and religious diversity as an essential component of interculturality. Religious festivities and events were supported by providing access to municipal and other public spaces and by sponsoring a series of initiatives named *Celebrem Barcelona*—thus making these celebrations fully-fledged city festivals. As for ethnic minorities, the administration celebrated the Gitano community for the first time on 8 April 2018 (International Romani Day), for instance placing the Romani flag on the façade of its building, while initiatives against the discrimination of Roma people were first launched in 2019.

Also, the city government launched the first anti-discrimination plan to fight islamophobia in 2016 (*Pla Municipal contra la Islamofòbia*). In this realm, the *No Tinc Por* (I’m Not Afraid) demonstration was especially significant. Co-organized by the city government and local activists in response to the ISIS terrorist attack of 17 August 2017, the march aimed at averting the spread of a xenophobic, anti-Muslim rhetoric. Also, an inter-religious and inter-convictional mourning event was organized the day after the attack. Local incumbents framed these events in terms of

opposition to terrorism, racism, and war, ultimately preventing the emergence of a securitarian discourse constructed on the antagonism between ‘us’ (i.e., civilized western natives) and ‘them’ (i.e., extremist Muslim immigrants)—cf. Garcés-Mascreñas 2018. While actors on the extreme-right sought to politicize the event in such terms—also resorting to physical violence—such reactions were marginal and promptly neutralized by larger counter-mobilizations.<sup>58</sup>

One key example of anti-discrimination measures is the *Xarxa BCN Antirumors* (Anti-Rumors Network), which includes hundreds of associations and individuals with the aim of countering stereotypes and canards that target minorities. Launched by former local incumbents, the BeC’s administration further empowered this platform. One public official highlighted how this «is now more agile, less bureaucratic, with a greater clout of grassroots groups, which have more capacity for leadership and self-organization» (B15). As recounted by one local incumbent, «the anti-rumors workshops that we are now setting up are not simply anti-racist; they even adopt an unequivocal postcolonial approach. Postcolonial activists are involved and I believe that we cannot get more to the roots than that» (B19).

In the realm of postcolonialism, other relevant initiatives were aimed at remodeling urban spaces, as in the case of the Antonio López’s monument, located in the namesake square. Antonio López—first president of the Hispanic-Colonial Bank and the *Compañía Transatlántica*—was a 19<sup>th</sup>-century Spanish businessman who engaged in slaves trade between Africa and Cuba. On 3 March 2018, the statue was removed in a public celebration and a participatory process was launched for retitling the square (most likely with the name of Idrissa Diallo, a 21-year-old Guinean migrant who died in the Barcelona’s CIE in 2012). During the venue, Gerardo Pisarello—then First Deputy Mayor of Barcelona—declared:

«The removal of the statue of Antonio López responds to a citizens’ demand. [...] Colonialism and slavery are among the worst things that we humans have done. [...] This is a restorative act for all the people who feel offended for these crimes of ‘lese-humanity’. Also, it is an act of recognition for the Barcelona we want—a free city».<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> See <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/23/opinion/barcelona-attack-catalonia-unity.html>

<sup>59</sup> See <https://www.elsaltodiario.com/colonialismo/retirada-estatua-esclavista-antonio-lopez-barcelona>

From the perspective of municipals officials, all these initiatives had the purpose of «making diversity [...] consubstantial with the city [...] and recognizing each community as a legitimate part of it» (B15). Also, they are intended to produce a diffusion effect towards other localities and geographical scales. As recounted by another official,

«I believe that what has been accomplished in the city is very important. [...] And this needs to come from the city-level, not the country-level. But clearly cities can be contagious. [...] Barcelona has the capacity of breeding diffusion processes. It takes time, years. But crafting craft a political discourse within the institutions, civil society, universities, and so forth is crucial. The pride of being an open, intercultural, inclusive, left-wing city can spread elsewhere» (B19).

In sum, the governments of Barcelona and Catalunya pioneered policy-making in support of immigrants in Spain and beyond. Since the 1990s, their approach to migration and diversity has been based on two basic pillars, namely the equality of rights and opportunities for all city residents, regardless of their administrative status, and the recognition of diversity as an intrinsic quality of the city. The BeC's local administration expanded these pre-existing arrangements further. First, the plight of undocumented immigrants became an utmost priority. The city government relied on a right-based interpretation of national laws so as to favor regularization procedures, stop deportations, and prevent 'supervened illegality.' In some instances, jurisdictional boundaries were even overstepped, as in the case of the newly-issued local ID cards and the attempted closure of the city's Immigration Detention Center. Second, local incumbents broadened the notion of interculturality so as to include the religious domain, especially when it comes to the fight against islamophobia. Overall, the governmental agenda of BeC has been characterized by radical stances, aimed at promoting a model of urban citizenship based on human rights, and often in contrast with the provisions of central authorities. This governance model was enacted through an intense cooperation with social-movement activists—as the next sections will show.

### 6.3 The emergence of pro-immigrant activism in Barcelona

In many respects, Barcelona has been an optimal breeding ground for the flourishing of pro-immigrant activism. The city's insurgent mood is indeed rooted in a centuries-long history (e.g., Bazurli & Castaño Tierno 2018). In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, while becoming Spain's most important industrial center, the city saw the rise of strong socialist and anarchist movements. It also has deep-seated republican values and was a bastion of resistance to Francisco Franco during the 1936-39 Spanish Civil War. The transition from his four-decade dictatorship to democracy in the late 1970s further sharpened this political identity.

The *asociaciones de vecinos*—grassroots movements popping up in countless neighborhoods to help drive the transition process—spread across Spain, producing a particularly strong legacy in Barcelona. These neighborhood committees built very strong ties with local incumbents since the first municipal election in 1979 (cf. [Section 3.2](#)). Also, they historically had a decisive role in smoothing the settlement of newcomers, catalyzing their participation, and averting the rise of ethnic conflicts—in the case of both Spanish and foreign-born immigrants (Morén-Alegret *et al.* 2016). These structures of political opportunities and dense solidarity networks ultimately explain why immigrant activism is markedly intense in the city (Morales & Giugni 2011).

Migration-related mobilizations became visible in the early 2000s. In the aftermath of 2000 Spain's general elections, over 100,000 immigrants became undocumented due to a new restrictive immigration law enacted by the PP-led Spanish government (Organic Law 8/2000, cf. [Section 4.3](#)). As reported by Però (2007: 279-80), on 20 January 2001, roughly 360 of these immigrants—mainly youngsters from North Africa and South Asia—locked themselves into the Barcelona's Church of Santa Maria del Pi. There, they started a hunger strike for demanding regularization (which they eventually obtained) and the repeal of the law. The protest then diffused at a rapid pace across other cult places in Barcelona and elsewhere in Spain—mobilizing 40,000 participants and getting sympathetic coverage by relevant media outlets. Further victories were achieved in 2005, when demonstrations in Barcelona and Madrid succeeded in easing the conditions for registration in the municipal census (i.e., wider range documents became applicable, see Bruquetas-Callejo *et al.* 2011: 305).

With pro-immigrant activism on the rise in Barcelona, however, conflicts inside social movements surfaced too. Spanish NGOs, trade unions, and other civil society actors are long-

standing advocates of immigrants' rights; they consistently played a decisive role in both providing services and driving policy change in this realm (*ibid.*: 306). Yet, in Barcelona, disagreements arose between two fronts: more contentious, less resourceful, migrant-led groups on the one hand, and more moderate, publicly funded, (mostly) native-led organizations on the other—a dynamic which is indeed recurrent in pro-immigrant activism and other social movement milieus (e.g., Nicholls 2013; Cappiali 2016; Beamish and Luebbbers 2009; Dixon *et al.* 2013).

As shown by Però (2007) in his extensive ethnographic work in the city, such controversies mainly revolved around the CMIB. Supposedly devised to foster immigrants' political participation—especially if devoid of voting rights—radical activists criticized this consultative institution for being token and ultimately dominated by incumbent politicians and 'conformist' NGOs (see also Østergaard-Nielsen & Acebillo-Baqué 2016: 12). In Però's account, 'insiders' included well-established NGOs such as *Cruz Roja*, *Caritas*, and *SOS Racisme*, large unions (*UGT* and *CCOO-CITE*), and small-scaled ethnic associations, whereas 'outsiders' consisted of assorted groups such as squatters, progressive Christians, and (undocumented) immigrants gathered in the collectives *Papeles Para Todos* and *Coordinadora*.

A new, intense wave of mobilization occurred in the 2010s. Hit hard by the Great Recession, from 2011 to 2014 Spain saw an impressive series of anti-austerity protests. The 15M/*Indignados* movement emerged in 2011 demanding a deepening of democracy and social justice while pointing an accusing finger at political and economic elites. Activists expanded the notion of corruption, framing it as a broader crisis of democratic legitimacy due to the collusion between public and private interests (e.g. della Porta 2015; Subirats 2016; del Romero Renau & Valera Lozano 2016; Bazurli & Portos 2019).

Within the general call for social justice and democratic renewal, the 15M/*Indignados* movement served as a platform for several issue-specific mobilizations—including migration-related ones. First, the polycephalic, decentralized networks of activists that sustained that social movement at the local level also engaged with struggles over the 'right to the city', an idea that «emphasizes the interests of all people who inhabit the city» (Kaufmann 2019: 2; cf. Lefebvre 1968; Walliser 2013). Second, and relatedly, one of the key actor of the anti-austerity mobilizations was the housing rights movement. In this context, the PAH (Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca – Platform of People Affected by Mortgages) emerged in Barcelona in 2009, before then spreading across all of Spain (225 affiliated groups in 2015, cf. Subirats 2016: 11). It was

among 15M's most significant organizations because of its large constituency and the significant victories it achieved. One of the PAH's defining features is that «most members are directly and profoundly affected by the issues they are protesting about—they have been transformed by personal individual circumstances into political activists» (Flesher Fominaya 2015: 471; see also Santos 2020). Importantly, immigrants represent a large share of this constituency (i.e., about half of PAH's members).

The PAH—and thus immigrant activists—played a decisive role for the emergence of BeC. Ada Colau was the PAH's spokesperson up till her candidacy for mayor in 2014 and the BeC's electoral program has been characterized by radical stances when it comes to the plight of immigrants. One elected official with a long-lasting record as pro-immigrant activist unpacked the nexus between the 15M/*Indignados* movement and BeC's administration as follows:

«In Spain we come from intense processes of social mobilization and politicization. The 15M is possibly the most impactful among these instances—at least for our political culture. For us, the 15M means: 'we are those from below and we are going to take on those from above.' Therefore, in face of the welfare state crisis, the economic crisis, the housing crisis, and so forth, we didn't allowed to blame immigrants as those responsible; rather, we claimed that politicians and bankers should be blamed. Thus, when you point above you don't point at those at your side. This kind of left-wing populism is important. It helps explaining why extreme-right movements did not take root in Spain with their discourse. Not even the [mainstream] right dare to put forward a blatantly racist discourse, or a discourse against the immigrant population» (B16).

The interaction between pro-immigrant movements and the BeC-led city government has to be interpreted against this background.

#### **6.4 Governmental activism as a social movement outcome: How activists shaped policies in support of undocumented immigrants**

In many respects, the local migration policies carried out by the Colau's administration can be regarded as social movement outcomes. The nexus between grassroots mobilization and policy-making has been particularly close in the realm of undocumented immigration. The TeC campaign (Tancarem el CIE – We Will Close the CIE) emerged in 2014 upon the initiatives of

various groups, ranging from progressive Christians to antiracist and radical-left organizations. The death of Idrissa Diallo within the Barcelona's CIE (see above) sparked moral outrage and precipitated mobilization (cf. Morán *et al.* 2012: 202; Castellà Josa 2015). The TeC campaign, moreover, was spurred by similar ones previously launched in other Spanish cities. As recounted by one of the initiator,

«[w]e began struggling against the Foreigner Law a long time ago. Occasionally, we also organized some demonstrations. Then, in 2012, the tragedy of Idrissa came out. [...] [I]n that moment we said “enough is enough, we need to stop this.” We drew inspiration from the movement “CIEs NO – Valencia”, which was already active at that time, and decided to do the same. This is how TeC was born. It grew very rapidly, with more and more people getting involved» (B28).

The TeC's repertoire of action is manifold and includes marches, sit-ins, lobbying, litigations, and events to raise public awareness, often held in front of the CIE itself, in the outskirts of the city. In addition, routine visits of detainees by volunteers are of particular importance. These visits are not only carried out to give immediate material and moral relief to the inmates, but also to collect information on their own conditions—a knowledge base subsequently employed for building legal cases when their rights are breached, as well as for carrying out dissemination activities (B18). As Spanish CIEs are scarcely transparent in their governance arrangements, the mobilization of such cognitive resources is an essential pre-condition for sustaining the whole TeC campaign.

Faith-based associations bear the lion's share of these activities. In 2017, the Jesuit Migrant Service (JMS) visited 674 people of 42 nationalities in five Spanish CIEs (including Barcelona's). Also, the Migra Studium Foundation—part of the JMS's network—releases annual reports on the Barcelona's CIE. Overall, then, direct social actions and political claim-making are intertwined and mutually necessary—rather than mutually exclusive—for mobilization (cf. Bosi and Zamponi 2020). This strategy produced significant results, for instance in terms of amendments to internal regulations and successful lawsuits. But the ultimate mission of closing the CIE—which gives its name to the campaign—was never accomplished on a permanent basis.

The relationship between anti-CIE activists and municipal officials has been intense and synergic. TeC was among the first organizations joining the BeC's platform in 2014; subsequently, the closure of the CIE was included in the electoral program. In the post-electoral period, too, chief policy decisions were regularly announced during public venues co-organized by the administration and TeC activists—including the one held on the 2015 World Refugee Day, just after the appointment of Ada Colau as city mayor. Also, the initiative of retitling Antonio Lopez Square with the name Idrissa Diallo was based on a TeC's petition launched signed by 17,000 individuals and eventually embraced by the municipality.

Jaume Asens is the political figure that most forcefully symbolizes the interweaving of institutional and activists networks. Before being appointed Deputy Mayor of Citizen Rights, Asens had a long career as civil rights attorney and was among the most renowned activists of TeC and the 15M/*Indignados* movement. As shown above, his strategy as incumbent has been especially confrontational. Drawing on a rights-based interpretation of municipal prerogatives, he unilaterally ordered the closure of the CIE and—once central authorities refrained from complying—took the lead of a legal proceeding against the Ministry of Interior. Hence, Asens enacted a movement-like strategy *from within the municipality*. More precisely, the Deputy Mayor imported social movements' repertoires of action into the institutional space and turned the city government into a platform for boosting the legitimacy, the visibility, and the 'firepower' of their own demands.

In the account of interviewees, Jaume Asens engaged in such forms of 'governmental activism' (cf. Verhoeven & Duyvendak 2017) on the grounds of both ideological commitment and strategic convenience. As recounted by one civil servant, «[Asens] has a long history as a human right lawyer, thus part of his political actions is to press charges through the city council. Based on his legal experience, he seeks to exert the power of the municipality for doing public accusations» (B15). One TeC's spokesperson agreed with this view, stating that «[Asens] wants to take on the role he had outside [of the municipality] from the inside so as to confront the [central] state» (B28). In other words, the city government «acted as a pressure group» vis-à-vis central authorities (B2). As one expert put it, «the boundaries between the state and society [at the city-level] have become extremely blurred. [...] Jaume Asens is an important instance in this sense because he is a high-ranked official of the Colau's administration, and yet still conflated with activist networks» (B32).

The massive mobilization escalated in the 2010s for Catalunya's secession from Spain—the so-called *Procés*—played a role in producing these outcomes, too. Since 2012, the regional government of Catalunya has been led by pro-independence parties that range from the radical left to the center-right, galvanized into the common prospect of secession. Strikingly, this coalition also embraced the demand of closing the Barcelona's CIE. This can be interpreted in the light of party competition dynamics. The more conservative component of the governing coalition possibly took such radical pro-immigrant stances for the sake of broadening its electoral support among left-wing voters while also articulating a line of conflict between Catalan and Spanish authorities.

While normally considering territorial conflicts as detrimental to the advancement of their social policy agenda, social-movement activists ultimately benefited from such a party politics dynamic, as it broadened popular consensus over immigrants' rights. Commenting on the motion approved by the Catalan parliament to dismiss the Barcelona's CIE, one TeC spokesperson claimed that:

«We profited from a juncture of rising tensions between Catalunya and Spain, succeeded in putting our issue on the agenda, and obtained a favorable positioning by [regional] institutions. [...] Although this didn't produce any direct consequence, it gave us a significant strength, because [...] we got a lot of visibility that we couldn't obtain otherwise» (B12).

Relatedly, in the account of one municipal official,

«I think that, from a discursive point of view [...], the *Procés* stimulated a renewed focus on the transformation of society. The attempt [of pro-independence parties] is to attract a more leftist social base, also because Catalanism, historically, has always been a bit conservative [...]. In the 2000s, [the conservative] CiU voted in favor of the Foreigner Law, but is now against the CIE, against border controls, in favor of free movement—so there is a clear hypocrisy here. But I believe this is positive when it comes to migration. The fact that, within the framework of the *Procés*, [the party] was forced to embrace a discourse of tolerance and respect, is good in my opinion. [...] We never expected anything like this. In Catalunya, a common sense on immigration is breeding, and this is much more progressive than in the rest of Spain» (B16).

The CMIB is another case in point when it comes to the strengthened link between social movements and urban governance. As reported above, this consultative institution epitomized the conflict between moderate and radical pro-migrant activists and was criticized for being dominated by local incumbents and condescending organizations. Under the BeC's administration, this fracture at least partly healed. Amid the Great Recession and anti-austerity mobilizations, radical groups led by immigrant activists became more vocal within the CMIB. In the account of interviewees, the new city government ultimately buttressed this ongoing process of inner renewal. According to a trade unionist and long-standing member of the CMIB,

«[w]ith Colau in office, I do see a change [in the CMIB]. Beforehand, it was a space where [policies] were merely explained. Now it is more participatory. This does not only owe to Colau, but also to the changes occurred among participant organizations. The economic crisis weakened the clientelist networks [of the CMIB] and a flair for greater participation emerged. In the wake of these changes, Colau opted for including smaller, more radical organizations [...] instead of the old 'caste' of trade unions» (B17).

Such changes within the CMIB are well testified by the proposals formulated to bypass the Foreign Law at the local level. This policy debate was first driven by *Sindihogar/Sindillar*, a self-organized trade union founded in 2011, based in Barcelona, gathering both native and immigrant women employed as houseworkers and caregivers (B26). In 2014, the CMIB commissioned legal experts to identify the grey areas of the law so as to prevent 'supervened illegality', prompt regularizations, and ease the conditions of undocumented immigrants—yet without trespassing municipal prerogatives (cf. Garcés-Mascreñas 2014: 17; Gebhardt 2016: 855). This led to the elaboration of '67 proposals to foster the inclusion of immigrants within the framework of the Foreigner Law' (Ajuntament de Barcelona 2014; 2016).

The measures adopted by the BeC's administration in 2017 (Ajuntament de Barcelona 2017; see above) are, in fact, the fully-fledged transposition of these 67 proposals into legal provisions (B17). One elected official asserted that

«these ideas floated around for a bit, but then were forgotten in a drawer somewhere. [...] I would say that, to date, we enacted 100% of the [CMIB's] 67 proposal among those pertaining to the municipality—and we even went a little further with the local ID card» (B19).

In addition, it should be noted that, on 1 August 2016, the CMIB released a manifesto for demanding the end of the Spain's deportation system and the repeal of the EU Directive in the field of 'repatriation' of undocumented immigrants (Directive 2008/115/CEE)—ultimately endorsing the municipal ordinance to close the Barcelona's CIE (Consell Municipal d'Immigració 2016).

In sum, under the BeC's administration, the CMIB was significantly reshaped in its governance arrangements as compared to the account provided by Però (2007) on this consultative institution. Local incumbents sought to alter the balance of power within this consultative institution by involving other, possibly more representative immigrant associations. The CMIB then began to work as a sort of 'transmission belt' between grassroots demands and governmental measures.

The city government's attempt of empowering activist groups was evident also in the case of the *Tancada* ('Occupation').<sup>60</sup> On 22 April 2018, an array of decolonial collectives—including *Papeles Para Todos*, *Sindibogar/Sindillar*, *Espacio del Inmigrante*, and the Popular Union of Street Vendors—locked themselves into an abandoned public school (Escola Massana) in the city center. Inspired by similar occupations carried out over the 2000s (see above), protesters blamed Spain's 'institutional racism' for its discriminatory provisions and put forward 11 demands targeting policy-makers at different levels of government (but overwhelmingly concerning central authorities). These included the repeal of the Foreigner Law and its inherent deportation system, the deletion of restrictive conditions for obtaining residence permits (e.g., a job contract of 40 weekly hours lasting at least one year), whose fulfillment became highly implausible following the economic crisis, as well as the abolition of the citizenship test, deemed nonsensical by protesters (for example, they pointed at one exam question that required to mention the profession of Enrique Iglesias, a Spanish pop-singer). The protest rapidly spread throughout other Catalan localities and in Madrid, but also in other spaces of the city, as in the case of the church of the Sagrat Cor—a highly symbolic place, where in 2001 the first immigrants' protest in Barcelona took place.

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<sup>60</sup> See <https://racismenstanca.wordpress.com/>

As for the interactions with policy-makers, the *Tancada* succeeded in gradually scaling-up its mobilization. In the aftermath of the occupation, an assembly elected a negotiating committee and met Ada Colau and Lola López, who assured that the city government would have taken charge of the (few) demands within its field of competence, i.e., minimizing discretion by street-level bureaucrats in registering individuals with no fixed above or rental contract, as well as easing policing towards street vendors. Shortly after, Quim Torra, president of the Catalunya's regional government, met protesters too. One of Torra's leading collaborator (B21) asserted that her team had at least three meetings with the negotiating committee, which led to the application of streamlined procedures for family reunification and access to healthcare services. As for the central government—then led by the conservative PP and towards which most of the demands were addressed—protesters met Emilio Ablanedo, delegate of the Government of Spain in Catalunya, on 14 May 2014, more than three weeks after the start of the occupation.

The role of local officials was determinant in activating these upscaling dynamics. First, the occupation of the school was enacted with the tacit consent of the municipality, which owns the facility. Second, the presence of Ada Colau and other popular municipal officials resulted in protracted coverage by media outlets. The demonstration ranked high in the local agenda for several weeks, thus enhancing the pressure over, and the opportunity for, political elites of taking a stance. Third, Colau personally facilitated the meeting with the Spanish government's delegation, which was initially reluctant over the prospect of accommodating undocumented immigrants as a counterpart at the bargaining table (B16). Albeit these meaningful procedural and symbolic gains (i.e., public recognition through participation at policy venues), however, central authorities did not make any notable concessions in terms of substantive responses.

All these instances of mobilization have a common thread. Emanating from an activist milieu, municipal officials espoused the demands of grassroots organizations—especially those that sustained their electoral platform in the first place. The transposition of these demands into public policies was substantiated by enacting concrete provisions to alleviate material grievances, as well as incorporating a semantics based on human and social rights into the institutional discourse. However, since supralocal (foremost central) authorities have more far-reaching competencies on immigration as compared to local ones, the BeC's administration and its activist allies deployed a strategy to reduce such a power differential. More precisely, when confronting the

Spanish executive, the city government sought to boost (and even to reproduce) social-movement mobilizations by means of institutional resources that activists lack *by definition*, such as legitimacy, visibility, and the rule of law. In turn, social movements backed up these institutional actions by igniting public controversy over migration-related issues. One public official with an activist background summarized this *quid pro quo* as follows:

«For changing the framework [of supralocal restrictive policies], somehow we need to *amplify* and *go along with* the struggles [for immigrants' rights]. We [...] know that the municipality per se, its competencies, are not the real battleground. In the city, however, you can generate dynamics of *strength accumulation* and build wide supporting majorities. [...] The fact that [the municipality] can avert a deportation or a detainment is powerful in *concrete* terms. But it is powerful also in *political* ones, because you are crafting a local-level legality for defending people that are deemed “illegal” by the [central] state» (B16, emphasis added).

In short, with the prospect of enacting a radical policy agenda, incumbents and activists joined their forces, as the former embraced the demands coming from below, while the latter legitimized municipal decisions through mobilization—in a process of mutual responsiveness. Governmental activism has been a strategy to shape policies in a context of multi-level governance. Yet these relationships have been far from immune to conflict. The case of street vendors—presented in the next section—is powerful in highlighting such controversies.

## **6.5 The apple of discord: Street vendors as contentious political subjects**

### *The emergence of the street vendors union and the response of the municipality*

The topic of street vendors has been among the thorniest one in the administration's agenda. This collective consists of approximately 400 undocumented immigrants, often of West African origin and referred as *manteros*. The *manta* is the blanket over which street vendors showcase the products on sale. It facilitates the escape of migrants when targeted by the *Guàrdia Urbana* or the *Mossos de Esquadra* (Barcelona's and Catalan local police), as products can be promptly recollected, hidden, and carried away. Most of these street vendors are not formally authorized to occupy public spaces and sell counterfeit products of famous fashion brands. Albeit criminalized, this kind of informal subsistence work is among the few viable options for most deprived

undocumented migrants (Ajuntament de Barcelona 2015a). Moreover, police prosecution has systematically entailed the misuse of force and ethnic profiling (SOS Racisme 2019).

Street vendors remained silent until 11 August 2015, when Mor Sylla—a 50-year-old Senegalese street vendor—died while escaping the Mossos de Esquadra. This event has been a turning point, as it catalyzed the politicization of the group. Street vendors created the *Sindicato Popular Vendedores Ambulantes* (Popular Union of Street Vendors) and put forward a set of demands, such as the decriminalization of street vending, the end of ‘institutional racism’, and the regularization of undocumented migrants as a path toward self-determination. The organization has attracted considerable public attention and has rapidly become very vocal in the city and beyond.

As one organizer put it, the idea of the union precisely points at role of street vendors as «part of the occupational structure of the city» rather than «black, poor, illegal foreigners» – a framing strategy thus intended to depict street vendors as «political beings» (B24). Following this reasoning, street vendors have also founded a clothing brand named *Top Manta – Ropa Legal Hecha por Gente Ilegal* (Legal Clothes Made by Illegal People), with the purpose of erasing the stigma of illegality and expanding their solidarity network. One of the street vendors’ spokesperson has provided a detailed account of this process of politicization:

«Here in Barcelona there are many groups that speak in the name of *manteros* that don’t know anything about the history of *manteros* and have never gone through what *manteros* are going through. [...] We decided to organize ourselves and speak with our own voice [...], organizing demonstrations, meeting people that support us, organizing talks, and so forth. But before all this, our fellow Mor died three years ago. [...] Just after that, we organized a demonstration in Barcelona, joined by a lot of collectives, and then we did an assembly to gather the all of us. We started to convince the rest of us that we had to organize [...]. So we set up this union to defend ourselves: if they touch one, they touch all of us». (B23).

Her account is consistent with the extant literature on the urban environment as a catalyst of immigrant activism (e.g., Nicholls, 2016; Steinhilper, 2019). The city’s relational qualities have helped street vendors to overcome their stigma and weave a network of solidarity. In turn, this has enhanced the viability and the scale of claim-making. In fact, she claimed,

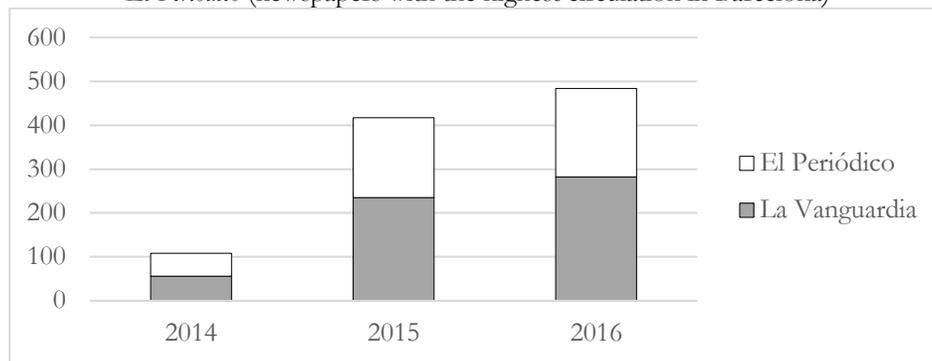
«[w]e have struggled a lot here in Barcelona. We have organized events in Madrid, in the whole country. [...] Before the union, no one took care of me, no one wanted to meet me, no one knew what my name is. Why? Because the union was not there, no one cared about immigrants and street vendors. The media talked about us, but knowing nothing about us. Since we have organized, for sure I meet someone in the street telling me: “Hi, L., what’s up?”». (B23).

The city government engaged in sustained interaction with street vendors and enacted various measures for alleviating their grievances. First, it has sought to change the behavior of the *Guàrdia Urbana* by issuing new guidelines aimed at minimizing the use of force (the so-called ‘Circular Víctor Alfa’), launching training programs focused on human rights, and granting career advancements to those officials deemed more sensitive to such values. Also, as a guarantee mechanism, the internal procedures of the Office for Non-Discrimination have been amended. This organizational unit is in charge of reporting and fighting discriminations and hate crimes. Conflicts of interest arose when police officers were accused, as they are municipal employees. In these cases, therefore, procedures have been externalized to third parties. Moreover, the administration has resorted to *Barcelona Activa*. As illustrated in [Section 6.2](#), since 2017 the city government implemented individualized plans for employment (*plans d’ocupació*) through this agency as a path towards regularization. Street vendors were among the first target groups of these policy provisions. More precisely, a cooperative named *Diomcoop* employing 15 street vendors has been established with the purpose of smoothing their labor integration and administrative regularization.

Yet these policies have been relatively small in scale and their effects are unlikely to be visible in the short-term. On the one hand, the street vendors’ union has repeatedly attacked the cabinet for not doing enough to materially aid these migrants and merely exploiting their grievances for the sake of consolidating political support. Their contestation reached the apex on 28 July 2016. While Colau was inaugurating a monument dedicated to the migrants who have died in the Mediterranean Sea, some street vendors set up an *escrache* against her, i.e., a direct action aimed at accusing the mayor for her moral responsibilities. On the other hand, police unions, shopkeepers, some opposition parties, and mainstream media have crafted a common discourse for accusing of the city government for its lax attitude to crime. The media attention on the topic

of street vendors has increased dramatically as soon as BeC has become incumbent of the local administration (cf. *Figure 6.3*). In short, the issue of street vendors has often put Colau’s cabinet on the defensive, sparking criticism from various fronts. In the following section, the main controversies arisen between activists and the city government will be explored.

*Figure 6.3.* Number of articles related to street vendors published on the local editions of *La Vanguardia* and *El Periódico* (newspapers with the highest circulation in Barcelona)



Source: Author’s elaboration.

#### *Behind governmental activism: How solidarity became contested in Barcelona*

As illustrated in previous sections, Barcelona’s public officials and activists have mobilized as an unitary player in policy-making processes, especially for confronting the Spanish government. Yet, ‘behind the scenes’, deep conflicts have arisen *within* the alliance. Most of these controversies owe to the abrupt and profound re-definition of roles occurred within activist networks after municipal elections. Players have struggled to understand how their position had changed and, as a consequence, to find new, consistent, unambiguous identities. In the perspective of various activists, some elected officials have tended to take grassroots demands for granted. According to A., an activist who felt «disillusioned» for the insufficient involvement of the civil society in policy-making,

«[...] some members of the cabinet think that – as they *come* from social movements – thus they *are* the social movements. But, when you are inside institutions, you are not. The roles are different. [...] And as an institution, you are expected to sit at the table with those that are social movements in that moment... even if we know each other, even if you already

know what my organization thinks. [...] Because there is a difference between inviting me as a person that you know and inviting me as spokesperson of an organization [...]. It's not a matter of people, but of what people represent» (B12).

In her view, relationships have been much more conflictual with the BeC's cabinet than those led by other parties. In fact, «it is easier to address and receive criticisms when those in office are your ideological enemies, [...] because you have nothing in common.»

In turn, disappointment has bred the fear of 'unintended co-optation.' Precisely because the ties of the city government with the grassroots are so strong, activists have perceived their space of autonomy under threat. T., an activist who has intensely cooperated with the city council on asylum-related issues, has brought the example of a public event organized by the municipality, at which she was invited to give a talk. As the topics of the talk had been defined in advance, she did not feel completely free of expressing the claims of her group. As she put it,

«[t]hat was a critical moment, not only for us but for many organizations. I don't think that it happened because of a Machiavellian will, but by *inertia* [...]. So we said: "let's pay attention, because we are all close friends, but everyone must stay in their place" [...]. We know that this is the best government that we could have [...], but we are very careful not to be absorbed in each other's space». (B13, emphasis added).

The confrontational repertoire of action of street vendors has been possibly driven by similar motivations, being political self-determination at the core of their collective identity. In the words of C., the *escrache* that street vendors organized against Ada Colau was «an important breaking point that had to happen» because «that was a way of saying: 'you won't create a political capital based on antiracism while racism keeps on occurring in the streets'» (B24).

Strikingly, also those seating in the city government shared similar (self-)criticisms, albeit with some different nuances. Interviewees pointed at the difficulty of adapting their own activist mindset to the institutional environment. The commitment to single issues and the pursuit of short-term victories have been identified as the most detrimental aspects. Amid rising levels of media attention and/or protest over certain topics, new incumbents have often felt the pressure of providing immediate responses to specific constituencies, also to avoid the 'charge of treason.'

However, such responses might have jeopardized the implementation of more encompassing public policies. One key figure of the cabinet summarized this dilemma as follows:

«As we come from these circles, we struggle in positioning as an institution. [...] There are certain “tics” [...] that are hard to be removed. [...] For example, the idea of founding a cooperative for street vendors is a mistake [...] because we have to do policies for everybody. [...] The responses of institutions should not necessarily coincide with movements’ demands. Social movements ask for group-specific solutions to group-specific problems. As an institution, we should solve the cause that originated those problems, but not only for that specific group. This is what NGOs or social movements do, but not institutions» (B21).

She also recognized how their attempts of introducing radical demands within institutions could paradoxically weaken, rather than strengthen, social movements:

«Curiously, we end up deceiving these movements. They shouldn’t be so close to us, precisely for maintaining their challenging power. In other words, as we are so close to most radical movements, we are de-radicalizing some movements for an excess of relationship with them. We are distorting our institutional function, as well as [...] disempowering social movements. Even if it seems that we are empowering them for the sake of helping, help is always a form of submission » (B21).

Other members of the city government also emphasize the weakness of social movements, but they ascribe this to the absorption of activist leaders in the administrative machine. As one public official put it, some sections of social movements have been «beheaded» (B11). This has produced problems in terms of urban governance because «there is no dialogue with someone powerful, who makes demands, who provokes you, who breaths on your neck, who obliges you to do more and more» (B11). This is also recognized by an activist who went back to Barcelona precisely to ‘re-fill’ activist networks. As she said, «we had to rebuilt movements from scratch. We have spent over two years being too weak to do anything, and this happened exactly when we could obtain the most, being our people in the cabinet» (B25).

Interviewees described pre-existing networks as split in two. The activists more committed with driving policy change have accessed institutions, while those more radical and identity-oriented have stayed out. Therefore, the latter have been accused of having «anti-institutional

tendencies» (B16), posing «surreal demands» (B11), and having «a naïf vision of what exercising power means» (B14). This has produced frustration on both sides of the alliance. In the perspective of a public official,

«[a]fter all, we've put our lives in this, literally. I mean, health, partners, families... we have completely abandoned our lives. Therefore, when someone you love [...] attacks you because of something for which you've sacrificed everything, well... that's a deep sorrow» (B16).

This holds also on the side of activists:

«I believe that, for the first time, we and those in office see things in the same way. [...] We share a vision of the city as a space where all citizens have the same rights. This is precisely why there is more frustration» (B12).

Yet these controversies have not undermined pre-existing relationships of trust. On the contrary, the awareness of sharing a common biography has preserved these bonds and smoothed mutual understanding. For instance, a PAH's immigrant activist referred to Colau saying that «she comes from here and she had a first-hand experience of what this means» (B29). In a similar vein, one public official asserted:

«Personal relationships have saved us from major conflicts many times. As we belong to each other, we say: 'this person in front of me would never cheat on me.' Of course this lowers the tension» (B16).

Mutual understanding has been also driven by the awareness of exogenous constraints. First, leading a minority government supported by only eleven of the city council's forty-one members, BeC has been forced to reach agreements with different parties that have obstructed most of its flagship initiatives. Second, pro-status quo coalitions (i.e., economic elites, with the complicity of mainstream media and some opposition parties) have fiercely opposed the most transformative policies in the governmental agenda. Third, Barcelona have experienced far-reaching societal transformations, magnified by flaws in multi-level governance. Local incumbents had to cope with such critical questions, which yet lie beyond their full jurisdiction. Multi-

level coordination has been especially poor because none of incumbents at the higher tiers have been of the same political color (for a detailed assessment, see Eizaguirre *et al.*, 2017; Blanco *et al.*, 2019).

These constraints have been particularly sharp in the case of street vendors. Criminalization of informal work, property laws, institutional racism, control of borders, and extreme deprivation are all intersected factors that prevalently lie outside the competency of local authorities, but turned out to be critical questions for local policy-makers. Not only higher tiers of government, but also local players have imposed severe constraints to policy change. The main opponents of the BeC's cabinet—especially police forces, mainstream media, opposition parties, and shop-keepers—have exploited the topic of street vendors to start a «cold war» against incumbents (B16).

The role of Guàrdia Urbana has been especially relevant. Although this police force is under the jurisdiction of the city council, the new protocols adopted to ease the repression of *manteros* have been hardly implemented. In the perspectives of interviewees, this has been a consequence of Guàrdia Urbana's corporativism and the legacy of Francisco Franco's dictatorship among some of its ranks. As one public official put it, «police forces are often alien to the surrounding political reality and administrative structure [...]. Thus, when we took office, we had to cope with a force that was very reluctant to change and, in certain occasions, blatantly against the city government. [...] [The police] used to meet us at demonstrations, occupations, I mean... on the opposite side. And then, out of the blue, we became their bosses. This might have been a nightmare for them» (B16).

## **6.6 Conclusion: Arenas and mechanisms of social movement outcomes in the case of policies in support of undocumented immigrants**

Barcelona's government has achieved considerable records in the field of immigration under the leadership of BeC—a platform coalescing left-wing parties and social movements. It promoted a radical model of urban citizenship that overtly contradicts, and intends to fill in for the lacunae of, Spanish immigration laws. This is particularly evident in the case of foreign-born residents with an irregular status, who have been supported through massive registrations in the municipal census (a pre-condition for accessing integration services) and employment plans (to smooth regularization procedures). Also, local officials have sought to undermine Spain's citizenship

regime by issuing local ID cards and seeking to close the city's Immigration Detention Center (CIE). These two measures—both aimed to prevent deportations—were implemented by overturning the hierarchy of institutional competencies and ultimately transforming law enforcement into a political battleground.

This policy agenda has been largely drawn on the demands of those social movements that buttressed the emergence of BeC in the first place. The closure of the local CIE was the core demand of a protest group of which leading figures of the administration were members until their election. The '67 proposals to foster the inclusion of immigrants within the framework of the Foreigner Law' (Ajuntament de Barcelona 2014; 2016) were first elaborated by social movements and eventually embraced by local incumbents as soon as they took office. Activists were also the first to formulate policy proposals in the field of cultural recognition—as in the case of the Municipal Plan Against Islamophobia.

Aside from the *contents* of policies, the tie between local officials and social movements has been especially strong when it comes to the *strategies* to realize them. Governmental activism—a particularly intense form of alliance-building based on the 'division of oppositional labor' between public officials and social-movement activists who share similar objectives and similar opponents (Verhoeven & Duyvendak 2017)—has been systematically employed by urban political actors. Local incumbents and activists have joined their forces, as the former embraced the demands coming from below, while the latter legitimised municipal decisions through mobilization, in a process of mutual responsiveness. Jaume Asens and Lola López—lifelong pro-immigrant advocates who became leading figures of the local administration—starkly embodied such entrenchment of activist and institutional networks. They persistently sought to empower grass-root organizations while also deploying a movement-style repertoire of actions from within the institutional space. Ultimately, governmental activism served as a strategy to shape public policies within an unfavorable context of multi-level governance.

These processes of contentious migration policy-making can be explained by the concatenation of different mechanisms in specific arenas of interaction. Barcelona has a long history of grassroots mobilizations and a deeply rooted leftist political culture. The massive anti-austerity mobilizations of the early 2010s, once faded away, left the legacy of a dense activist network in the *civil society arena*, also in the realm of immigrant rights. Next, social movements took the electoral option so as to move their claims from the arena of protest to the institutional space.

Rather than building alliances with local political elites in the *city politics arena*, they have directly turned into a political party for competing in local elections (McAdam & Tarrow 2010: 533). Once in office, activists profited from a particularly advantageous environment (i.e., the Barcelona's legacy of pro-immigrants politics, the long tail of an intense protest cycle, and the inclusive discourse crafted by Catalan pro-independence forces) to successfully align policy frames and provisions with their own demands. Finally, they crafted a 'common front' with local officials—often former protestors—to upscale political mobilization in the *multi-level governance arena*. This allowed the city government to stretch, counter, and circumvent supra-local policies for supporting a section of the population deemed 'illegal' from the perspective of the nation-state.

However, these alliance-building dynamics have also encountered significant limits. Most of controversies have revolved around the misfit between the militant identity of incumbents and their new institutional role. Their ties with activist milieus have smoothed the introduction of radical demands within the institutional space, but have also deprived social-movements activists of their *raison d'être* to some extent. Somehow paradoxically, the responsiveness to the inputs coming from below have beget both an *empowerment* and a *replacement* of social movements. Moreover, the mobilization capacity of protesters has been undermined by the absorption of prominent movement leaders into the local administration. This switch has made activist networks less resourceful, as well as less capable of deciphering and affecting institutional dynamics.

From this angle, findings confirm that the relationship between parties in office and their activist base is likely to be conflictual, but not necessarily for the reasons outlined by McAdam and Tarrow (2010: 537). In Barcelona, the conflicts between elected officials and protesters were not caused by the attempt of the former to appeal to the median voter by moving to the center, but *precisely for the opposite reason*. In fact, the 'loyalty' of local incumbents to their activist legacy, their mimicking of social-movement strategies, and their sensitiveness to protesters' demands have fueled, rather than tamed, controversies. More generally, the BeC's electoral victory in 2015 did represent a major political opportunity for social movements. Yet this was not set in stone once and for all. Rather, opportunities have been «reflexively and strategically used and played» (Den Hond *et al.* 2014: 11) by both activists in the street and (former) activists in the city council. Their objectives have been re-adjusted throughout long interactive sequences. The divergent

expectations of players have partly converted aspirations into frustrations—producing misunderstandings and, in some circumstances, contentious dynamics.

These limitations and controversies appear especially pronounced when it comes to immigrant activists, and especially so in the case of the street vendors union. The attempt of the city government to embrace grassroots demands has bred an antagonistic reaction from the side of this collective, as the wish of not being patronized—by allies and opponents alike—has been at the basis of their process of politicization. Relatedly, the confrontational attitude of street vendors has been also driven by the lack of far-reaching responses to their grievances. This forcefully epitomizes the limits that a local administration on the radical left has to face in a national-capitalist context. Property laws, criminal laws, and immigration laws all lie beyond the jurisdiction of local governments with limited rooms to maneuver. BeC's opponents have exploited these constraints to both put local incumbents on the defensive and prevent the expansion of immigrant rights.

These limitations notwithstanding, the case of Barcelona's policies in support of undocumented immigrants demonstrates how pro-immigrant movements are able to drive policy change at various spatial scales, well beyond their local realm. As the next chapter will show, similar outcomes can unfold also in the realm of asylum policy-making.

# Chapter 7

## Asylum policies and social movement outcomes: Milan and Barcelona, 2013-2019

«[T]he political objective [of Barcelona's asylum program] is to create a municipal counter-balance to a national policy. [...] Multi-level governance does not exist here. Zero. We insisted in talking with the State for two years [...] but we obtained a far larger opportunity for coordination through the municipal network of Spanish and foreign cities than with the central government».

(Interview B11, member of the city government of Barcelona)

### 7.1 Introduction<sup>61</sup>

Amid the so-called 'refugee crisis' of the 2010s, South European cities have experienced far-reaching societal transformations, magnified by flaws in multi-level governance. How can urban actors cope with such critical questions, which affect their communities and yet lie beyond their full jurisdiction? This chapter deal with the question of social movement outcomes in the realm of asylum policy-making. Milan and Barcelona are here analyzed together because of the similar governance and protest dynamics that unfolded therein. Both the cities have been at the forefront in coping with the 'refugee crisis' and stood out as leading 'cities of welcome' in their respective countries and beyond. The chapter will show how left-leaning governments and ideologically sympathetic social-movement activists at the city-level were incentivized to join their forces. Alliance-building was a strategy to secure political gains while shaping policies within an otherwise unreceptive, hostile context of multi-level governance.

The chapter is structured as follows. The next section provides background information and critical perspectives on the European 'refugee crisis' and its impact on the cities of Milan

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<sup>61</sup> A similar version of this chapter has been published as an article: Bazurli, R. (2019) 'Local governments and social movements in the 'refugee crisis': Milan and Barcelona as 'cities of welcome.' *South European Society and Politics*, 24:3, 343-370.

and Barcelona ([Section 7.2](#)). Afterward, [Section 7.3](#) offers an overview of Italy's asylum policies, the response to the 'crisis' enacted by the local government of Milan, as well as the patterns of strategic interaction between the local officials and social-movement activists in shaping policy outcomes. [Section 7.4](#) then presents empirical material on the case of Barcelona in the same fashion. Last, [Section 7.6](#) summarizes the main findings and bring them into dialogue with the theoretical framework of the study.

## **7.2 Not a 'refugee crisis': Global migration, EU governance, and the city**

Following the political upheavals that erupted in Northern Africa and the Middle East in late 2010 (the 'Arab Spring'), millions of migrants reached Europe or lost their lives trying. Drawing on the thesis popularized by Castles (2004), the responses enacted by the EU and its Member States can be regarded as 'policy failures.' The Dublin Regulation, a key component of the Common European Asylum System, provides that asylum-seekers should submit their protection request in the first country of arrival. This rule has put South European frontline states under severe strain, as migrants have been forced to request sanctuary there. In the wake of a 'domino effect', rising levels of policing at the borders of neighboring countries further exacerbated this scenario and de facto nullified the principle of free movement within the Schengen area (Scipioni 2018: 1368; see also [Section 4.2](#)). The image of 'Fortress Europe' precisely points at European immigration governance as heavily restrictive and security-oriented (Bonjour *et al.* 2017).

In other words, if the burden of humanitarian assistance has been much heavier for certain localities, this did not only owe to their geographical position. Legislative frameworks have amplified—rather than tamed—such structural imbalances. The EU and its member states failed in sharing the responsibilities of international protection and responded with highly restrictive measures (Guiraudon 2018). The 'refugee crisis' narrative—framing immigration as a massive, unexpected emergency—served to justify such a securitarian approach. Yet the predictability of increased arrivals from the Global South, as well as their stabilization over time, make the notion of a 'refugee crisis' largely misleading. Rather, what has occurred is a *crisis in the governance* of migration. In turn, this can be interpreted as a more profound crisis of democratic legitimacy in western Europe (Castelli Gattinara 2017).

Hence, humanitarian emergencies have mushroomed in many European localities, which found themselves forced to deal with the sudden, sometimes massive arrival of migrants. The Municipality of Milan assisted roughly 130,000 asylum-seekers in the 2013-18 period (Comune di Milano 2017; 2018). Most reached Milan's Central Railway Station between 2014 and 2016, in the attempt to move toward their preferred destinations in northern Europe (Pogliano & Ponzio 2017). Because of their short-term stays (5.8 days on average in 2015), they were defined as 'in transit' (*transitanti*). Such a pattern changed after 2016, when arrivals sensibly diminished but the length of stays increased due to the closing of borders by neighboring countries and the Dublin Regulation. Syrians were predominant at the outset of the crisis (78.1% in 2014), while Eritreans were the majority in 2015 (58.5%). The nationalities diversified after 2016, with growing numbers of migrants from Somalia, Sudan, Ethiopia, and Afghanistan (Pogliano & Ponzio 2017: 11-12).

The impact of the crisis has been softer in Barcelona, where the municipality assisted 16,739 asylum-seekers in 2013-18 (Ajuntament de Barcelona 2019). While this figure is much lower than Milan's, there are further aspects to be considered. First, the number of migrants seeking international protection has increased dramatically year on year (e.g., 424 in 2013 and 7,433 in 2018, i.e. +1,653% in five years), saturating the city's administrative capacities. Also, most of these migrants were not in transit, so social provision has been aimed at their long-term settlement (differently from Milan, at least until 2016). Recipients' origins indicate the existence of 'migration crises' arising outside Africa and the Middle East. In 2018, the five main countries of origin were Venezuela (25.3%), Colombia (13.7%), Georgia (11.6%), Honduras (8.9%), and El Salvador (6.9%).

Yet, while they are in the trenches of coping with the 'crisis', some European cities have catalyzed the contestation of such a governance regime. They have propagated pro-migrant discourses well beyond their own local realms (Mayer 2018)—with Barcelona and Milan among those taking the lead. On 18 February 2017, via Laietana—one of the major streets of Barcelona—was filled by the largest ever demonstration in solidarity with migrants (with 500,000 participants). The protesters' main slogan was 'Volem Acollir' ('We Want to Welcome'). They targeted the EU for the policies it conducts at its own borders as well as the Spanish government for its lack of commitment to asylum-seeker protection. Three months later, on 20 May 2017,

Milan hosted a demonstration under the banner ‘Milano come Barcellona’ (‘Milan like Barcelona’), in which roughly 150,000 people participated, expressing their own will to welcome migrants.

Barcelona and Milan followed a counter-trend compared to many other western sites, where anti-immigrant forces are instead gaining support. Even more puzzlingly, such massive events have not only brought together activists from civil society—in fact, political leaders in the cities’ respective local governments were also among their promoters and spokespersons. As the remaining of this Chapter will show, such episodes of ‘governmental activism’ (Verhoeven & Duyvendak 2017) were just the tip of the iceberg of a deeper, long-lasting dialogue between policy-makers and activists during the ‘refugee crisis.’

### 7.3 The case of Milan

#### *Asylum policy in Italy*

Until the early 2010s, asylum policy played a minor role within the Italian legislative context and was mostly limited to the reception of EU directives. Undocumented immigrants often opted to settle by ‘overstaying’ and waiting for mass amnesties, rather than seeking asylum. With the rise of the Arab Spring, international protection gained importance as a potential door to entry. Hence the administrative system in place rapidly showed its deficiencies (Caponio & Cappiali 2018).

The ordinary instrument for the integration of asylum-seekers is the SPRAR (Sistema di Protezione Richiedenti Asilo e Rifugiati – Protection System for Asylum-Seekers and Refugees), which provides a holistic set of services for tackling multiple vulnerabilities.<sup>62</sup> In addition to the immediate needs to be met, it aims at individual empowerment in the longer-term through ‘Individualized Training Programs.’ The SPRAR also ensures the involvement of local actors and a balanced pattern of settlement (small-scale reception centers tied to local communities). For such reasons, it is widely recognized as a valuable policy instrument (cf. Comune di Milano 2017).

Its main flaw, however, is the voluntary implementation mechanism. Municipalities may decide whether to apply for the Ministry of the Interior’s public calls. This encourages free-riding

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<sup>62</sup> In 2018 the so-called ‘Security Decree’ (Decree-Law 113/2018) drastically curtailed the SPRAR. The restriction of asylum protection has been a flagship initiative of Matteo Salvini, appointed Minister of the Interior on 1 June 2018.

by reluctant mayors and an uneven settlement of migrants across the country. Northern Italy—where Milan is located—is more prone to suffer from such disequilibria, as numerous cities have enforced exclusionary policies (Ambrosini 2013b). As one local public official remarks, «[the city] suffers from its involuntarily attractive capacity vis-à-vis immigration from other cities» (M8).

To cope with increased arrivals, in 2013 the Ministry established the CAS (Centri di Accoglienza Straordinaria – Emergency Reception Centres). Such structures were supposed to work as an exceptional, short-term solution to complement the ordinary system in cases of its temporary saturation. However, they have eventually covered the lion's share of migrant reception. Out of the 135,045 of migrants hosted in 2016, 96,701 (i.e., 71.6%) were settled in CASs, an increase on the 76,683 in 2015.<sup>63</sup>

This 'ad hoc' measure shows shortcomings concerning the quality of reception. Contrary to the SPRAR, CAS centers are often large-sized, hosting hundreds of guests, and located in urban outskirts or other peripheral areas. Beside basic provisions, more sophisticated services are largely absent. The role of local institutions is limited, as the Ministry and its local branches, the prefectures (*prefettura*), manage implementation centrally and then outsource services to private actors, usually NGOs and hotels. Immigrant rights advocates have persistently denounced the CAS model for its insufficient level of service provision, the scarce transparency of decisional procedures, the systemic infiltrations of criminal organizations, as well as the risks of ethnic conflicts in the areas of reception (e.g., Cittadinanza Attiva 2016; MEDU 2016). The Ministry of Interior itself recognized the lack of a permanent, adequate, and uniform system of reception, which resulted in a «ordinary emergency» (Ministero dell'Interno 2015).

#### *Milan responding to the 'refugee crisis'*

The first crucial juncture for Milan emerged at the outset of the Arab Spring, in 2011, when Italy's central government declared a 'State of Emergency.' The situation escalated in 2013, when large numbers of migrants started camping in the Central Railway Station. Civil society organizations rapidly mobilized to meet the needs of migrants in transit, especially unaccompa-

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<sup>63</sup> See <https://www.sprar.it/pubblicazioni/rapporto-sulla-protezione-internazionale-in-italia-2017>

nied minors. They set up a reception point in the station, which was ‘institutionalized’ and re-named ‘the hub’ by the municipality shortly after. In 2014, more than 50,000 migrants arrived in the city, with peaks of almost 1,000 people a day. Rising levels of policing at the Austrian, French, and Swiss borders exacerbated this scenario.

The city government thus came under severe strain and asked the central government for support so as to expand its own administrative capacities. As reported by Pogliano & Ponzio (2017), these negotiations produced their first results in October 2013, when the Ministry of Interior allocated exceptional resources to accommodate migrants in the city. In spring 2014 the means of the ‘hub’ were insufficient to deal with increased arrivals. After roughly 6 months, in October 2014 the Corelli center—whose aim was the detention and expulsion of undocumented immigrants—was transformed in a reception infrastructure for migrants in transit (see also [Chapter 5](#)). In July 2015, moreover, the local prefecture provided larger and better-equipped spaces. Other lines of negotiation concerned the resettlement of migrants, as well as EU-level provisions for more easily granting international protection and relaxing border controls.

Though the central government was also led by the PD, the Milan center-left administration’s relationship with it deteriorated. This was sharply exemplified by the framing adopted in local policy documents. For instance, one affirms that «Milan, despite its *total isolation* by the national government, has managed an absolutely unparalleled arrival of asylum-seekers» (Comune di Milano 2015: 8, emphasis added). Also, to bring national counterparts to the bargaining table, local political leaders have persistently sought to attract public attention on the issues at stake. For instance, the city mayor Beppe Sala made national headlines on 19 September 2016. In a letter sent to the Italian newspaper ‘La Repubblica’, he emphasized how «Milan is doing everything in its means» to cope with the crisis. At the same time, he called on the central government to «ease the huge weight on the shoulders of cities.»<sup>64</sup>

Administrative expertise was crucial in realizing the incumbents’ strategy, working ‘on a razor’s edge.’ To host the migrants in transit, the municipality resorted to the ‘Apulia Law’,<sup>65</sup> approved for the reception of Balkan migrants in southern Italy 20 years previously. While Italian law provides that foreigners must be identified within eight days of arrival, the city government

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<sup>64</sup> See [https://milano.repubblica.it/cronaca/2016/09/19/news/titolo\\_non\\_esportato\\_da\\_hermes\\_-\\_id\\_articolo\\_4575097-148053885/](https://milano.repubblica.it/cronaca/2016/09/19/news/titolo_non_esportato_da_hermes_-_id_articolo_4575097-148053885/)

<sup>65</sup> Governo Italiano, Decreto-Legge no. 451, 30 October 1995.

inverted the interpretation of this rule by *purposefully* neglecting to identify migrants hosted for less than eight days (as was the case for most of them). These ‘gimmicks’ provided a legal cover to serve a political purpose, namely allowing people to leave the country before being identified, de facto circumventing the Dublin Regulation. A public official commented that the city government created «a humanitarian channel, actually not authorized by the central government and the EU» (M13).

Ironically, in June 2015 a municipal delegation was invited to the European Parliament to present the virtues of Milan’s reception model amid the ‘refugee crisis.’ In general, actions at the international level have been secondary and mostly aimed at legitimizing the city government’s choices while negotiating with the Italian executive (Caponio 2018: 2065). On the other hand, a municipal official involved in international networks has emphasized the «transformative potential’ of these venues and the growing weight of the city within them» (M22).

The situation normalized at the end of 2016. Policy documents account for a stable and far-reaching urban reception system. 6,011 migrants were hosted in Milan in July 2017 (Comune di Milano 2017). Most of them (almost 60%) were accommodated in CAS centers, but one quarter of these slots were directly managed by the municipality via special agreement with the Ministry. The rest of the migrants were hosted through the SPRAR (7%), in municipal homeless shelters (29.2%), by philanthropic organizations (6.8%), and in centers with a special focus on unaccompanied minors (19.1%). Small-scale policy innovations include direct agreement with the EU for implementing its relocation mechanism (290 individuals) and partnerships with families hosting migrants at home (9 individuals).

#### *Urban alliances: the Milan model*

The main political figure throughout these events was Pierfrancesco Majorino, Deputy Mayor of Social Policies and an exponent of the PD’s left-wing minority. While taking a resolute pro-migrant stance, he articulated a line of conflict between Milan as a ‘city of welcome’ and national institutions, blamed for the mismanagement of frontiers, the fragile reception system, and the lack of efficacy in negotiating at the EU level. Majorino also promoted the idea of the Modello Milano (Milan Model) as an Italian ‘avant-garde’ of migrant integration founded on cooperation among urban actors.

As mentioned, civil society organizations were the first to give relief to migrants in transit at the Central Railway Station. The solidarity initiatives that mushroomed in the city were focused on volunteering rather than political claim-making. Yet they were promoted by groups—such as faith-based and welfare associations—which had egalitarianism at the core of their values. Many volunteers moreover understood their humanitarian actions as politically loaded (Zamponi 2018; Sinatti 2019). In short, actual or potential constituencies of the center-left were mobilized. Local incumbents then chose to ‘ride the wave’, for example coordinating the activities of volunteers and civil servants at the railway station and inciting further acts of solidarity to alleviate the emergency.

In the accounts of interviewees, the Deputy Mayor interpreted events at the railway station as a window of opportunity to engage in multi-level negotiations while building broad political support from the grassroots. As an expert put it, «at that moment Majorino realized that a positive image of himself could be constructed, at least for his reference constituency» (M1). Similarly, a leading third sector figure stresses that «there was a strong push from the city... an opportunity that Majorino was smart enough to seize. Without that input from below, what happened would not have happened, it was decisive» (M10). A public official agrees with this view, stating that «the administration has been able to grasp the call coming from civil society» (M13). With respect to the decision of suspending the Dublin Regulation, a social movement activist states that «the municipality has felt legitimized by [a] large sector [of the civil society] to act at the edge of legality» (M7).

The city government’s pro-immigrant stance has represented, in turn, an opportunity for new, more radical sectors of social movements. Following the prefecture’s decision to set up a CAS center at the Ex-Caserma Montello (a former barracks in Milan’s north-western outskirts), some inhabitants were involved in unrest. They perceived the arrival of 300 migrants in a suburban area as a threat to social stability. Parties and movements on the far right fueled skepticism by propagating a much more political, anti-migrant discourse. The city government adopted a strategy of compensation to tackle discontent among less politicized inhabitants, for instance boosting public services in the area and responding to the demands of specific families. Smaller groups on the far right have been isolated and eventually neutralized.

These actions have been pursued in conjunction with *Zona 8 Solidale* (Z8S). This neighborhood committee had two main objectives, namely countering racism by promoting a culture

of solidarity and providing a decent reception to migrants through volunteering. Activists arranged a set of integration services, such as Italian language classes and professional training. The overall strategy was to «push the CAS model as close as possible to the SPRAR one» (M17), meaning that volunteers added further services to the ones provided through the CAS while staying within its legislative boundaries. Also, Z8S organized a party inside the Ex-Caserma on 2 November 2017. This eased the tension in the neighborhood, as residents and newcomers could meet personally.

Providing voluntary services and obtaining permission for a celebration required extensive negotiations between Z8S and the Milan prefecture. Since prefectures are generally characterized by an extremely closed structure of opportunity, the city government intervened as a broker or—as one activist put it—as a «battering ram» (M17). It legitimized Z8S's demands and brought them to the table with a relatively unreceptive powerholder. As recounted by one public official, «the Deputy Mayor worked as a sort of ambassador, as a bridge, charging himself with bringing certain claims to the prefecture. These events occur in the city, therefore the city government has the duty to intervene» (M16).

Z8S paved the way for the emergence of a larger social movement named *No One Is Illegal* (NOII) in spring 2017. While adopting a confrontational repertoire of action (e.g. street protests), NOII sustained a continuous dialogue with the municipality, which has shown a partial responsiveness to activist demands, such as extending the city's SPRAR (the demand was to host every migrant in the city through this system; the consequent promise from the municipality was to move from 300 to 1,000 slots, and 430 migrants were eventually hosted in such centers in July 2017). These interactions culminated with the demonstration of 20 May 2017 (see above), which was promoted by the city government and most progressive civil society organizations. NOII also participated, despite their harsh criticisms of the Ministry of Interior and the PD (governing at both the national and the local level). In the words of one activist, «we participated with the idea of integrating the municipal platform – which is rather moderate, in our view – by qualifying it in a more radical direction» (M7).

Finally, Milan's government engaged in negotiations with the Italian executive in order to expand its own administrative capacities faced with the 'refugee crisis.' Further room for maneuver was attained by non-compliance with national and EU immigration laws. Perceiving a pro-migrant mood across their constituency, local political entrepreneurs constructed a conflict

between the ‘welcoming’ Milan and the ‘negligent’ upper tiers of government. This strategy galvanized movement activists into pushing the institutional agenda closer to their demands. They have exploited incumbents’ receptiveness in order to gain access to otherwise inhospitable policy venues. In a self-reinforcing mechanism, growing mobilizations allowed the city government to project an image of the city consistent with its political strategy.

## 7.4 The case of Barcelona

### *Asylum policy in Spain*

In Spain, too, asylum policy has not traditionally played a substantial role in migration governance (González-Enríquez 2009). As mentioned above, until 2017 the number of arrivals in Spain was lower than in Italy or Greece. This owed to multiple factors, such as the tight control of borders in Ceuta and Melilla and the country’s distance from the Middle East. The EU relocation mechanism has proven a largely uninformal remedy. Data updated on 31 October 2018 show that only 1,359 migrants resettled in Spain, whereas this country had committed to accept 15,000–19,000 (European Commission 2018; Alcalde & Portos 2018).

Nonetheless, the condition of asylum-seekers has represented a crucial challenge for Spanish municipalities. This is largely the result of the deficient national system of international protection. Once migrants submit their protection request, they can access the SAI (*Sistema de Acogida y Integración* – Reception and Integration System), centrally managed by the Ministry of the Interior and outsourced to large NGOs. Inconsistencies emerge at the implementation stage. While the verdict on asylum requests takes up to three years, the SAI lasts 18 months (24 for most vulnerable individuals). Thus migrants may finish an integration process while their applications are still pending—possibly becoming undocumented if the request is eventually rejected. These legislative voids—as an expert put it—were «eventually filled by cities, almost in a ‘philanthropic way’, as they are neither competent nor funded to fulfil such tasks» (B10).

An additional problem is the SAI’s geography. Most migrants are lodged in four large reception centers located in major Spanish cities. The center is chosen according to the availability of spaces, regardless of where migrants applied or their pre-existing social ties. Implementation stalemates have also occurred in the phase *before* application, as front-offices’ capacity has been insufficient for receiving migrants. One activist claims that «the administration is so slow

(and, in our opinion, deliberately slow) that [migrants] settle here for three–four months without any kind of assistance, often sleeping in the street» (B8).

In short, local communities have faced issues related to the deficiencies of Spain’s asylum governance. This was especially the case with respect to migrants who completed an integration programmed and then became undocumented (receiving a negative response to their asylum application) and newcomers without access to state services (before starting their application). These problems have heightened since 2018, when Spain became the main destination for migrants landing in southern Europe (cf. *Figure 4.2*).

### *Barcelona, city of refuge*

One of the first public acts of Ada Colau as mayor of Barcelona, on 28 August 2015, during the most tragic juncture of the ‘refugee crisis’, was to launch the network ‘Cities of Refuge’ (*Ciudades Refugio*), with the aim of driving policy change at Spanish and European level. In the following days, 55 Spanish left-wing municipalities joined the initiative, including Madrid, Valencia, and Zaragoza. Also, in September 2015, Colau wrote a letter entitled ‘We, the cities of Europe’ (Ajuntament de Barcelona 2015b). Prepared together with Anne Hidalgo (mayor of Paris), Spyros Galinos (mayor of Lesbos), and Giusi Nicolini (mayor of Lampedusa), it denounced the humanitarian emergency in the Mediterranean Sea, calling on European institutions «not to turn their backs on the cities, to listen to the outcry coming from them» in their attempt to welcome migrants.

This immediately revealed the importance of building an international network for the city government’s political strategy. The city mayor Ada Colau indeed exploited her charismatic leadership for promoting the interests of local governments and the rights of migrants far beyond the boundaries of Spanish politics. For instance, on 9-11 June 2017, Barcelona hosted the 1<sup>st</sup> International Municipalist Summit of Fearless Cities, a global network of progressive municipalities. The policy roundtable on immigration was introduced by the following statement: «While States build walls and fences, cities and towns are welcoming refugees and providing spaces of sanctuary to undocumented residents» (Fearless Cities 2017).

Such an upscaling dynamic was especially important in the confrontation with the Spanish central government, headed by the leader of the conservative PP, Mariano Rajoy. In Septem-

ber 2015, Ada Colau addressed a letter to the prime minister demanding the fulfilment of international obligations related to asylum protection. A few months later, in March 2016, the city government reached a pre-agreement with the mayor of Athens to resettle 100 migrants in Barcelona. Although the municipality expressed its own readiness to cover the expenses concerning their reception, Rajoy denied his approval.

The multi-level conflict with the central state and, to a more moderate degree, with the EU, has also been articulated through a policy programmed implemented since September 2015, BCR (Barcelona Ciutat Refugi – Barcelona Refugee City). It has been explicitly framed as a plan to counter, at the city-level, the holes in supralocal institutions. Its four strategic pillars are (1) implementing a stable reception system that operates independently of the central state one; (2) boosting services for migrants already settled in the city; (3) promoting civil society participation in policy-making; (4) accomplishing actions abroad through a network of cities and NGOs. As stated by a member of the city government,

«the political objective is to create a municipal counterbalance to a national policy. [...] Multi-level governance does not exist here. Zero. We insisted in talking with the State for two years [...] but we obtained a far larger opportunity for coordination through the municipal network of Spanish and foreign cities than with the central government» (B11).

Integration services are implemented through a pre-existing municipal structure, the SAIER (see also [Chapter 6](#)). Such services also include the Nausica programmed, aimed to support the integration of extremely vulnerable migrants (143 individuals in 2017) who are not inserted in the SAI.

As anticipated, the number of asylum-seekers attended by the SAIER has increased from 424 to 4,405 (+1,653%) in the 2013-18 period, signaling both an increase in municipal funding (from €1.5 million in 2015 to €1.7 million in 2016) and the gaps in national legislation, which have left a segment of these migrants devoid of assistance. However, the municipality—notwithstanding its increased engagement in pro-migrant policies—has struggled to keep pace with the increased number of recipients. Many interviewees have used the term «overflowing» (*desbordament*) to describe the rapid saturation of SAIER’s capacity during the ‘refugee crisis.’

*Barcelona's social movements and their allies*

The strategy of Barcelona's city government has gone hand in hand with that of pro-migrant social movements. The *Stop Mare Mortum* (SMM) platform was created in 2015 following major events that fueled moral outrage among the public, especially the dismissal of the Mare Nostrum search-and-rescue operation (November 2014),<sup>66</sup> the death of Alan Kurdi on the shore of Bodrum, Turkey (September 2015),<sup>67</sup> and the EU-Turkey agreement (March 2016) (see also Alcalde & Portos 2018). SMM's demands especially concern the EU (e.g., opening of safe migration routes, loosening of border controls, change in foreign and military policies), as also exemplified by its protest targets. For instance, a demonstration was staged in front of the local seat of the European Commission.

The relationship with the city government—although not immune to conflict—also facilitated the accomplishment of major results, both locally and internationally. A spokesperson reports that the local-level demands were approved during the plenary session of the municipal council and incorporated in BCR. With respect to the international level, she claims,

«we are now very committed to direct actions for creating safe passages to Catalunya. For example, we have a project with migrants in Greece. We provided support to more than 300 of them to access the EU relocation mechanism. We received financial support from and exchanged information with Barcelona Refugee City to consolidate this project. When speaking with Greek institutions, [...] the support of Barcelona's city government assured them that we could provide a reliable reception» (B13).

The campaign *Volem Acollir* (We Want to Welcome), launched by the activist organisation CNCV (Casa Nostra Casa Vostra – Our Home is Your Home), have also focused on international affairs and heavily intersected with municipal politics. CNCV was founded by a group of Catalan volunteers working in the Idomeni refugee camp (Greece) on 9 May 2016, when the momentum of public awareness on such themes was starting to decrease. As a CNCV spokesperson put it, «in Spain, public opinion was starting to ignore such issues, as it was 'already past.'

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<sup>66</sup> The Italian Navy's Mare Nostrum search-and-rescue operation had both humanitarian and military purposes. It was replaced by Triton, conducted by the EU agency Frontex. As compared to Mare Nostrum, Triton had a more limited budget and a mandate focused on border control rather than rescue (Caponio & Cappiali 2018: 118-119).

<sup>67</sup> Alan Kurdi was a three-year-old Kurdish migrant who fled Syria with his family and died while moving to Greece. The picture of his lifeless body made news headlines worldwide.

This was precisely our fear. A window of opportunity had been opened and now it was about to shut down» (B8).

The numerous events organized by the group reached their climax with the massive demonstration staged on 18 February 2017, among the largest ever to have taken place in the city (see above). The event had an extraordinary resonance (5,383 related articles were published in national and international media and it inspired the march held in Milan three months later). In addition to groups from civil society at large, all of Catalunya's political parties joined the demonstration (with different degrees of commitment), except the PP, which was ruling the central government.

A competitive dynamic was activated between left-leaning local coalitions (like the one governing Barcelona) and the pro-independence parties governing Catalunya, which both target Spain's central government for blame (albeit in different terms). In the same activist's account, «the municipality placed our flag on the façade of its building, and the Catalan government did the same on the following afternoon. [...] The two institutions, maybe because they are governed by such parties, were competing to see who could be closer to us» (B8).

Both SMM and CNCV, as prominent sectors of urban social movements, enacted an upscaling mechanism in which the city government worked as a propagator. Their strategy has been based on three consistent objectives, i.e. sensitizing the public at the discursive level, sustaining large mobilizations in the streets, and driving policy change. In such a dynamic, the relationship with the city government has been symbiotic. As one activist put it,

«on one side, the great mobilization of social movements provided an image of the city thanks to which Colau could later take a stance clearly shared by a part of the population, and which ultimately legitimated the work of the administration itself. On the other side, the municipality has had to listen to these mobilizations, to follow the wave by doing certain things, and has had to develop an international discourse, that I don't think would be there without the massive participation that took place» (B13).

In connection to this, a trade unionist working on migrant rights states that,

«the decisions that have a real impact on refugees are not taken in Barcelona, but Barcelona can, in some ways, empower a lot of demands. [This] is a *megaphone* for delivering such demands to those with responsibilities. The confluence of associations, movements, and the municipality, makes it possible to *transpose and enlarge* the demands. It makes a lot of difference if our claims are brought to the Spanish parliament by the municipality or by ourselves, and here is where we have to converge» (B17, emphasis added).

In a nutshell, the failures of Spain's asylum governance pushed Barcelona's government to 'fill the hole' through a far-reaching policy program, designed to function independently of central authorities. Local services have been boosted in order to keep pace with the increased numbers of asylum-seekers settled in the city. Urban actors have engaged in international networking to bypass the Spanish executive's unreceptiveness. The cooperation between incumbents and urban social movements has been based on reciprocal needs, as they could legitimate each other's choices in supralocal arenas. Yet also other parties have sought to tap into social mobilizations for the sake of consensus-building. Pro-migrant sentiments spread in Barcelona's society also thanks to movements' agency, and political parties thus themselves competed for the ownership of it.

## **7.5 Conclusion: Arenas and mechanisms of social movement outcomes in the case of asylum policies**

The contentious politics of migration has escalated amid the so-called 'refugee crisis.' While global in nature, such a crucial juncture has produced deep consequences also at the local level, as in the case of borders and cities situated along migration routes. The central argument of this chapter is that, in a context in which cities experience intense societal changes and governance failures that originate elsewhere, ideologically-sympathetic local governments and social movements are incentivized to respond by building urban alliances. The similarities and differences across the two cases analyzed allow us to add further nuance to this picture.

Both Milan and Barcelona sit at the bottom of a multi-level configuration that penalize them in governing migration-related issues. Indeed, unfavorable conditions were imposed by the respective central governments. Tens of thousands of migrants reached Milan during the 2010s. A deficient national asylum system put the city—especially its central railway station—under

unprecedented pressure. The humanitarian emergency however also opened a window of opportunity for the Deputy Mayor of Social Policies, who drew a line of conflict between the city and the upper layers of government. Remarkable room to maneuver was thus achieved, as testified by important decisions regarding migrant identification and freedom of movement, as well as the central authorities' concessions. Urban social movements had their momentum too. Local incumbents introduced activists' demands within branches of the central state that would have been unreceptive otherwise. In turn, they could capitalize on grassroots mobilizations to sharpen their urban leadership.

Similar dynamics unfolded in Barcelona, where gaps in the implementation of Spanish asylum policy left numerous migrants devoid of assistance, either before the submission of their asylum request or after a negative verdict. The city government filled this legislative void by launching its own program of international protection, Barcelona Refugee City. Also in this case, incumbents and activists joined forces, as the former embraced the demands coming from below, while the latter legitimized municipal decisions through mass mobilization—in a process of mutual responsiveness. In upscaling the conflict, the development of an international network of cities and NGOs has been a critical resource.

The mechanisms at play can be summarized as follows. Within the *city politics arena*, local governments and social movements have engaged in alliance-building on the basis of emerging urban issues and ideological affinity. This made it possible to upscale political mobilization in the *multi-level governance arena*. Urban allies have worked 'in tandem', i.e., exchanged their resources, for the sake of pressuring (or circumventing) supra-local institutions. On the one hand, parties in office—aware of their constituencies' pro-migrant mood—have overstepped their competencies and converted the 'refugee crisis' into an opportunity for consensus-building. On the other hand, activists have fed such public sentiments and exploited incumbents' receptiveness to push their demands onto the institutional agenda. Multi-level governance—while constraining local policy-making—served as a discursive expedient for constructing a 'common front' (i.e. the city) and a 'common enemy' (i.e. the upper tiers of government).

Hence, when looking at political alliances, one might argue that belonging to the same geographical community is—under certain circumstances—a stronger glue than being inside or outside institutions. Lying at the intersection of these two boundaries, local governments can both engage in contentious politics (by catalyzing demands from below) and play in institutional

arenas. Theoretically, such reasoning echoes the work of Duyvendak & Jasper (2015) on the state as a relational entity to be split in different analytical components, e.g. according to geographical scales. The cases analyzed moreover provide insights on ideology and immigration politics at large. They suggest that the left (whether mainstream or radical) can secure political rewards by formulating a distinctive, coherent discourse that resonates with the values of egalitarian constituencies, rather than conforming to the security-oriented approach of the right (cf. Castelli Gattinara 2016: 171-6).

When it comes to cross-case differences, EU governance (and other structural factors) had divergent consequences for the two cities. Milan became a key stop-off point for migrants trying to reach northern Europe. The Dublin Regulation, in conjunction with intensified border controls by neighboring countries, created a bottleneck in their routes. The consequences of these decisions were faced by many Italian local authorities—including Milan's. The number of migrants reaching Spain was much lower up till 2018. This explains the quite opposite demand from the Barcelona government to Spanish authorities, in favor of hosting more migrants in the country, e.g., by committing to the EU relocation mechanism.

These distinctions can be interpreted as a consequence of differences across the two cities in terms of ideological background and impact of the 'refugee crisis.' In Milan, the humanitarian emergency accelerated the construction of a city-level alliance. Ideological affinity is present, but the urgency to act was possibly a greater incentive to coalesce. This is particularly evident when looking at the confrontational attitude adopted by the municipal government vis-à-vis the central one, even though both were of the same political color. Activists have exploited this apparent contradiction, keeping up pressure on the city government and pushing its agenda closer to their own demands. Logics of convenience thus prevailed over ideological ones. In Barcelona, where the crisis has been relatively softer, the urban alliance seems to be crafted on a more ideological basis. The city government—a quite unique experiment of movement-party coalition—has also been guided by the prospect of radically transforming EU migration governance.

Part III:  
Discussion and conclusion

# Chapter 8

## Comparing social movement outcomes across contentious migration policies

«To explain contentious politics is to identify its recurrent causal mechanisms, the ways they combine, in what sequences they recur, and why different combinations and sequences, starting from different initial conditions, produce varying effects on the large scale».

(McAdam *et al.* 2001: 13)

### 8.1 Introduction

This research departed with the ambition of theorizing how and under what conditions pro-immigrant social movements—collective actors that mobilize from the margins of the political process—can exert an influence on policy-making at the city-level and beyond. Multiple scholarly contributions have dealt with the questions of migration governance and contestation, but research on the outcomes of social movements has been lagging behind. [Chapter 2](#) brought these different scholarships into dialogue and combined them in a consistent fashion by means of a strategic-interaction and mechanism-based approach to contentious politics. Based on the empirical findings presented in Part II of the dissertation, I now compare social movement outcomes across different contentious realms of policy-making, namely exclusionary policies, policies in support of undocumented immigrants, and asylum policies. This will allow us to extrapolate general statements on the mechanisms linking mobilization and policy change.

The chapter is structured as follows. First, I zoom in on the arenas of interaction deemed relevant for the occurrence of social movement outcomes, namely the civil society arena ([Section 8.2](#)), the city politics arena ([Section 8.3](#)), and the multi-level governance arena ([Section 8.4](#)). For each of these, I will provide a summary of the empirical findings so as to unveil the specific causal mechanisms that drove social movement outcomes in the cases analyzed. Next, [Section](#)

[8.5](#) moves to a higher level of abstraction. It presents general statements on the (sequences of) mechanisms that social movements can activate to produce political change, assessing similarities and dissimilarities across different contentious migration policies.

## **8.2 Civil society arena: Brokers of contention**

When seeking to pose a credible challenge to their targets and to other counterparts, one of the main concerns of protestors is to give a semblance of rock-hard unity by constructing a unequivocal collective identity. Far from being monolithic, however, even the most cohesive social movement is a compound of manifold players in constant negotiation. The establishment of ties among them is the product of difficult, laborious, long-lasting brokerage mechanisms that unfold within what I refer to as the civil society arena. This latter includes the vast array of non-state players at the city-level bearing an interest in the expansion of immigrant rights. Intensive networking efforts are essential to immigrant activists, as they can hope to step out of the shadow by reaching out to potential allies, building bridges, and drawing on the resources of their broader environment (Nicholls 2016: 304). Everyday city life provides them with assorted opportunities to this purpose because of the relatively large availability of influential supporters who may mobilize out of a sense of solidarity with a constituency to which they do not belong (della Porta 2018: 11).

Research findings demonstrate how crucial were these dynamics for the emergence of pro-immigrant movements in the cities analyzed. In Milan, this process took root in two solidarity traditions, namely left-wing unionism and Christian philanthropy. These networks have been historically committed with issues that gradually became *related to* migration, such as jail conditions, homelessness, poverty, and employment. A fully-fledged pro-immigrant activism arose between the 1990s and the 2000s, concomitantly with the breakthrough of migration politics on the national stage and the upsurge of the GJM. In Barcelona, too, the emergence of a solidarity movement is rooted in a century-long history. The *asociaciones de vecinos*—grassroots committees at the neighborhood-level concerned with urban welfare—played a decisive role in the settlement of both Spanish and foreign-born immigrants, catalyzing their participation and preventing ethnic conflicts. More recently, the intense anti-austerity protests Spain witnessed in the early 2010s served as a platform for several issue-specific mobilizations, including migration-related

ones—as in the cases of the housing movement (whose constituency is largely foreign-born) and the broader battle over the ‘right to the city.’

Another recurrent feature is the importance of direct social action for the pro-immigrant movements scrutinized (cf. Bosi & Zamponi 2020). While their recourse to political claim-making was contingent on specific external circumstances (e.g., threats and opportunities), mutual aid, voluntarism, and similar activities were carried out on a regular basis. However, these two kinds of repertoire ultimately appear highly synergic, as if they are the ‘two hands’ of mobilization. Direct social actions have kept networks alive in times of latency and served as a source of political legitimacy in times of visibility (cf. Zamponi 2017). In Milan, for example, activists perceived their bottom-up welfare activities as means to influence policy-making, in so far they shed light on the deficiencies of institutional intervention. Barcelona’s street vendors first organized as a mutual aid group, but became more and more politicized as they expanded their solidarity network. Moreover, in both the cities, seemingly a-political actions have become increasingly contentious in face of retreats of state actors from their responsibilities of humanitarian protection. This was evident, for instance, in the case of asylum policy-making. NGOs have gradually hybridized with protest groups (cf. della Porta 2020), as they (or their individual volunteers) began to take part in campaigns in support of forced migrants and against the EU border regime.

The ability of players in the civil society arena to craft robust coalitions, however, seem heavily dependent on the policy realm they seek to affect. Most notably, activating brokerage mechanisms was much more challenging in the case of local exclusionary policies as compared to policies in support of undocumented or forced immigrants. Under these circumstances, protest appear ever more risky (e.g., because of the prospect of being deported or subjected to other punitive measures). Also, solidarity networks seem more likely to disintegrate in absence of powerful incentives. This was apparent when the Milan’s *Comitato Immigrati* occupied Torre Imbonati—a smokestack of a dismissed factory—to protest against the Cabinet Berlusconi III’s regularization plan. As internal conflicts over paternalism and ethnicity escalated, insurgents failed to craft a coherent strategy to participate at the institutional bargaining table. Their momentum faded away and the city government—led by conservative and anti-immigration parties—eventually succeeded in repressing them. This finding problematizes the argument that movements obstructing policy decisions would have greater chance of success as compared to those seeking constructive policy innovations (see Lipsky 1970: 13; Amenta *et al.* 2019: 452).

### 8.3 City politics arena: The boons and banes of alliance-building

There are manifold urban players bearing an interest in migration-related affairs. A propitious balance of power in what I define as city politics arena is essential for pro-immigrant movements to produce successful and meaningful outcomes. Alliance-building is the key mechanism to achieve this objective. Civil society organizations need to build ties with sympathetic political elites who, in turn, are well positioned to find «the support of native-born elites [...] and to overcome skepticism among native-born voters» (Steil & Vasi 2014: 1143; see also de Graauw & Vermeulen 2016). In spite of their marginality, demand-makers can rely on various strategic leverages for motivating powerholders to become part of, and possibly lead, a pro-immigrant alliance at the city-level. I argued that these leverages are both political and cognitive, meaning that mobilization can make pro-immigrant policies electorally convenient and technically practicable from the perspective of local political elites.

The case of Barcelona's policies in support of undocumented immigrants clearly demonstrates the importance of these dynamics. The responsiveness to protesters was remarkable in this realm. Since 2015, the city government has been led by a movement-party coalition on the radical left (BeC). Emanating from an activist milieu, municipal officials embraced the demands of grassroots organizations—especially those that sustained their electoral platform in the first place. To transpose these demands into public policies, Barcelona's government not only enacted provisions to alleviate the plight of the undocumented, but also incorporated a semantics based on human rights and social justice into the institutional discourse. The administration has refused to endorse any hierarchical stratification of the foreign-born population and projected a vision of the city as alternative site of citizenship, by which all types of resident are deemed legitimate members of the urban community, regardless of their administrative status (so-called *jus domicili*; cf. de Graauw 2014).

In many respects, Barcelona was a fertile breeding ground for the flourishing of these ideas and practices of urban governance. This owes, of course, to its long-standing history of insurgent city, where democratic forms of policy-making and self-government have been persistently experimented. Moreover, following the massive wave of anti-austerity protests in the early 2010s, radical claims have moved from the arena of protest to the institutional space, also through the emergence of new parties (della Porta *et al.* 2017). Populist attitudes proliferated, but

these were of inclusionary type, meaning that political and economic elites, rather than ethnic and religious minorities, were targeted as opponents of ‘the people’ (cf. Font *et al.* 2017). Similar considerations hold for the case of the Catalan pro-independence movement, whose nationalist claims are embedded in a broader call for democracy and equality. The radical agenda of the Barcelona’s administration has to be also interpreted as a cultural and political outcome of these major upheavals.

One might argue that Barcelona’s political dynamics are so exceptional that responsiveness to social movements is a foregone outcome. In a way, the electoral victory of BeC can be ultimately interpreted as a consequence of social movements in itself. However, a very different case—that of Milan’s exclusionary policies—highlights the importance of much similar dynamics. The conservative administration led by the mayor Letizia Moratti (2006-2011) adopted a hardline approach to immigration, foremost on the initiative of far-right governing parties. Policy-making revolved around three main axes, namely assimilationism, highly selective access to decision-making processes, and the adoption of punitive ordinances that criminalized most vulnerable immigrants. Amid this securitarian escalation, which was concomitantly unfolding at the national level, the odds for activists to produce successful outcomes were virtually null. They adopted a highly contentious, sometimes illegal, repertoire of actions with the purpose of limiting the most detrimental consequences of local policies.

When Giuliano Pisapia—a leftist civil rights lawyer—became the mayoral candidate of the center-left coalition at the 2011 local elections, even the radical sectors of Milan’s movements mobilized to support his campaign, galvanized by the prospect of moving beyond a hostile political season. Once in office, Pisapia’s administration rejected the immigration-criminality nexus promoted by its predecessors and framed diversity as an opportunity for the urban community. Also, the most repressive exclusionary policies were dismantled and the array of municipal integration policies were expanded. In pursuing these policy objectives, Pierfrancesco Majorino—Deputy Mayor of Social Policies—took a leadership position and crafted a large and cohesive coalition around a pro-immigration political vision. Social movements welcomed and contributed to craft these policy changes. Activists felt legitimized as policy actors within newly-established participatory venues, but still lamented a scarce sense of efficacy—an outcome that can be referred to as ‘access without influence.’

These outcomes also shed lights on the limits and dilemmas that pro-immigrant movements face when engaging in alliance-building with players in the city politics arena—most notably local political elites. At the root of the struggle for immigrant rights is the refusal of nationally-bounded definitions of citizenship; yet, state players are also the ultimate target of demand-makers, who urge public officials to at least partly accommodate their claims (e.g., Darling & Bauder 2019: 13). Establishing cooperative dynamics with institutional actors bring these contradictions to the fore. In Milan, left-leaning incumbents framed immigration and diversity in positive terms, but the ‘hierarchy of citizenship’ to which immigrants are subjected has not been put into question. Subsequently, undocumented immigrants have never been considered as potential targets of inclusionary policies, except for residual and ‘unadvertised’ provisions. The expansion of immigrant rights has been pursued within the boundaries of a ‘legality’ established at higher tiers of government, with limited efforts to push these very boundaries forward. Within this context, policy-makers accommodated assorted demands of immigrant advocates, but did not endorse more fundamental claims for challenging nationally-bounded definitions of citizenship. Activists referred to this unbridgeable gulf as a ‘legal divide.’

Importantly, disputes between allies have surfaced in the ‘rebel’ Barcelona, too. The pivot of controversy has been the difficulty of new incumbents to match their actions with their new role. This has bred the fear of co-optation among activists, who have felt the threat of having their identity (unintentionally) appropriated and suffered from the absorption of their former leaders in the administrative machine. Discontent has been extremely pronounced in the case of street vendors, being political self-determination at the core of these immigrants’ collective identity. From this angle, findings confirm that the relationship between parties in office and their activist base is likely to be conflictual, but not necessarily for the reasons outlined by McAdam & Tarrow (2010: 537). In Barcelona, the conflicts between elected officials and protesters were not caused by the attempt of the former to appeal to the median voter by moving to the center, but *precisely for the opposite reason*. In fact, the ‘loyalty’ of local incumbents to their activist legacy, their mimicking of social-movement strategies, and their sensitiveness to protesters’ demands have fueled, rather than tamed, controversies.

## 8.4 Multi-level governance arena: Upscaling mobilization

The governance of migration is dispersed over multiple sites of authority at various spatial scale. Yet, the dominant players are central states, as they can reclaim the levers of immigration policy to regulate the conditions for being admitted in a national polity. As for the EU, scholars make use of the metaphor of ‘Fortress Europe’ to describe a «intergovernmentalist view of European cooperation as a means for restriction-minded member states to close down their external borders» (Bonjour *et al.* 2018: 411). Hence, to affect migration policy-making, social movements have to not only craft potent alliances at the city-level, but also to activate dynamics of change in the multi-level governance arena. Upscaling mechanisms are crucial to this end. By leveraging on the relation density of the urban environment, pro-immigrant movements can «transform the local arena into a major front in national immigration battles» (Nicholls *et al.* 2016: 3). Institutional actors at the city-level, too, can surpass the limits of local politics through mechanisms of upscaling, notably through strategies of vertical venue-shopping for bypassing unreceptive political environments (Sapotichne & Jones 2012: 454-5).

Empirical findings demonstrate how social movements and local governments are able to activate upscaling mechanisms *jointly*, i.e., by mobilizing as an unitary player to confront supra-local institutions. This is apparent in the case of urban asylum policies enacted amid the ‘refugee crisis.’ In dealing with a humanitarian emergency whose governance rests in the hand of central states, but which ultimately manifests as a critical urban issue, a ‘tandem’ between local incumbents and social-movement activists was set in motion in Milan and Barcelona. This strengthened their position in a battleground where the balance of power was structurally unfavorable to them. On the one hand, parties in office—aware of their constituencies’ pro-immigrant mood—have overstepped their competencies and converted the ‘refugee crisis’ into an opportunity for consensus-building. On the other hand, activists have fed such public sentiments and exploited incumbents’ receptiveness to push their demands onto the institutional agenda. In sum, alliance-building was a strategy to secure political gains while shaping policies within an otherwise unreceptive, hostile environment.

These upscaling mechanisms are thus closely linked with city politics dynamics. In multi-level governance arenas, not only sympathetic political elites can be functional to the objectives of social movements, but also the other way around—meaning that their strategic leverage is

reciprocal. Activists are able to strengthen their institutional allies by fueling public controversy and allocating blame (Hutter *et al.* 2019), e.g., to the EU and national governments. Also, they often have a knowledge of social problems ‘on the ground’ and a sterling reputation among their reference constituencies (Mayer 2018). Hence, city governments are incentivized to be responsive toward activists who presumably belong to their constituency and who can provide resources to be invested in higher-level arenas. In turn, social movements are prone to mobilize when sympathetic parties are in the city government, as institutional allies can smooth the viability of claims that would remain unheard otherwise. Precisely because they need support from above, activists seek to profit from elites’ vulnerability, trying to be perceived as potentially facilitating or disruptive for institutional goals (Amenta *et al.* 2010).

These strategic interactions are well described by the concept of ‘governmental activism’, i.e. «governmental players joining forces with non-governmental players in contentious actions against policies they want to prevent or redress» (Verhoeven & Duyvendak, 2017: 564). In such cooperative dynamics, partners engage in a «division of oppositional labor» (*ibid.*: 567), meaning that they back each other up by combining their respective political expertise. The case of Barcelona’s policies in support of undocumented immigrants is particularly illustrative. As mentioned the BeC’s administration promoted a radical model of urban citizenship that overtly contradicts, and intends to fill in for the lacunas of, Spanish immigration laws, e.g., issuing local ID cards and seeking to close the city’s Immigration Detention Center. For the sake of challenging the Spanish executive, local incumbents sought to boost (and even to reproduce) social-movement mobilizations by means of institutional resources that activists lack *by definition*, such as legitimacy, visibility, and the rule of law. Jaume Asens and Lola López—lifelong pro-immigrant advocates who became leading figures of the BeC’s administration—starkly embodied such entrenchment of activist and institutional networks. They persistently sought to empower grassroots organizations while also deploying a movement-style repertoire of action from within the institutional space.

## **8.5 Comparing social movement outcomes: Similarities and dissimilarities across contentious migration policies**

Extrapolating from the empirical findings presented thus far, this section aims to formulate general statements on how and under what conditions pro-immigrant social movements exert their

influence on migration policy-making, locally and beyond. This theoretical exercise has its epistemological foundation on strategic-interaction and mechanism-based approaches to the study of contentious politics, which have been productively applied to explain the consequences of collective action in other policy sectors (cf. Bosi *et al.* 2016: 11-12).

By intersecting multiple scholarly contributions, the theoretical framework ([Section 2.5](#)) identified three concentric arenas of interaction deemed relevant for the occurrence of social movement outcomes in the field of migration policy-making, i.e., the civil society arena, the city politics arena, and the multi-level governance arena. Each of these tend to correspond to a specific causal mechanism, i.e., brokerage, alliance-building, and upscaling, respectively. It was argued that, despite their position of relative weakness position vis-à-vis other players in the arenas, social movements can create a strategic leverage by means of these mechanisms, which reinforce and concatenate with one another (cf. *Figure 2.1*). The empirical study has then focused on three contentious migration policies, namely (1) exclusionary policies, (2) policies in support of undocumented immigrants, and (3) asylum policies. As (sequences of) mechanisms tend to recur in a regular fashion across various circumstances (McAdam *et al.* 2001: 13), here I will detect similarities and dissimilarities across these different realms of policy-making. A general summary is presented in *Table 8.1*.

Local exclusionary policies aim to exclude specific, highly politicized sections of the immigrant population—such as the undocumented, Muslims, or Romani—from various rights and benefits (e.g., Ambrosini 2013b). These provisions often go hand in hand with punitive measures against lawbreakers. Examples include bans from collective goods (i.e., welfare chauvinism), policing in public spaces for deportation purposes, and evictions from unauthorized camps. Under these circumstances, integration programs may be enacted, but are usually very selective, meaning that support is provided only to subjects that fulfil particular conditions. Overall, these policies tend to unfold through the prism of national rhetoric (Hopkins 2010) and to divide foreign-born residents according to criteria of alleged deservingness (Crawley & Skleparis 2018). Pro-immigrant forces may mobilize to oppose these policies and mitigate their consequences, but the responsiveness to their demands tend to be extremely scarce. The production of negative, unintended consequences—including repressive backlashes and policy setbacks—is likely, too.

These outcomes can be explained in light of the limited strategic leverages that activists are able to exert in the arenas in which they interact. Exclusionary policies limit the very chance

of engaging in political claim-making in so far as they criminalize potential demand-makers. Under these conditions, mobilization becomes very risky. Direct social actions may be preferred as these can remain ‘invisible’ and mitigate the detrimental impacts of policy-making. The dominant role played by pro-status quo organizations involved in policy-making may obstruct the activation of brokerage mechanisms in the civil society arena. In addition, the limited prospect of change may prompt divisive dynamics among potential allies, notably due to their power asymmetries. In turn, the city politics arena offers limited opportunities for alliance-building. Local political elites tend to be hostile towards activists, who can then hope to disrupt institutional routines by means of highly confrontational actions. Local elections represent a (rare) opportunity to affect the political process through the endorsement sympathetic candidates. Also, in absence of influential institutional allies, movement have meager chances of accessing the multi-level governance arena, although venue-shopping strategies can be occasionally deployed, e.g., through court appeals to oppose discriminatory provisions.

On the other side of the spectrum there are policies that aim to support undocumented immigrants, either by granting them access to generalist provisions or through specific ones. The targets of policies are deemed ‘illegal’ from the perspective of the nation-state, which normally has the monopoly over controlling immigration and regulating citizenship. Within this framework, constitutionally subservient local governments are only allowed to bear responsibility in integration policy-making (Penninx *et al.* 2004; Spencer 2018), i.e., to entitle foreign-born residents with civil, political, and social rights *once admitted in a national polity* (cf. Hammar 1985). Immigrant rights are, in fact, most often stratified by and dependent on residency status as established under national jurisdictions (Bolderson 2011). Local governments can support undocumented immigrants either conforming with the prescriptions of supra-local authorities (e.g, through regularization programs that confer national residency status, cf. Kaufmann 2019) or contradicting them, as in the case of US sanctuary cities (Gonzalez O’Brien *et al.* 2019: 4). These policies project an image of the city as an alternative site of citizenship, by which all types of resident are deemed legitimate members of the urban community, regardless of their administrative status (cf. de Grauw 2014).

Table 8.1. Arenas, mechanisms, and social movement outcomes across different contentious migration policies

	Exclusionary policies	Policies in support of undocumented immigrants	Asylum policies
<b>Outcomes to be explained</b>			
Main features of policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Exclusion of politicized categories from various rights and benefits.</li> <li>Repression.</li> <li>Selective assimilationism.</li> <li>National rhetoric.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provisions within the boundaries of supra-local policies (e.g., regularizations).</li> <li>Provisions in contrast with supra-local policies (e.g., local ID cards).</li> <li>'Urban citizenship' framework.</li> <li>Decoupled policy-making.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provisions within the boundaries of supra-local policies (e.g., expansion of national provisions).</li> <li>Provisions in contrast with supra-local policies (e.g., free movement).</li> <li>'Human rights' framework.</li> <li>(Partly) decoupled policy-making.</li> </ul>
Responsiveness to social movements	Very low	Low/intermediate	Relatively high
<b>Causal mechanisms</b>			
Civil society arena ( <i>brokerage mechanisms</i> )	<p>Fragmented (but not disconnected)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Obstructive role of pro-status quo civil society organizations.</li> <li>Divisive dynamics due to power asymmetries.</li> <li>Prevalence of direct social actions over political claim-making (damage limitation)</li> </ul>	<p>Cohesive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Supportive role of 'native' organizations.</li> <li>Importance of legacies of solidarity.</li> <li>Direct social actions and political claim-making as synergic.</li> </ul>	<p>Cohesive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Supportive role of 'native' organizations.</li> <li>Importance of legacies of solidarity.</li> <li>Direct social actions and political claim-making as synergic.</li> </ul>
City politics arena ( <i>alliance-building mechanisms</i> )	<p>Inhospitable</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hostile political elites.</li> <li>Highly contentious interactions through extreme actions.</li> <li>Elections as chances for alliance-building.</li> </ul>	<p>Favorable</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Supportive role of sympathetic elites.</li> <li>Importance of cognitive resources.</li> <li>Elections as chances for alliance-building.</li> </ul>	<p>Favorable</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Supportive role of sympathetic elites.</li> <li>Importance of cognitive resources.</li> <li>Electoral incentives.</li> </ul>
Multi-level governance arena ( <i>upscaling mechanisms</i> )	<p>Barely accessible</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited leverage vis-à-vis counterparts.</li> <li>Occasional opportunities of venue-shopping.</li> </ul>	<p>Barely accessible</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>'Governmental activism' as a strategy for policy change.</li> <li>Limited rooms to maneuver.</li> </ul>	<p>Accessible</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>'Governmental activism' as a strategy for policy change.</li> <li>Systematic use of venue-shopping.</li> </ul>

Social movements play a crucial role in the enactment these policies. The relational density of cities allows undocumented immigrants to weave extensive networks of solidarity in the civil society arena and eventually find the support sympathetic elites in the city politics arena. Left-leaning elected officials in the city government may be eager to be accommodate activists' demands for the sake of boosting their electoral consensus and career prospects. Municipal bureaucrats may be incentivized to be responsive, too. They can capitalize on their discretionary powers so as to craft inclusionary policies in support of immigrants. To this end, activists can provide indispensable and otherwise unavailable cognitive resources. These alliance-building mechanisms may push urban players to forge alliances to jointly confront supra-local authorities. By means of governmental activism—a particularly intense form of alliance-building based on the 'division of oppositional labor' between public officials and social-movement activists who share similar objectives and similar opponents (Verhoeven & Duyvendak 2017)—they can shape public policies within an unfavorable context of multi-level governance. However, since citizenship remains a prerogative of nation-stated, the chance of success are generally limited, at least in the short-medium term.

Last, social movements may exert their influence in the realm of asylum policies. These latter are aimed to support migrants who are either settled in, or in transit, through a locality and who are seeking protection. Local governments can support them through the levers of national policies, perhaps expanding these provisions, or by means of 'transgressive' actions, as in the case of decisions to locally suspend bans on mobility. These policies are normally justified on the grounds of humanitarianism as it is embedded in international laws that guarantee the right to international protection to whoever is forced to leave its context of settlement. The dynamics of social movement outcomes are similar to those occurring in the case of policies in support of undocumented immigrants. The establishment of solidarity networks in the civil society arena, the availability of influential allies in the city politics arena, and the possibility of activating up-scaling mechanisms in the multi-level governance arena appear as the major drivers of change. But chances of success tend to be greater in the case of asylum policies, in so far as the category of 'refugee' is normally perceived as more legitimate and deserving in the eyes of both elites and the electorate at large (cf. Crawley & Skleparis 2018).

# Chapter 9

## Conclusion: Do social movements matter for urban migration governance?

«Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will».

(Frederick Douglass, 1857)

### 9.1 Introduction

The metaphor of ‘Fortress Europe’ points at European migration and asylum policy as dominated by restriction-minded member states with a stark preference for closing down their external borders (Bonjour *et al.* 2018: 411). Although this intergovernmental, security-oriented approach to immigration has been intrinsic to the process of Europeanization since its inception (cf. Guiraudon 2000; Toshkov & De Haan 2013), the European ‘refugee crisis’ of the 2010s marked a deepening of pre-existing governance arrangements. As Castelli Gattinara put it,

«[i]nstitutional and mainstream actors have mirrored public anxieties and security concerns, endorsing emergency narratives, aggressive policing and militarized border control. Unable to engage with citizens’ concerns, they have helped to conflate migration with insecurity, creating a fertile breeding ground for xenophobic, populist reactions» (Castelli Gattinara 2017: 318).

Similarly, on the other side of the Atlantic, the Trump administration deployed corrosive nativist rhetoric and enacted a crackdown on immigration, breeding polarization in the US political debate (Williamson 2020)—yet deepening, rather than departing from, the trajectories of its predecessors (cf. Nicholls 2014a). These trends have far-reaching implications for migration governance at the local level, too. For the sake of electoral consensus or mere legal subordination,

local authorities tend to reproduce, or even amplify, the securitarian and emergency logics inscribed in supra-local provisions.

Compliance, however, is not the only option on the table. Local actors can enact *debordering* policies and practices (Ambrosini 2018) that derail from the tracks established at higher spatial scales. Nonconformist responses are first advocated by pro-immigrant activists. In contesting extant border regimes, they urge the state to accommodate their demands, while also projecting a vision of the city as an alternative locus of membership, regardless of formally-granted citizenship statuses (Kaufmann 2019). *But do they really matter?* This is the grand question guiding my scientific endeavor. By intersecting multiple scholarly contributions, and based on extensive fieldwork in two large South European cities, this research sought to theorize how and under what conditions pro-immigrant social movements are able produce political (and policy) outcomes.

This chapter, which brings the dissertation in full circle, is structured as follows. [Section 9.2](#) recalls the main strands of literature on which the research has been grounded (especially in the realms of migration studies, social movement studies, and urban studies) and clarify what are the contributions to each of them. The main limitations and the avenues for future inquiry are critically assessed in [Section 9.3](#), which also advocates the adoption of ‘space-sensitive’ comparative designs in political studies. Conclusive remarks are presented in [Section 9.4](#).

## **9.2 Connection with and contribution to extant literature**

### *Migration studies*

This research draws on (and speak to) the most recent trends in migration studies. Over the last two decades, scholars paid growing attention to the local dimension of migration policy-making (e.g., Rogers & Tillie 2001; Penninx *et al.* 2004; Schiller & Çağlar 2011; Caponio & Borkert 2010). This ‘local turn’ was driven by two emerging societal trends, namely the relevance of local contexts of settlement for the integration or marginalization of immigrants, as well as the autonomy of local governments in steering these processes through the levers of policy-making. Scholars increasingly detected patterns of divergence across localities even within centralized countries (Koopmans 2004; Penninx & Martiniello 2004), with local policy-making ranging from accommodative, multicultural programs to punitive and exclusionary provisions.

In more recent years, specialists on migration incorporated a multi-level governance perspective so as to account for the assorted state and non-state actors located at different spatial scales that concur to shape migration policies (Scholten & Penninx 2016; Zapata-Barrero *et al.* 2017; Caponio & Jones-Correa 2018). Precisely because local governments are relative autonomous in this realm, local policies may be different from (and even in contradiction with) the ones of supralocal authorities. The leeway of local actors may thus result in *decoupled* policy-making, i.e., government levels are poorly coordinated and possibly in conflict with one another (Scholten & Penninx 2016: 94).

Municipalities are indeed able to stretch, counter, or circumvent supralocal provisions. A borderline case is that of sanctuary cities in the U.S. and beyond. In face of mounting nativism in national politics, these localities forbid the inquiry into immigration status or cooperation with central immigration authorities within their jurisdictions (Gonzalez O'Brien *et al.* 2019: 4), e.g., by mean of local bureaucratic membership policies (de Graauw 2014). More broadly, sanctuary is «a spatial practice of setting a specific territory, location, or building outside the bounds of sovereign authority and legal redress» (Darling & Bauder 2019: 8). But before opting for these 'rogue' actions, city officials might support resident immigrants by expanding, but still conforming with, the prescriptions of constitutionally-superior authorities—as in the case of regularization programs that confer national residency status on irregular migrants (Kaufmann 2019).

Migration scholars adopt an agenda-setting perspective for explaining such instances of decoupled policy-making (cf. Scholten 2013). Patterns of agenda-setting normally have a strongly level-specific character. In contested policy areas like migration, the interpretation of collective problems (the «constructivist moment», Guiraudon 2000: 258) is likely to vary depending on the tier of government. This can result in divergent policy trajectories across levels of policy-making, ultimately breeding inter-institutional conflicts.

This research contributes to the literature by focusing on crucial but overlooked drivers of local migration policy-making—namely, pro-immigrant social movements (cf. de Graauw & Vermeulen 2016). The framing processes of local policy-makers are not only shaped by signals descending 'from above' (e.g., policy failures that originate from central authorities), but also by forces emerging 'from below.' Protest is a signal sent by large sectors of the electorate about urgent societal problems they care about (Hutter & Vliegthart 2018: 360). Elites can embrace popular causes for electoral opportunism, i.e. playing the role of 'tribunes of the people', but

also guided by a more substantial ideological commitment (Hutter *et al.* 2019). Also, responsiveness can help parties in power to recover from a crisis of legitimacy (Holdo 2016). If large and persistent, protest can even represent an electoral threat, especially when many protesters belong to the incumbents' voter base. Otherwise put, also *social movements can act as agenda-setters and thus as driving forces of progressive, possibly nonconformist policy-making.*

These findings shed light not only on social movements as impactful policy participants, but also on more far-reaching institutional dynamics unfolding at the local level—and in cities especially. City governments are part of both the state and the urban community. This implies a complex 'tightrope-walk', as they share (and compete for) power with supralocal institutions, at the same time as having to respond to possible conflicts and demands emerging from below. Local incumbents can find themselves caught 'between a rock and hard place' in that they need to manage efficiently what they see as critical collective problems (e.g., humanitarian emergencies) while trying to keep consensus among native-born residents and assorted local stakeholders.

Mayors are positioned at the zenith of these dense and intricately webs of relationships. As *top elected politicians* and *local party leaders*, they can secure electoral gains by championing highly visible policy changes that epitomize the values of their voter base—also in the prospect of boosting their personal career (Hughes 2017: 367-9; see also Mullin *et al.* 2004). Drawing on their visibility, and possibly their charisma, mayors are able to set the political agenda and draw policy frames in line with their interests and beliefs. Far from being an individual exercise, however, the deployment of such strategies is conditional on their ability crafting large and cohesive coalitions around a certain political vision—possibly the most influential driver of policy change locally (Liu *et al.* 2010). But aside from political affairs, mayors are also *chief executive officers*. While their power is superior when it comes to agenda-setting as compared to the implementation stage (cf. Sapotichne & Jones 2012), they still yield an influence over administrative apparatuses, for instance by directly appointing trusted technical figures. Accordingly, this research has shown that left-leaning mayor(al administrations) are able to crystalize the manifold magmatic forces in support of immigrants that gurgle within the urban political realm, clustering them in a potent—albeit variably unstable and internally contested—alliance.

*Social movement studies*

The contentious politics of migration has escalated in western societies (van der Brug *et al.* 2015)—and even more so in the context of the ‘refugee crisis’ of the 2010s. This is the result of multiple actors’ mobilizations, within both the electoral and the protest arena, either opposing or supporting migrants, diversity, and multi-culturalism (Eggert & Giugni 2015). This study has especially focused on urban social movements *by and in solidarity with* immigrants. Their activists «do not only oppose discriminatory discourses and practices, but also attempt to improve the fate of immigrants in the countries of residence» (van der Brug *et al.* 2015: 14). Over the last two decades, these instances of collective action have proliferated, initiating «a new era of protest» (Ataç *et al.* 2016) and «a new form of activism on the global stage» (Caraus 2018).

The burgeoning literature on pro-immigrant social movements has sought to understand how groups at the margins of society can turn into vocal political subjects (cf. della Porta 2018). Often materially deprived, socially stigmatized, and devoid of voting rights, immigrants are the least likely to become politicized. To solve this puzzle, scholars detected assorted drivers of immigrants’ mobilization, including opportunities and threats in the outer environment (e.g., Morales & Giugni 2011; Zepeda-Millán 2016; Nicholls 2013), dense networks of supporters (e.g., Agustín & Jørgensen 2016; Rosenberg & Winkler 2014), and ‘acts of citizenships’ as breakthrough moments (e.g., Isin 2008; Ataç *et al.* 2016; Caraus 2018). This strand of literature also points at the dilemmas that these collective actors normally face, such as the indispensable and yet obstructive support of ‘native’ allies, whose solidarity can be driven by paternalistic attitudes (e.g., Cappiali 2016; Fadaee 2015).

However, in face of a growing literature on the consequences of collective action (cf. Bosi *et al.* 2016), the political (and policy) outcomes of pro-immigrant movements have been seldom investigated and remain one of the main blind spots in social movement studies (Eggert & Giugni 2015: 168). To fill this lacuna, and based on the seminal work by McAdam, Tilly, and Tarrow on contentious politics (2001), this research introduced the notion of ‘contentious migration policies.’ The adjective ‘contentious’ intends to denote the contested character of migration policy arenas, as well as to move beyond narrow movement-centered perspectives, i.e., considering broader patterns of interaction between claim-makers, elites, opponents, and the state (see also Ataç *et al.* 2016: 536).

In line with the scant literature on the topic (Steil & Vasi 2014), this research confirmed that mobilizations aimed at enlarging immigrant rights are more likely to succeed in influencing

policy-making when local powerholders are sympathetic with such demands. Hence, based on their ideological affinity, public officials and social-movement activists are incentivized to back each other up in enacting pro-immigrant policies at the local level. Yet extant literature neglects how such cooperative dynamics unfold in contexts of multi-level governance—a gap that this study filled in by incorporating a multi-level governance perspective into the study of social movement outcomes. More precisely, it has been shown how the outcomes of pro-immigrant activists do depend on the local context in which they mobilize (what I define as the city politics arena), *but in combination with interactive dynamics unfolding in the civil society arena and the multi-level governance arena.*

Therefore, this research engaged with, and argue for, a deeper interdisciplinary dialogue between migration studies and social movement studies, as the former underestimated the role of activists in shaping the perceptions, strategies, and preferences of policy-makers, while the latter overlooked the question of outcomes in multi-level political environments. Moreover, and relatedly, this endeavor allow us to bring the state into the study of pro-immigrant movements. As mentioned, mobilizations *by* and *in solidarity with* immigrants are caught in a plethora of dilemmas. Most notably, at the root of the struggle for immigrant rights is the refusal of nationally-bounded definitions of citizenship; yet, the nation-state is also the main target of demand-makers, who urge public officials to at least partly accommodate their claims (Darling & Bauder 2019: 13). By locating the question of responsiveness at its core, this research could explore the many facets of this paradox in its complexity.

These insights can also travel beyond the realm of immigration and shed light on movement-state relationships at large. The case of Barcelona, with activists on the radical left forming a municipal government, is so exceptional that poses more general questions in this respect. BeC—quite unique experiment of movement-party coalition—is indeed an offspring of the 15M/*Indignados* movement. Amid the Great Recession, the 15M protesters advanced a radical criticism of neoliberalism, demanding a deepening of democracy and social justice while pointing an accusing finger at political and economic elites. The great intensity of Spanish anti-austerity mobilizations was mirrored in the crisis of the established party system, smoothing the rise of new parties (della Porta *et al.* 2017). On the left, this space was subsequently occupied by Podemos. BeC was founded precisely to funnel the aspirations of urban social movements into the electoral arena.

On the one hand, the Colau's administration is a clear example of how social movements can successfully move from the 'streets' to the 'ballot box.' With mainstream parties perceived as unresponsive to popular demands (Mair 2009), anti-establishment sentiments found expression in the institutional space, possibly recovering liberal democracy from its crisis of legitimacy. Although anarchism and other autonomous movement cultures molded the 'square movements' of the 2010s to a vast extent, the question of the state was at the core of protesters' demands, which included the restoration of 'old' social rights and the regeneration of political institutions (della Porta 2015; Gerbaudo 2017). This marked some discontinuities with previous cycles of contention—most notably the GJM—in which the state embodied an enemy to be defeated more than a structure to be transformed from below. The biographical, cultural, and political outcomes that anti-austerity protests are now producing—especially in the realm of electoral politics—would support this interpretation. The success of new parties such as Podemos and left-wing leaders such as Jeremy Corbyn and Bernie Sanders are the long tail of those mobilizations. In sum, office-holders in the institutions are not inevitably counter-posed to movements, but can act as a megaphone for protestors by making their claims more visible and legitimate.

On the other hand, the BeC's administration forcefully epitomized the limits and contradictions of a social movement with radical aspirations taking office in a national-capitalist context. This research confirmed how conflictual is the relationship between parties in office and their activist base, but not necessarily for the reasons outlined by McAdam & Tarrow (2010). Conflicts were not caused by the attempt of the local incumbents to appeal to the median voter by moving to the center, but *precisely for the opposite reason*. In fact, the 'loyalty' of local incumbents to their activist legacy, their mimicking of social-movement strategies, and their sensitiveness to protesters' demands have fueled, rather than tamed, controversies. Ethnicity bred contestation further, as the propensity of the city government to embrace grassroots demands provoked an antagonistic reaction from the side of immigrant activists (foremost the street vendors collective), as the wish of not being patronized by allies and opponents alike has been at the basis of their process of politicization.

The greatest constraints, however, were of an exogenous nature. While local governments normally lack competencies and resources in many areas, multi-level coordination was especially poor in the case of Barcelona, as neither regional nor national incumbents were of the same political color. Also, pro-status quo coalitions—economic elites, mainstream media, and some

opposition parties—fiercely opposed the most radical policies in the governmental agenda (cf. Eizaguirre *et al.* 2017; Blanco *et al.* 2019). These constraints were particularly sharp in the case of street vendors. Property laws and border controls are intersected factors that lie at the core of the capitalist economy and outside the competency of local authorities. Also, the city government has been confronted with a particularly complex political conjuncture. Most of Colau's term has coincided with the height of the Catalan pro-independence movement, a period of growing polarization within the Catalan society, during which the Spain's executive severely repressed pro-independence mobilizations. BeC has, moreover, faced this difficult situation as a minority government supported by only 11 of the city council's 21 members, forcing it to reach agreements with different parties to pass any policy (Bazurli & Castaño Tierno 2018).

*'We don't forget who we are and why we are here'* is a solemn resolution that BeC's members are used to recall—and yet obstructed by several adverse conditions. Léon Blum—leader of the SFIO (Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière – French Socialist Party) throughout the 1920s—distinguished between the 'exercise of power' (taking office to prepare the groundwork for socialism) and the 'conquest of power' (the actual dismantling of capitalism), cf. Sunkara (2019). The Colau's administration has been caught in dilemmas of this kind, with the risk turning popular aspirations into mere frustration.

### *Urban studies*

Human mobility is a worldwide phenomenon that has profound consequences in cities of transit or settlement. Precisely because immigration is such a paradigmatic urban issue, the findings of this research transcend this immediate policy sector and have implications for the study of urban politics at large. As pointed out in recent endeavors to 'urbanize' political science (Kaufmann & Sidney 2020), the underlying mechanisms of urban policy-making are, in many respects, unique when compared to governance processes unfolding in different contexts. As Stone puts it, «cities are not the nation-state writ small» (2015: 117). Hence, some grand questions that can be answered inductively are: What is distinctive about urban policy-making? What are its typical constraints and opportunities? Or, put succinctly, *how 'urban' is urban policy-making?* It is here contended that its defining features are *density* and *multi-scalarity*, which briefly denote that cities are sites of dense relational networks that articulate over multiple territorial scales.

Urban policy-making is peculiar, first of all, for the collective problems it addresses. Although rural communities also face dramatic global-scale transformations, these changes tend to concentrate in cities because of the large numbers of diverse individuals living in restricted, often overcrowded spaces (cf. Wirth 1938). Urban policy-making is further complicated by multi-level politics (e.g., Hooghe & Marks 2003; Bache & Flinders 2004; Kübler & Pagano 2012). The prerogatives of municipalities are generally narrower than—and subordinated to—those of national institutions. But because of their propinquity to societal change, local policy makers are those ‘forced’ to respond, with or without the support of the central state. Such dynamics were apparent in Milan and Barcelona—even more so during the ‘refugee crisis.’ Major global transformations and flaws in multi-level governance have ‘flowed downstream.’ Global migration, restrictive immigration management, lack of interstate cooperation, and poor national migration governance are all factors that lie outside the competency of local authorities but became critical questions for policy makers at the city level, who have been forced to ‘pay the bill.’

However, whereas these are political constraints faced by any local authority, those operating in cities tend to have a superior ‘firepower’ to stretch them, insofar as cities are strategic sites for political agency (e.g., Nicholls 2008; Sapotichne and Smith 2012). This holds for both municipalities and social movements, which can exploit the relational density of cities to shape the public agenda and access policy arenas at various spatial scales, far beyond their immediate local realms. Urban actors have a strategic toolbox at their disposal for responding to the unfavorable conditions that ‘flow downstream’ by ‘moving upstream.’ This is why cities are often ‘avant-gardes’ whose experiments may travel to other localities or levels of government, e.g., by means of international networks (cf. Caponio 2018). Interestingly, interviewees had very clear these possibility of spreading policy innovations on the global stage. In sum, urban policy-making cannot be simply subsumed under the heading of policy making with a local scope. It seems, on the contrary, hardly ‘local.’

Relatedly, this research shed lights on the importance of cities in projecting a «just, democratic, and sustainable future» (Kaufmann & Sidney 2020: 1). Once more, immigration is an excellent entry point to unpack these dynamics. Modern states are built on, and seek to monopolize, the enforcement of territorial and legal borders. In the ‘age of migration’ (Castles *et al.* 2014), however, their sovereign authority is questioned to the core. This challenge comes, most

notably, from urban societies. In the Global North, amid ever more restrictive governance arrangements at the central level, cities proved fertile breeding grounds for nonconformist responses in support of vulnerable and highly politicized immigrants, such as asylum-seekers and the undocumented. Importantly, local exclusionary policies proliferated too (Ambrosini 2018; Steil & Vasi 2014) and often served as experiments later upscaled at higher tiers of government (Steil & Ridgley 2012). These caveats notwithstanding, the case for the city «as a space that challenges the exclusion perpetrated at the level of the nation-state» (Darling & Bauder 2019: 4) remains valid. In the eloquent words of one interviewee:

«The fact that [the municipality] can avert a deportation or a detainment is powerful in *concrete* terms. But it is powerful also in *political* ones, because you are crafting a local-level legality for defending people that are deemed ‘illegal’ by the [central] state» (B16, emphasis added).

These alternative discourses and practices are first conceived and experimented in activist circles—and possibly embraced and upscaled by local officials later on. Hence, progressive social movements may originate at the periphery of power relations, but are able to craft and disseminate new grammars of democracy in the longer run (cf. Tarrow 2011).

### 9.3 Limitations and avenues for future research

#### *Moving beyond ‘binary’ definitions of migration policies*

The first limitation of this study concerns the definition of migration policies. The research has relied on the distinction between *immigration* and *immigrant* policies (Hammar 1985). While fruitful for analytical purposes, the boundaries between these policy areas are far from neat. Nation-states regulate the conditions for being admitted in their territory, for instance through the regulation of citizenship and asylum. The social rights of foreign-born residents are subsequently stratified based on their immigration status (Bolderson 2011). From this perspective, then, immigrant policy is heavily dependent on immigration regimes. This research has made apparent, moreover, how this connection also works the other way around. In Spain, for instance, local governments have the authority to register undocumented immigrants in their municipal census so as to grant them access to integration programs. Importantly, this registration can also serve

as a legal basis for initiating regularization and family reunification procedures (cf. Garcés-Masareñas 2014: 5-6). Future research may delve deeper on the implication of these interdependencies for the strategies and outcomes of social movements.

Another ‘dualism’ to be interrogated is the one between inclusionary and exclusionary policies. As a recent study points out,

«restriction and integration are conceived not as opposed to one another but as two different strategies devised by government officials *to achieve a common goal: the control of illegalized people in their jurisdictions*. One strategy, restriction, uses punitive techniques and spectacles to spread terror in immigrant communities [...]. The other, integration, governs by separating deserving from undeserving immigrants and deploying disciplinary methods to normalize the former and punitive techniques to repress the latter» (Nicholls 2019: 3, emphasis added).

Future studies may take charge of such a critical perspective to investigate how it is mirrored on the relationship between pro-immigrant activists and policy-makers. For instance, it can hypothesized that inclusionary policies are not simply enacted for accommodating the demands of social movements, but also for co-opting their moderate sectors while controlling more insurgent ones.

#### *Causes and consequences of policy-making and mobilization*

Other avenues for future inquiry are related to the *determinants* of local policies and social movement outcomes. Several instances of collective action scrutinized in this research emerged on the wake of major ‘watershed’ events. This was the case of the solidarity initiatives that mushroomed in the midst of the ‘refugee crisis.’ In Milan, when large numbers of migrants started camping in the Central Railway Station, civil society organizations rapidly mobilized to meet the needs of migrants in transit, especially unaccompanied minors. The SMM platform was created in Barcelona following major events that fueled moral outrage among the public, especially the dismissal of the ‘Mare Nostrum’ search-and-rescue operation, the death of Alan Kurdi on the shore of Bodrum, Turkey, and the EU-Turkey agreement. In the same city, the TeC campaign emerged as a reaction to the death of an inmate, Idrissa Diallo, in the city’s Immigration Detention Center. Also, the death of Mor Sylla—a Senegalese street vendor—was a turning point for

the mobilization of his colleagues. These critical junctures thus seem embedded in extant political opportunity structures (cf. della Porta 2018: 5-11). Rather than creating social movements from scratch, they precipitated the politicization of networks mobilized on different issues or until then focused on humanitarian, seemingly *a*-political actions (cf. Fleischmann and Steinhilper 2017; Zamponi 2018; Sinatti 2019).

Strikingly, these turning points played a crucial role in initiating not only mobilization, but also policy-making. This finding echoes research on ‘focusing events’ as possible driving forces behind agenda-setting (cf. Kingdon 1995). In Birkland’s definition,

«[a] focusing event is an event that is sudden; relatively uncommon; can be reasonably defined as harmful or revealing the possibility of potentially greater future harms; has harms that are concentrated in a particular geographical area or community of interest; and that is known to policy makers and the public simultaneously» (Birkland 1998: 54).

The ‘refugee crisis’ is a highly visible case in point, as it unfolded locally as a humanitarian emergency. Local incumbents could exploit it as a window of opportunity to pursue their goals, namely seeking electoral rewards while responding to emerging policy problems. They can exploit the symbolic power of migration policies in order to discursively intervene in arenas that lie beyond their administrative competences (Castelli Gattinara 2016: 4-5).

Varying ‘magnitude’ of these focusing events seem to produce different patterns of interaction between policy-makers and social-movement activists. In Milan, the humanitarian emergency accelerated the construction of a city-level alliance. Ideological affinity is present, but the urgency to act was possibly a greater incentive to coalesce. This is particularly evident when looking at the confrontational attitude adopted by the municipal government vis-à-vis the central one, even though both were of the same political color. Activists have exploited this apparent contradiction, keeping up pressure on the city government and pushing its agenda closer to their own demands. Logics of convenience thus prevailed over ideological ones. However, these emergency-driven cooperative dynamics possibly became path-dependent, with social movements remaining important voices in policy-making also after the ‘refugee crisis’, as in the case of the municipal registration for residents with no fixed or regular abode. In Barcelona, where the crisis has been relatively softer, the urban alliance seems to be crafted on a more ideological

basis. The city government has also been guided by the prospect of radically transforming EU migration governance.

Drawing on the work by McAdam & Tarrow (2010) on the relationship between parties and movements, in Milan we can recognize a case in which ‘movements polarize parties internally’, whereas in Barcelona there were ‘movements that turned into parties’, i.e., accessing institutions through the electoral channel. This is also mirrored on the stages of the policy process in which the interactions between urban actors mostly occurred. While implementation is especially relevant in Milan (e.g., management of the emergency at the railway station, extension of national policies through volunteering), agenda-setting is more important in Barcelona (e.g., media-oriented actions aimed at impacting the Spanish and the EU agendas). Future research may further unpacks the role of ‘critical junctures’ or ‘focusing events’ in shaping the political outcomes of social movements.

*South European cities and beyond: Toward space-sensitive comparative designs*

This study has compared two large, multicultural, relatively affluent South European cities—Milan and Barcelona. The Italian and Spanish contexts are similar in many respects that are relevant for the comparative study of local government, such as the Napoleonic administrative tradition, the ‘Southern Model’ of welfare systems, and social spending retrenchment (e.g., León & Pavolini 2014). As for immigration, these are countries of recent settlement whose regulatory models are likely to produce undocumented immigration, in a pendulum between restrictive policies and mass regularizations (e.g. González-Enríquez 2009; Caponio & Cappiali 2018). Such weak planning capacities and the logic of emergency that often permeates policy-making have put local actors at the forefront in handling immigration.

This strategy for case selection allowed us to hold constant numerous contextual factors at both the country-level (e.g., welfare systems, models of migration governance) and the city-level (i.e., urban demography, economy, and society). Simultaneously, Milan and Barcelona express significant variations in terms of local migration policies and political dynamics. The interactions between city governments and social movements could be assessed in their nuances thanks to such variations. By means of a strategic-interaction and mechanism-based approach to contentious politics, the findings of this research may contribute to theorize the dynamics of

social movement outcomes in the field of migration. More generally, they may help to understand *how urban actors respond to emerging collective problems in face of highly restrictive and scarcely capable governance regimes.*

Future studies may construct more encompassing comparative designs, for instance selecting cases expressing greater variation in terms of multi-level governance. Comparing South European cities with others in the Global North is a promising avenue of research. Despite different multi-level arrangements in the field of immigration, similar interactions between local governments and movements might be at play—as the history of US sanctuary cities seems to suggest. However, it is worth investigating whether the responses of urban actors follow different trajectories when immigration regimes are still restrictive but yet characterized by superior governance capabilities as compared to the South-European ones (e.g., Germany’s). For instance, Italian and Spanish municipalities seem eager to overstep their jurisdictional boundaries and interfere with national affairs for enacting ‘remedies from below.’ It may be expected that, within more stable governance systems, cities limit their policy-making endeavors within the boundaries of their competencies.

Relatedly, future inquiry may scrutinize more in depth how the leeway of urban actors vary depending on different systems of local government (e.g., mayor-council vs. council-manager system). For instance, the Barcelona’s government made significant efforts to support and protect undocumented residents within its jurisdiction. Yet, the Spanish deportation system remained virtually untouched in its fundamental mechanisms. This is why Barcelona can be referred as a ‘quasi-sanctuary’ city (see [Section 6.2](#)). The incompleteness of its sanctuary practices does not owe, however, to a lack of political will, but to the *actual confines of its governmental authority*. The bargaining power of South European mayors is, in fact, more limited compared to their US counterparts, who have greater leverage to locally subvert federal provisions. Therefore, to develop a more general theory of local migration policy-making, the opportunities and constraints offered by different institutional arrangements have to be unpacked in their smallest particulars. Contrasting immigration with other policy areas in the competencies of local governments (e.g., waste management, drug policy, spatial planning) may offer important insights in this respect, as it would allow researchers to hold constant a considerable number of contextual factors.

Finally, another avenue for future research is to compare policies and social movement outcomes across local contexts of different sizes and types (e.g., large cities, smaller cities, towns,

rural areas, frontiers). As mentioned above, the defining features of cities—namely, the geographical concentration of numerous and diverse individuals in restricted areas (Wirth 1938)—have tremendous political implications. The city indeed works «as a *relational incubator*, facilitating complex relational exchanges that generate a diversity of useful resources for campaigns operating at a variety of spatial scales» (Nicholls 2008: 842, italics in original). Offering generalizable urban comparative insights requires the adoption of *space-sensitive comparative designs* that take into account the distinctive qualities of different geographical settings. Ultimately, this would allow us to productively intersect comparative perspectives that are typical for political science (e.g., cross-national studies) with ‘cross-spatial’ ones, more in line with the tradition of urban studies.

## 9.4 Epilogue

The political trends unfolding in the context of late neoliberalism threaten the survival of representative democracy as we know it (della Porta 2013a; Crouch 2004). The long-lasting economic, political, and cultural crises that affect western countries provided ‘windows of opportunity’ for the success of populist radical right parties (Caiani & Graziano 2019). These latter intercept, and promise to redeem, citizens’ discontent by championing a nativist and authoritarian understanding of social order. Mainstream parties have been eager to chase these challengers in the (often unsuccessful) attempt of neutralizing them (Abou-Chadi & Krause 2018). As a ‘side effect’, far-right politics has become accepted by ever broader sections of the public—a process that can be referred to as *normalization* (Mudde 2019). This has a tangible and detrimental impact on the lives of many, often vulnerable sectors of society—including immigrants, as well as ethnic and religious minorities.

These trends were also apparent in Italy and Spain, albeit with some notable differences. Matteo Salvini, Italy’s Minister of Interior in 2018-19 and leader of the far-right *Lega*, authored two ‘security decrees’, in fact aimed at restricting asylum rights and criminalizing foreign-born residents and their supporters. Previous left-leaning executives paved the way to this punitive approach to immigration, pandering to rightwing anxieties and enacting measures in stark contrast to human rights, as in the case of the externalization of border management to Libyan militias and smugglers. In Spain, far-right forces remained at the fringes of the political arena for

a long time—also due to the success of populist parties of a inclusionary kind (Alonso & Kaltwasser 2014; Font *et al.* 2017)—but ultimately made their breakthrough on the national stage in 2019. Both the mainstream parties that dominated domestic politics over the last decades (the PSOE and the PP) have contributed to enforce a heavily militarized control of frontiers in Ceuta and Melilla, the two Spanish enclaves surrounded by Moroccan territories.

Cities have proven to be more hospital environments for immigrants' integration in face of, and *notwithstanding*, hostile rhetoric prevailing at the national level. One might argue that 'winners of globalization'—who have increasingly settled in dense urban settings—tend to bear more liberal worldviews (Gidron & Hall 2017). Also, immigrants often choose to settle in cities because of the higher chances of finding jobs and accommodations, accessing social networks, and benefiting from anonymity (Kaufmann 2019). This would then explain why cities are more 'immigrant-friendly' environments compared to other settings. On the other hand, the city is also where immigrants more starkly suffer from spatial segregation and where exclusionary practices are first experimented. Urban scholars indeed refer to the city as an 'ambivalent' spatial setting (Enright & Rossi 2017). Within such a contradictory context, the peculiar qualities of urban spaces—notably, the availability of dense relational networks extended over an array of geographical scales—allow immigrants to create bonds of solidarity, craft alliances, and turn into vocal political subjects (Nicholls 2016). Hence, if the city emerge «as a space that challenges the exclusion perpetrated at the level of the nation-state» (Darling & Bauder, 2019: 4), this ultimately owes to immigrants themselves.

This research has shown that immigrants and their allies *do* beget political change. Job training programs were launched, shelters were arranged, religious diversity was celebrated, bans on the children of undocumented residents were abolished, deportations were averted, forced migrants were allowed to reach their preferred destination. All these were, more or less directly, by-products of collective action. Also, activists and their institutional allies propagated pro-immigrant discourses well beyond their own local realms—thus projecting the image of a radically alternative social fabric. As cities tend to catalyze and anticipate social change, all these outcomes will likely affect the lives of many elsewhere. These victories, however, were far from recurrent, definitive, or univocal. Dealing with power carries many risks, contradictions, compromises, and

frustrations. But nothing would have been attained without mobilization. In the words of Frederick Douglass—leader of the US abolitionist movement—«power concedes nothing without a demand» (1857). It seems, then, that struggling is always worth the effort.

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## Appendix: List of interviews

### M: Milan

ID	Location	Date	Actor	Language
M1	Milan	11 July 2017	Sociology professor	Italian
M2	Milan	25 July 2017	Law professor	Italian
M3	Milan	26 July 2017	Trade unionist	Italian
M4	Milan	26 July 2017	Economics professor	Italian
M5	Milan	27 July 2017	NGO leader	Italian
M6	Milan	27 July 2017	Sociology professor	Italian
M7	Milan	8 September 2017	Social movement activist	Italian
M8	Milan	11 September 2017	Civil servant	Italian
M9	Skype interview	11 September 2017	Political science professor	Italian
M10	Milan	13 September 2017	NGO leader	Italian
M11	Milan	26 September 2017	Trade unionist	Italian
M12	Milan	27 September 2017	Political science professor	Italian
M13	Milan	28 September 2017	Civil servant	Italian
M14	Milan	28 September 2017	Civil servant	Italian
M15	Milan	28 September 2017	Social movement activist, trade unionist	Italian
M16	Milan	29 September 2017	Civil servant	Italian
M17	Milan	23 January 2018	Social movement activist, trade unionist	Italian
M18	Milan	23 January 2018	NGO leader	Italian
M19	Milan	23 January 2018	Social movement activist	Italian
M20	Milan	26 September 2018	Politician, member of the city government	Italian
M21	Milan	27 September 2018	Social movement activists [2 <i>participants</i> ]	Italian
M22	Milan	28 September 2018	Civil servant	Italian
M23	Milan	28 September 2018	Social movement activist, trade unionist	Italian
M24	Milan	17 January 2019	NGO leader	Italian
M25	Milan	17 January 2019	Social movement activist	Italian

## B: Barcelona

ID	Location	Date	Actor	Language
B1	Barcelona	19 March 2018	Researcher, social movement activist	English
B2	Barcelona	23 March 2018	Researcher	English
B3	Barcelona	6 April 2018	Social worker, social movement activist	Spanish
B4	Barcelona	6 April 2018	Social movement activist	English
B5	Barcelona	11 April 2018	Researcher	Italian
B6	Barcelona	12 April 2018	Social movement activist	English
B7	Barcelona	18 April 2018	Sociology professor	English
B8	Barcelona	24 April 2018	Social movement activist	Spanish
B9	Barcelona	26 April 2018	Law professor	Spanish
B10	Bellaterra	26 April 2018	Researcher	Spanish
B11	Barcelona	2 May 2018	Politician, member of the city government	Spanish
B12	Barcelona	4 May 2018	NGO leader	Spanish
B13	Barcelona	7 May 2018	Social movement activist	Spanish
B14	Barcelona	8 May 2018	Researcher	Spanish
B15	Barcelona	10 May 2018	Civil servant	Spanish
B16	Barcelona	28 May 2018	Civil servants [2 <i>participants</i> ]	Spanish
B17	Barcelona	6 June 2018	Trade unionist	Spanish
B18	Barcelona	7 June 2018	NGO leader	Spanish
B19	Barcelona	12 June 2018	Politician, member of the city government	Spanish
B20	Barcelona	18 June 2018	Trade unionist	Spanish
B21	Barcelona	20 June 2018	Politician, member of the regional government	Spanish
B22	Barcelona	11 July 2018	NGO leader	Spanish
B23	Barcelona	16 July 2018	Social movement activist	Spanish
B24	Barcelona	18 July 2018	Social movement activist	English
B25	Barcelona	23 July 2018	Social movement activist	Spanish
B26	Barcelona	23 July 2018	Social movement activist	Spanish
B27	Barcelona	25 July 2018	NGO leader	Spanish
B28	Barcelona	30 July 2018	Social movement activist	Spanish
B29	Barcelona	31 July 2018	Social movement activists [2 <i>participants</i> ]	Spanish
B30	Barcelona	31 July 2018	Researcher, journalist	Italian
B31	Barcelona	31 July 2018	Politician, member of the city government	Spanish
B32	Barcelona	31 July 2018	Politician, member of the regional council	Spanish