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Europeans, Shut the Borders! Anti-refugee Mobilisation in Italy and France

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Introduction

The influx of refugees that reached Europe over the summer of 2015 quickly came to be represented as a 'crisis' by the mass media. The public experienced high levels of anxiety about immigration and asylum across Europe, especially throughout that summer (Berry et al. 2016). While many factors explain the emergence of negative attitudes towards immigrants, these feelings are arguably partly due to the rising popularity of the far right and its anti-immigrant rhetoric (see, e.g. Ceobanu and Escandell 2010). Scientific literature and mass media commentators have noted that economic strains, and concerns over terrorism and the cultural assimilation of immigrants, have encouraged the growth of populist anti-immigration parties throughout the last decades.

More broadly, the events that have been portrayed as a 'refugee crisis' have brought about discussions on the borders of Europe, triggering a diverse spectrum of views on how societies must be organised, primarily in terms of who is to be included and who, instead, is to be excluded.

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While governments tend to dominate the political debates on migration, their main opponents are often represented by anti-immigration actors challenging government policy on asylum and migration (Berry et al. 2016). Representing migrant populations and refugees as aliens who infiltrate Europe to corrode its social and cultural fabric, these actors challenge the solidarity movement by voicing concerns about 'unlimited' and 'uncontrolled' migration (Ataç et al. 2016).

The long summer of migration in Europe was characterised by two major developments in anti-immigration politics. On the one hand, it contributed to further shifting the debate to the right, transcending the boundaries of far-right politics and reaching into the political mainstream (Richardson and Colombo 2013). On the other, it triggered an upsurge in far-right and anti-immigration street politics (Mudde 2016). While the far right in Western Europe has long been considered as exclusively a party phenomenon, the events of 2015 saw the emergence of a variety of new organisations engaged in extra-parliamentary activities and hybrid forms of mobilisation, paving the way for the development of a broad, European, anti-immigration movement. Given its emergent nature, however, we still know remarkably little about the motivations, choices, and repertoires of action of this movement. Not only have very few scholars studied anti-immigration mobilisation at the level of street politics, but even fewer studies have been grounded on original face-to-face interviews with militants and party officials involved in anti-refugee activities (e.g. Busher 2015; Meleagrou-Hitchens and Brun 2013; Benček and Strasheim 2016; Castelli Gattinara et al. 2013). Understanding how anti-refugee street politics unfolded, and how opposition to migration is framed, reveals a great deal—not only about the anxieties of European public opinion but also about the construction of mainstream political debates on migration that the mobilisations in solidarity with refugees had to address. The goal of this chapter is thus to investigate anti-immigration street politics in the wake of the refugee crisis, unveiling the main strategies of contention deployed by anti-refugee actors and the main frames by which they attributed meaning to the events.

We shall focus on two carefully selected national settings: France and Italy. Veugelers and Chiarini (2002) suggest that the main difference between far-right politics in the two countries is crucially linked to

opposition to migration and nativism, which are considerably more politically viable in France than in Italy. Over the past decade, however, both countries have been characterised by electorally successful right-wing populist parties, even though they also present significant differences in terms of public policies on immigration, as well as in dominant discourses about ethnic diversity and the integration of migrants. Moreover, while they are located at different stages in the EU migratory map, they are both affected by the phenomenon of transit migration (Council of Europe 2014). By exploring the connection between mobilisation at the street level, on the one hand, and the framing of migration, national identities, and diversity on the other, we thus aim to compare anti-immigration mobilisation in France and Italy in the shadow of the so-called European refugee crisis. To this end, the chapter starts by presenting the data upon which the study is based, and then moves on to contextualise far-right politics and opposition to migration in the two countries. We then analyse the crucial features that have come to characterise activism against refugees over the long summer of migration in Italy and France, with a specific focus on their practices of mobilisation and predominant frames of collective action.

Methods and Data

This chapter is based on 23 semi-structured interviews with activists engaged in anti-refugee initiatives and high-ranking officials from far-right and anti-immigration political organisations. Thirteen interviews were conducted in four Italian cities between January and March 2017 (Rome, Milan, Ferrara, and Treviso), and ten interviews in France (Paris, Calais, and Versailles). This is a remarkable feature of our study, considering that research on anti-immigration groups has been mainly based on secondary data (Blee 2007; Goodwin 2006) due to longstanding problems of access to far-right officials and their reluctance to share internal information with academics and journalists (Mudde 2007).

With the goal of overviewing the different types of actors comprising the anti-refugee front, we addressed three different types of actors engaged in opposition to migration. First, we approached people working as local

representatives for established far-right political parties and organisations. Second, we addressed members of movements and pressure groups campaigning against refugees. And third, we considered unaffiliated activists who took part in grassroots assemblies that were formed ad hoc by citizens to challenge the settlement of camps in their local territory. The organisations were contacted by phone or email using information retrieved from mass media reports of anti-immigration protests and from previous knowledge about the network of mobilisation against refugees in Europe. Unaffiliated activists were then contacted through other participants, the Facebook pages of local anti-immigration collectives, and personal contacts developed during the fieldwork.

Concerning social movement organisations, we addressed activists engaged in the grassroots politics of the extremist right Forza Nuova in Italy and Génération Identitaire in France, including local militants and activists in charge of external communication as well as high-ranking national officials. Both groups normally engage in electoral as well as street politics, and articulate their political mobilisation primarily against immigration, globalisation, and Islam. Forza Nuova displays an enhanced propensity for confrontational forms of political contention, especially in recent times, while Génération Identitaire has agreed on a strategic division of labour with the Front National, withdrawing all candidates for the 2017 French presidential elections and explicitly endorsing the campaign of Marine Le Pen. In France, I then considered two political associations opposing immigration but located at opposite ends of the French secularist cleavage: the traditionalist Catholic far-right Civitas and the outspokenly Islamophobic secularists of Riposte Laïque. In addition to these groups, we addressed local officials and elected representatives who are regularly involved in routinised and conventional politics. This includes members of far-right political parties, such as Lega Nord in Italy, as well as local representatives from municipal lists, such as in the case of Versailles Familles Avenir in France.

When relevant, we asked for prior authorisation of the group leadership to conduct interviews with activists. Prior to the interview, we briefed participants about the main purpose of the study, underlining that the research covered solidarity groups and anti-refugee organisations alike. Subsequently, interviewees were asked to reconstruct the

mobilisation against refugees in which they participated, discussing their personal involvement in the initiatives. We then approached their main understandings of migration and their relationship with other actors in the same context or political area. Although participants were left free to discuss the aspects of the issue that they deemed most relevant, they were asked their personal and collective assessment of how the mass media and politicians dealt with the crisis, their proposed solution, and the policy proposal and dissemination material that they had developed throughout the campaigns.

All but three of the interviews were conducted face-to-face and recorded, and on most occasions the interviewees were happy to be given the opportunity to share their personal experiences. On several occasions across the two countries, however, the interviewees presented themselves under pseudonyms, declining to share their biographical and professional details. Overall, there was a certain degree of variation among the people who took part in the study, especially in terms of employment and level of education. The interviewees were aged from their mid-20s to more than 50 years old. In Italy, younger activists were university students, with some experience with far-right youth movements and organisations. While older respondents generally held lower levels of education, the activists engaged in knowledge production for the anti-immigrant movement generally possessed university degrees. In contrast, the interviewees belonging to established political parties, as well as local representatives, were mostly professional politicians. Unaffiliated activists were often unemployed and described other participants in the protests as either unemployed or outside the labour market. Perhaps most strikingly, only two of the participants we could interview are females.

Comparing Opposition to Migration and Asylum in Italy and France

The comparative perspective requires examining the conditions under which anti-refugee mobilisation is articulated by strategic political entrepreneurs. The migration history of the two countries is crucially different: while France can be considered a traditional country of migration, Italy

has turned from origin to international destination more recently. Hence, public debates on migration are based upon considerably different conceptions of citizenship. The French republican model, dominated by a 'universalistic' understanding of integration which stigmatises cultural specificity (Scrinzi 2010), generated debates on the wearing of religious symbols in the public sphere (Lemière 2007; Scott 2007). The Italian model is instead generally appraised as 'familistic', in that it is based upon belonging to the national community by descent (Zincone 2006). This creates a crucial demarcation between insiders and outsiders, since increasing numbers of people living, working, or studying in Italy are devoid of citizenship due to the ethnic imprint of the legislation and public debate on the matter (Zincone and Basili 2013). Overall, therefore, Italy should display a more clear-cut demarcation between 'insiders' and 'outsiders', especially with respect to second- and third-generation residents.

Since 2015, moreover, Italy has been one of the countries most directly affected by the migration crisis, and most heavily involved in search-and-rescue operations in the Mediterranean. Of the one million refugees who arrived in 2015, more than 150,000 landed in Italy, resulting in a 31 per cent increase in the yearly asylum application rates (Eurostat 2016). This triggered much public controversy, especially on the scale and cost of the Italian involvement in patrolling operations and on tensions with migrants escaping from temporary hosting facilities (Berry et al. 2016). In France, the impact of the inflow has been considerably more limited in terms of asylum applications, as well as political and mediatic clamour. While initially the government rejected the European Commission proposal to locate 40,000 asylum seekers in France, based on the argument that the country had already taken its share of the 'burden', it subsequently endorsed the German proposal for a European relocation scheme (Tardis 2016).

The two countries also display remarkably different scenarios in terms of negative attitudes on migration and asylum. According to a recent Pew Research Center survey, by 2016 a majority of Italians believed that refugees represented a major threat. In France, the share of concerned respondents was much lower, among both left-wing and right-wing respondents (Pew Research Center 2016). Furthermore, 60 per cent of Italians and

'only' 47 per cent of French were concerned that refugees would increase domestic terrorism, whereas 65 per cent of respondents in Italy and 53 per cent in France believed that refugees would have a negative economic impact. In Italy, finally, 47 per cent of respondents believed that refugees were more to blame for crime than other groups in their nation, a figure that is 15 per cent higher than the European median and twice that of France (Pew Research Center 2016). Accordingly, Italy is likely to offer many more opportunities to mobilise on refugee issues, as these pertain to multiple dimensions of migration including access, transit, residence, and exit. In contrast, much of the public debate in France focused exclusively on the management of migrants stranded by the North Sea in the so-called Calais *Jungle*.

Against this background, the nature of anti-immigration politics in Italy and France is highly comparable. The two countries display a neat distinction between institutional and street politics, which is likely inherited from the historical experience of the New Right, resulting in the double mobilisation of far-right parties as well as movements oriented towards more unconventional forms of activism (Mammone 2015). In this respect, anti-immigration parties have had a considerable impact on immigration politics and policy in both Italy and France for at least two decades (Carvalho 2014; Castelli Gattinara 2016). In France, the authoritarian-populist Front National (FN) enjoys remarkable influence in the political, mediatic, and electoral arena, even though it does not count on a stable representation in parliament. Especially since the beginning of Marine Le Pen's project of 'de-demonization' of the party (Mayer 2013; Crépon et al. 2015), the FN's agenda on migration, security, and Islam (Smith 2010; Odmalm 2011; Maler and Salingue 2016) represents a crucial resource for anti-immigration movements, which are otherwise constrained by laws forbidding religious, ethnic, and racial discrimination (Camus 2009). Similarly, in Italy, right-wing social movements enjoy a privileged channel of communication with the electoral and media arenas thanks to the significant electoral relevance of Lega Nord (see Caiani and Parenti 2013). The blurred distinction between mainstream and far right led to the polarisation of political conflict on migration, with mainstream actors promoting openly xenophobic vocabularies and thus legitimising radical anti-immigration movements in national

and local political landscapes since long before the current crisis (Castelli Gattinara 2016). Accordingly, it is reasonable to anticipate a certain degree of similarity in the choice of anti-refugee narratives, as well as main forms of mobilisation against immigration, across the two countries.

Mobilising Against Refugees in France and Italy

Today, Italy serves as the main point of entry to Europe for migrants and refugees, together with Greece. Refugees transiting through Northern Africa and taking the road of the central Mediterranean usually arrive in Italy through Sicily, and then move to the French border in the attempt to reach the United Kingdom. The enhanced border controls throughout Europe, however, and the lack of appropriate structures to accommodate asylum seekers, resulted in the emergence of several illegal settlements in different areas in Italy and France, especially in border towns like Ventimiglia and Calais. In both Italy and France, thus, law enforcement authorities have been heavily involved in the relocation of asylum seekers in dedicated structures and camps distributed over the national territory. Still, the choice of locations and the identification of the structures for hosting them soon became a major source of political disagreement and conflict.

Since the beginning of summer 2015, anti-refugee protests have emerged under the initiative of actors claiming to be unaffiliated with the far right. Rather than configuring a homogeneous protest movement concentrating on nationwide events, thus, mobilisation took place at the local level and coalesced around specific situations and grievances. Furthermore, anti-refugee protests combined conventional activity in the institutional arena with grassroots mobilisation by assemblies of citizens that emerged to address local problems. In this respect, the repertoires of protest of the movement opposing immigration and asylum politics were differentiated among spontaneous grassroots mobilisation, institutional intervention by organised parties and local authorities, and various forms

of street politics. As outlined below, we could identify a similar pattern of protest in the two countries, characterised by three main forms of mobilisation: (1) direct interventions and confrontational protest, which are not only aimed at escalating conflict but also at exerting control over the territory to prevent the settlement of migrants; (2) 'whistle-blower' actions, or media-oriented events, with the goal of denouncing malpractice by state and refugee aid organisations, and creating alternative knowledge about the 'crisis'; and (3) institutional or administrative acts promoted by members of political parties or local authorities and mayors, with the goal of inhibiting the settlement of refugee centres or temporary camps.

Direct Intervention and Confrontational Actions

A first prominent form of political engagement concerns direct interventions and confrontational actions against the settlement, displacement, and management of migrants. This type of action includes interventions to ensure security at the neighbourhood level, the squatting of buildings predisposed to hosting immigrant families, and street blockades and confrontations with police to prevent the settlement of migrants. We likened these to the concept of direct social actions, as they differ from traditional forms of engagement addressing third parties (e.g. the state, the media) and demanding their mediation to solve a public problem (Bosi and Zamponi 2015; Froio and Castelli Gattinara 2016). Rather, they offer a direct contribution against something perceived as dysfunctional, in this case migration and insecurity. While often focusing on socioeconomic emergencies, far-right actors also make use of direct actions when dealing with immigration and law and order issues (Froio and Castelli Gattinara 2016).

In Italy, this took place primarily by means of blockades against the transfer of refugees—or supplies for refugees—from one location to another, organised either by local grassroots assemblies (e.g. Abano dice No in Veneto) or street movements and parties (Forza Nuova, CasaPound). In France, the predominant form of action was vigilantism (by Calaisiens en Colère and Génération Identitaire). Still, examples of both forms of

engagement could be observed in the two countries. In general, interviewees state that the starting point of all protests is the concerns of citizens, who feel abandoned by the state and thus mobilise seeking a 'concrete' answer to their grievances:

> Our group was formed in response to the aggressions that took place in Calais over the past months: there were thefts and rapes, some houses were squatted. There was degradation: some animals were stolen, eaten, killed. We don't have proof it was them, but well, we know it anyways. (Interview FR1)

> When the citizens saw the truck with the people from the cooperative approaching, they startled, they took on the street and blocked it. I think we can say it was basically an uprising. […] There were no clashes with the police. The cooperative workers ran away, and left the camion with the supplies there … and then someone set on fire the televisions and the mattresses. (Interview IT1)

Despite much emphasis on the spontaneity of the protest, however, direct actions benefit from the expertise and resources of organised far-right groups. While local party leaders have been keen to ensure that no recognisable political symbols or flags were shown to the media, far-right militants from Forza Nuova consistently underlined that they provided logistical support, information, and personnel to local committees, as these were principally composed of citizens with little, if any, prior experience with active politics (Interview IT3). One example of this is the numerous 'permanent pickets' that were built in front of buildings supposed to host refugees in northern Italy:

> The picketing started when the people that had gathered there informed us that they [the police and the NGO] were about to come to survey the building. We [Forza Nuova] went there and brought in more people in front of the building, so that we could prevent the survey by the cooperative and gardening companies that would have to take over the place. We were not too many, but we warded them off, pacifically. (Interview IT2)

Furthermore, activists promoted vigilante and patrolling activities. Grounded in the belief that state executives and the police failed to

defend citizens from migrant criminality and violence, they decided to engage on their own to protect the citizenry. While similar practices are also common among the far right in Italy (Forza Nuova, CasaPound Italia; cf. Froio and Castelli Gattinara 2016), this experience was most notable in Calais, where local inhabitants joined groups of vigilantes patrolling the streets and looking for illegal campsites. Gathering support, resources, and volunteers through Facebook, the Calaisiens en Colère claim to be 'complementary' to the activities of the police:

> When there was the Jungle, our main goal was precisely to avoid aggressions, rapes, or migrants squatting houses, and even more so to prevent roadblocks on the highway. […] Now that the Jungle has been dismantled, our mission is to look for the new camps that have been formed, and at the same time to prevent aggressions in highway parking, where they frequently squat some space. (Interview FR2)

> If we get there at the right time, we use some very strong flashlights—much stronger than the ones used by the police—which might be upsetting for them. […] We flash them so that they believe that we are the police. It often works, but when it doesn't we have to call the police with the tear gas and the uniform. (Interview FR1)

In this respect, 'dissuasion' stands out as a crucial dimension in various forms of direct activism. This is most evident in the 'Defend Europe' campaign, promoted by the French Génération Identitaire in co-operation with groups in Italy and other European countries. The goal is to set up a search-and-rescue mission documenting the (mis)behaviour of NGOs engaged on the Libyan coast, exposing their illegal activities and collaboration with smugglers (Defend Europe 2017). This type of activity directly relates to dynamics of movement-countermovement action. In fact, most interviewees reported that their intervention had the ambition, or the effect, of dissuading opponents (especially NGOs) from pursuing a project, action, or criminal activity. Dissuasion is also at the core of vigilante activity, as activism is framed as a form of dissuasion against migrants willing to commit criminal offences:

> We make some tours by cars, in four or five people. Sometimes we have several cars and we are equipped with walkie-talkies. We look around and

> see what goes on. […] It is dissuasive … because after all, concretely, we cannot do much: we cannot beat them up, we cannot arrest them, we cannot do anything. We can only scare them, that's all. (Interview FR1)

In Italy, anti-immigrant organisations correctly understood that law enforcement agencies and NGOs in charge of the resettlement of refugees would not proceed with the actual transfer of guests if there was a risk of confrontation with citizens. Accordingly, anti-refugee protestors formed grassroots assemblies (e.g. Treviso ai Trevigiani) and then organised permanent pickets blocking the entrance of buildings, with the logistical support of Forza Nuova. On one occasion, while the direct action was successful in dissuading the police from pursuing the transfer of refugees, the picketing continued for several months, as activists from Abano dice No feared that the plan would be implemented as soon as public attention decreased:

> When DIGOS [political police] arrived, and saw that we were many and that we had blocked the access, they simply decided not to try and enter the building. Still, we started the permanent picketing, from September until now, day and night. We are equipped with a television, and a generator to warm us up. Now we have organized shifts, but we are still there. (Interview IT2)

Overall, French and Italian anti-refugee activists share a similar approach to direct and confrontational interventions, anticipating their positive impact on local communities coping with the negative consequences of migration. Direct activism is thus framed as productive of material results and concrete solutions to urgent problems. At the same time, direct and confrontational actions also have broader consequences, in that they attract the attention of the media by showing that citizens are 'exhausted', and give local authorities leverage to ask more engagement by the police or to reconsider refugee management projects. Both in Italy and in France, therefore, we found a certain degree of co-ordination among various actors, including self-organised groups of citizens, local mayors and council members, and activists from extremist right-wing parties. As we shall see, these are crucial elements to understanding the choice and nature of anti-refugee mobilisation in Italy and France.

Whistle-Blower Actions and Knowledge Production

The second form of mobilisation against refugees concerns actions primarily oriented at attracting the attention of the mass media and the public. Since media attention is a crucial resource for any movement seeking to influence public policy, anti-refugee protestors resorted to this type of action to generate a reaction, increase awareness, and create a moral panic. While the mobilisation choices are similar across the two countries, as we shall see, the accompanying narratives are considerably more radical in France than in Italy: if anti-immigration actors in Italy must balance out between the legitimate and illegitimate areas of political competition, French social movements seem to have more leverage and legitimation in developing their own discursive repertoires.

A first form of media-oriented intervention can be categorised as whistle-blower actions: the promoters—either individual activists or social movement organisations—stage communicative or protest acts to signal situations they consider unjust and raise awareness about them. In this respect, a French interviewee from Génération Identitaire explicitly mentions that:

> Our political engagement is very peculiar: our activism is like Greenpeace. The way we express ourselves, staging spectacular actions, has the goal of imposing a debate and the terms of this debate in the political sphere. We want to build the political agenda based on our issues and our words. (Interview FR4)

The main objective of these actions is thus to change public discourse on migration. The Italian anti-immigration movement mobilised against corrupt NGOs, the mass media, and 'multiculturalist' elites that have strategically constructed the concept of a 'refugee crisis' to soften public opinion and legitimise the 'invasion'. Similar narratives have widespread resonance in the Italian public sphere, as demonstrated by a 2017 intervention by former PM Matteo Renzi, who stated that immigration control is incompatible with 'philosophical do-goodism and universalist utilitarianism' (L'Unità 2017). A more radical interpretation emerges among French activists, who accuse NGOs and the governments of

colluding in a project of 'replacement' of European populations: white nations are progressively repopulated by non-European migrants, and European values are replaced by foreign cultures and faiths:

> We must create awareness that what we are facing is not a crisis. It is an invasion. We can't call it an emergency either, it has been lasting for too long. Every day there are new arrivals. And they don't come from war-ridden countries. (Interview IT4)

> I believe that it there is no refugee crisis. What we are facing is primarily the mediatisation and acceleration of a phenomenon that has been going on for years, with the goal of pointing the finger at European populations and making them feel guilty. (Interview FR4)

Both in Italy and in France, moreover, the anti-refugee movement contests the entitlement of applicants to refugee status. The idea is that asylum seekers, rather than being 'real refugees', are instead irregular economic migrants. In Italy, Forza Nuova and Lega Nord tried to promote this interpretation by retrieving and diffusing documents and material from established organisations and public institutions. In the following examples, this repertoire is drawn upon to question the actual numbers making up the refugee crisis, using information from institutional sources:

> They land in Italy claiming the status of asylum seekers, but the estimations of the ministry of Internal Affairs say that only 2% are real refugees … And I wonder whether even that 2% is made of real refugees. Anyways, 98% of them are just Africans looking for a job or a life opportunity. (Interview IT13)

> The numbers provided by the police headquarters are very clear: the nationalities of people making up the so-called 'refugee emergency' are the same of the people making up what we called 'illegal immigration', when we could still call it with its real name. (Interview IT8)

The quotes suggest that the mass media may be imposing the use of a certain terminology, thus denying the problem that 'bogus' refugees are immigrants who act dishonestly and attempt to stay in the country illegally. A similar approach is seen in France, especially with groups like

Civitas and Riposte Laïque accusing the mass media of silencing the truth about immigration and Islamisation. In the following example, activists point out their struggle for a correct representation of the immigration phenomenon, stressing the importance of the alternative media for producing new channels of information beyond the political mainstream:

> First, we engage at the intellectual level. Against propaganda media, we publish articles on our website and inform the French citizenry on immigration, Islamisation and its wrongdoings. Information is crucial. We also give arguments to people, producing summary dossiers for people, so that they can use them to discuss with, and convince, people around them. (Interview FR9)

> Today, when the mainstream media report of an aggression by an immigrant, they will write 'aggression by a young man'. We must be able to read between the lines. If we suspect that perhaps there is more to it, we start looking for testimonies, or photos etc. […] It's what we call the *reinfosphere:* the field of re-information. It's a series of non-professional media which offer semi-journalistic enquiries on taboo issues. (Interview FR4)

Knowledge production thus benefits of the interplay and exchange of information between organised groups and individual citizens. On the one hand, supporters and social media provide the material to deconstruct public narratives about migration. On the other, anti-refugee groups produce their own information and material, offering arguments that people can use in discussions about the crisis. The willingness to create 'alternative' knowledge on migration and asylum is a crucial dimension of mobilisation against refugees, and it is based on the long-lasting idea that multiculturalism constrains public debates by refusing to acknowledge social and security problems (Vertovec and Wessendorf 2010). In this sense, much anti-refugee activism in Italy and France has concentrated on diffusing and amplifying the problems brought about by the arrival of immigrants and refugees, challenging the cultural hegemony of multicultural values.

Numerous forms of production of alternative knowledge could be found in France, most notably by Riposte Laïque and Génération Identitaire. These range from the production of alternative news to in-depth studies of the Quran and reportages on the Islamisation of Europe. The most notable

example was the production of informational dossiers by Génération Identitaire, entitled 'How to answer to the lies about migrants?', with data to contrast statements such as 'there is no link between immigration and delinquency', or 'there is no link between immigration and terrorism' (Les Identitaires 2016a). The dossiers offer an overview of the main argument proposed by their political opponents, a discussion of 'why they say so', and a list of elements confirming that 'it is not true'. Concerning refugees, the documents suggest that:

> The term 'refugee' defines individuals who have suffered persecution in their country of origin, and thus qualify for the right of asylum. This right has been perverted and transformed in a new channel of immigration in Europe. By speaking of 'refugees' instead of 'illegal migrants', the aim is to deceive the European people by encouraging them to pity the fate of the millions of immigrants who flood their continent. (Les Identitaires 2016b)

In Italy, a similar function was served by activities aiming at denouncing malpractices by refugee aid organisations. Targeting primarily the national and local media, for instance, Forza Nuova and Lega Nord activists produced small documentaries, or journalistic reportages, denouncing degradation, criminality, and illegality in refugee hubs. The material is then circulated via social media and local news agencies, with the goal of coalescing dissent and possibly triggering the intervention of law enforcement agencies. The underlying idea is that the refugee crisis is the result of a 'business of hospitality':

> We promote investigative activities: we produce photos, documents, testimonies confirming that the living conditions of the asylum seekers hosted there were at the limit of human decency. Thus, the day after, the cooperative in charge of the building transferred all guests to another location. […] The problem is that when we do this type of things, they accuse us of racism. But our protests are also aimed at increasing awareness on the living conditions in refugee centres, and on the business of hospitality. (Interview IT8)

> When we can make an investigation, we do not necessarily have to take on the streets and make the barricades. Our enquiries on the apartments that were given to refugees, or on [name refugee aid organization], originate from our collaboration with employees in the municipality, as well as

with people working in the NGOs that have realised the problems in this system. (Interview IT9)

Institutional and Administrative Actions

The third form of intervention is institutional in nature: with the goal of inhibiting the settlement of refugee camps, members of political parties, local authorities, and mayors promoted administrative acts addressing law enforcement agencies and national political actors. This brought together local officials from different political areas, including members of radical right and centre-right parties, and was based on a variety of administrative devices including municipal votes, issuing of local referendums, and the temporary bans on the distribution of food to migrants. Perhaps because the institutional experience and representation of Lega Nord is considerably greater than that of Front National, however, this repertoire was much more prominent in Italy. Contextual factors also explain cross-national variation in anti-refugee narratives, as opposition to migration in Italy focuses primarily on sanitary and corruption issues, in France on security and terrorism.

In Italy, administrative interventions by Lega Nord members in municipal assemblies generally aimed at slowing down the procedures for the settlement of refugee centres. This included formal procedures inhibiting the use of allegedly 'dangerous' or unstable structures designed to host refugees, as well as legal initiatives against the cooperatives in charge of the hosting facilities. Institutional actions primarily addressed local health authorities, with the goal of certifying that refugee centres were unhealthy or sanitarily unsuited to host guests. Lega Nord and Forza Nuova administrators, as well as local members of mainstream right- and left-wing parties, tried to demonstrate that a given town was unsuited to hosting refugees, focusing on potential harm to the local economy or damage to the natural environment, health, or tourism. At the same time, they argued that their local territory had already paid its 'price' (also in relation to pre-existing burdens, e.g. economic crisis, natural disasters, etc.):

Our greatest problem is that [our town] lives from tourism. If they build a refugee hub here […], our wellness tourism is doomed, it's hopeless. I have

> been in touch with the hoteliers and I was told that tourists that have been coming for holiday here for twenty years have cancelled their reservation once they heard the news. The refugee hub would be our tombstone. (Interview IT2)

> We said no to the prefecture's request to welcome refugees on our territory. About 10% of our citizens are regular migrants. Moreover [our town] is earthquake-stricken and about 600 people, 5% of the population, are still unable to go back to their house. Hence, we must be exempted from the obligation to host refugees, and we are struggling with the regional council who is willing to disattend the agreement. (Interview IT7)

The idea that local communities have done 'enough' is crucial in these narratives, which often contrapose a lack of resources for locals to the new ones made available to refugees, generally articulated in terms of 'locals must come first'. This has paved the way for the emergence of many local assemblies lobbying on the need to prioritise the interests of locals, such as Treviso ai Trevigiani, Como ai Comaschi, and so on. In France, the focus is on the need to protect the local citizenry, endangered by irresponsible, or dysfunctional, immigration policy. For instance, local council members from Versailles Familles Avenir present themselves as mediators between the government, or law enforcement agencies, and the citizenry. In this way, the contestation of the decision of welcoming refugees is not based on an explicit, ideological opposition to immigration but rather on pragmatic argumentation, which associates resettlement choices with security threats to the local population and the French nation:

> As an elected official, I must cope with this subject and with the anxiety of my fellow citizens. I am not ideological: certainly, I am a conservative, but I do not consider myself as extreme right-wing. Not everyone who deals with immigration must necessarily be associated with that political area. Migration is a subject that should concern all political parties. (Interview FR6)

> We learned that the Prefect wanted to open a welcoming platform—some sort of desk—ten meters away from the entrance of a private school. The most important college in our town. […] I sent him an official letter, saying that I would file a complaint against him to the public prosecutor, for any harm to public order, be that theft, rape, or aggression. […] It was

> very simple: the day after, the prefect communicated that he would not pursue with the construction of the desk. (Interview FR5)

Local administrators thus present themselves as engaged in the grey zone between the representatives and the represented. Located in between these two poles, they act as defendants of the interests of the local citizenry, against central authorities. While they cannot be blamed for immigration policy, they have the means to minimise the negative impact of the current crisis by deploying strategies to deny shelter to refugees, by slowing down the administrative procedures, and by giving visibility and legitimacy to citizens' concerns. Thus, local politicians often merge an ideological opposition to immigration per se, with a more pragmatist argumentation about the unsuitability of their own territory to hosting refugees.

In Italy, this is done primarily—albeit not exclusively—by mobilising on sanitary issues linked to public health and living conditions in the buildings hosting refugees. This allows them to shift the focus away from Lega Nord's and Forza Nuova's anti-refugee attitudes while placing attention on the misconduct of pro-refugee organisations and the inappropriateness of the welcoming system in Italy. This is perhaps the most striking form of movement-countermovement interaction in the field of refugee politics, collapsing into a single category the government, progressive left-wing parties, transnational human rights associations, as well as anti-racist networks. The underlying idea is that immigration is a business for these groups, as corrupt NGOs make profits from the current crisis. Local authorities thus have the responsibility of protecting the safety of citizens (especially in terms of health and sanitary issues):

> People come to me and tell me something like: 'there are thirteen people that are sleeping here and there'. Once I know this, I mobilize on their behalf: I send a letter to the health authorities and they immediately intervene, […] which they would not do if they were informed by a citizens' assembly only. (Interview IT9)

> The Lega Nord […] took care of the more institutional side of the protest: they organised the monitoring by local health authority, and tried to put pressure taking advantage of their position within the institutions. (Interview IT1)

In France, collective action frames link terrorism, physical insecurity, and the presence of refugee camps and migrants, because migrants are a 'population with a high criminal proclivity' (Interview FR5). If the authorities plan to build a camp in proximity to a school, there is a risk that migrants may rape children or students; if the camp is close to the water factory, Jihadists might poison the water supply; if a camp is near a computer science institution, it risks jeopardising national defence and intelligence. Actors thus stress the public responsibility of local authorities versus the political irresponsibility of the government that is mismanaging the inflow of migrants. In this understanding, the government and the police are putting the nation in danger, either because they are unprepared to cope with the crisis or because they are corrupt. Local authorities thus have a moral obligation to intervene before migrants become a physical threat to citizens:

> 90% of the time these people are denied the status of refugees. Yet, they remain here, in a juridical 'no man's land'. […] They have no official status; the police do not even take their fingerprints; we don't even know how old they are! The public authority is simply incompetent in dealing with this problem. If migrants are refused the status of refugees, well, they must go back to their country. (Interview FR6)

> First, they wanted to construct the camp at the entrance of the factory in charge of the water distribution in the whole region, while the Jihadists had threatened that they would poison France's water supply! It would be a camp with 5000 guests, and there could be a commando of 100 persons attacking the factory just in front. […] I filed an action against the prefect mentioning that he handed parts of the national territory to a group of migrants—which could be under the influence of a foreign power or organization. […] In case of a terrorist attack, he could be charged with high treason. (Interview FR5)

Conclusions

In France and Italy, the long summer of migration triggered not only the wave of solidarity analysed in other chapters within this volume but also a cycle of anti-refugee protest of considerable size and impact. By placing borders at the core of the public debate, the so-called refugee crisis paved

the way to a social process of moral panic, where exclusionary actors could benefit from crucial symbolic resources to perform their privileged role of entrepreneurs of fear. On the one hand, mobilisation against migrants was fuelled by the fear of terrorism and physical threat, the idea that the newcomers were culturally incompatible with the values and traditions of Europeans, and the perception that political elites had betrayed the social contract with the people. On the other, anti-refugee mobilisation had to do with movement-countermovement dynamics, especially in relation to delegitimising narratives against NGOs and the solidarity movement.

By observing the practices of mobilisation and the framing of collective action in Italy and France, we were also able to detect important departures from traditional anti-immigration politics. First, there has been an upsurge in street politics: facing the unresponsiveness of national public authorities to growing discontent with immigration policy, anti-refugee activists engaged in the protest arena, exerting pressure on policy-makers and offering immediate answers to problems perceived as urgent. Second, there has been a variation in the nature of the mobilisation, which now brings together a variety of different actors ranging from local representatives to grassroots citizen assemblies and organised far-right parties. As a result, throughout the long summer of migration, activists have organised a broad range of actions, including conventional actions within the institutional arena, confrontational and direct actions in the protest arena, and cultural struggles aimed at creating alternative forms of knowledge.

Furthermore, despite considerable differences in the patterns of opportunity for mobilisation in Italy and France—and the different locations of the two countries along the migration route in Europe—our analysis shows much similarity in the way in which opposition to immigration was articulated, confirming the crucial role played by far-right actors in the two countries. At the same time, this implies that exclusionary politics are built on a set of common elements which, at least according to the promoters of the protest, define the phenomenon of immigration at the local, national, and European levels. In their protests and networks, there are at least two main ways in which anti-immigration movement opposed the arrival of refugees. Mobilisations organised by allegedly non-partisan and grassroots groups at the local level focus on the contingent situation

of a specific territorial area, suggesting its inappropriateness to hosting migrants and refugees, but not openly opposing the politics of hospitality towards refugees per se. In contrast, the engagement of far-right actors generally implies that protests turn against immigration and refugees in general. Irrespective of this, however, the logic underlying both types of protest is similar, suggesting the interpenetration between grassroots citizens' initiatives and far-right mobilisation on migration affairs. Finally, anti-immigration activists have engaged in a cultural struggle to challenge the idea that migrants arriving in Europe deserve the status of refugees. They accuse them of acting dishonestly, to the detriment of people who truly deserve to receive refugee status, and they accuse the political establishment of hypocrisy for turning immigration into a business. Corrupt NGOs, the mass media, and multiculturalist elites are accused of having strategically constructed the concept of a 'refugee crisis' to legitimise the invasion and destabilisation of Europe.

In so doing, the anti-immigration movement has effectively updated its repertoire based on a simple dichotomy between truth and untruth, in the attempt to increase the legitimacy of their discourse in the public sphere. True refugees deserving hospitality are opposed to fake refugees who dishonestly apply for status; real data by independent organisations is opposed to the fake information circulated by the mainstream media; real humanitarianism 'at home' is opposed to false humanitarianism of money-seeking NGOs; and real facts about Islam and terrorism are opposed to the self-defeating ideology of multiculturalism promoted by the corrupt elites of Europe. By mobilising on notions of respect for human rights strategically, by describing anti-refugee protest as a wide popular uprising against unresponsive political elites, and by rejecting the language of racial superiority, in conclusion, the anti-refugee movement can be broadly situated within the turn to 'civic' values that has characterised much exclusionary politics in Europe in recent times.

Interviews

IT1: Activist in anti-refugee mobilisation at the local level and member of Forza Nuova, Treviso, 17 January 2017.

IT2: Activist in anti-refugee mobilisation at the local level, Abano (PD), 17 January 2017.
IT3: Activist in anti-refugee citizens' assembly, Volpago sul Montello (TV), 18 January 2017.
IT4: Activist in anti-refugee citizens' assembly, Volpago sul Montello (TV), 18 January 2017.
IT5: Member of *Forza Nuova*—national level, Rome, 23 January 2017.
IT6: Activist in anti-refugee campaign at the local and national level and member of Forza Nuova, Milan, 24 January 2017.
IT7: Local administrator and member of Lega Nord, Bondeno (FE), 30 January 2017.
IT8: Regional administrator and member of Lega Nord, Bondeno (FE), 30 January 2017.
IT9: Activist in anti-refugee campaign at the local level and member of Lega Nord, Bondeno (FE), 30 January 2017.
IT10: Member of Forza Nuova—local level, Ferrara, 31 January 2017.
IT11: Activist in anti-refugee campaign at the local level, Ferrara, 31 January 2017.
IT12: Activist in anti-refugee campaign at the local level, Ferrara, 31 January 2017.
IT13: Member of Forza Nuova—national level, Rome, 6 February 2017.
FR1: Activist in anti-refugee campaign at the local level, Calais, 17 March 2017.
FR2: Activist in anti-refugee campaign at the local level, Calais, 17 March 2017.
FR3: Member of Civitas—national level, Paris, 19 March 2017.
FR4: Member of Génération Identitaire—national level, Paris, 20 March 2017.
FR5: Local administrator, independent, Versailles, 21 March 2017.
FR6: Local administrator, independent, Paris, 21 March 2017.
FR7: Activist in anti-refugee campaigns at the national level, Paris, 21 March 2017.
FR8: Member of Riposte Laïque, Paris, 24 March 2017.
FR9: Member of Réponse Républicaine, Paris, 24 March 2017.
FR10: Activist in anti-refugee campaigns at the local level, Paris, 25 March 2017.

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