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Refugee Solidarity in a Multilevel Political Opportunity Structure: The Case of Spain

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Introduction

Spain is part of the Schengen border, comprising the only European frontier with the African continent. This geostrategic location is crucial for the Spanish role within the EU migration and asylum policies, as it has traditionally facilitated the inflow of migrants. However, since the beginning of the financial crisis, the immigrants living in Spain have particularly suffered, and many have returned to their countries of origin (Hellgren and Serrano 2017). In sharp contrast with other European cases, Spain has not experienced a massive inflow of refugees under the so-called refugee crisis. In part, this was due to the stricter conditions imposed by the Spanish government and the Moroccan authorities to prevent people from crossing the so-called Southern border (Zaragoza Cristiani 2016).

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In early September 2015, the Spanish government negotiated with the other European governments to host 2500–3500 refugees (Pérez 2016). Spain's offer was similar in number to those of other countries run by conservative parties, such as Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary. In this context, the image of the dead body of a three-year-old Syrian boy drowned on 2 September 2015 in the Mediterranean Sea made global headlines, becoming a transformative event that increased civil society's pressure, not only but also through protest activities. The incident changed the government's position as, on 15 September 2015, Spain committed to welcoming more than 17,000 refugees. Far from meeting its self-imposed standards, however, six months later, the Spanish government had only admitted the embarrassing number of 18 refugees in total (Pérez 2016). By the end of 2016, Spain had hosted only five per cent of the refugees to which the government had committed in the two-year period, September 2015 to September 2017 (Público 2016).

In spite of the government's ambiguous position, a strong social movement in solidarity with refugees developed within the country, with varying degrees of institutionalisation. This included well-known organisations, such as the Spanish Committee of Refugee Aid (CEAR) and the Red Cross, together with hundreds of grassroots solidarity initiatives all over the country, as well as Stop Mare Mortum (SMM), a very politicised group dealing specifically with refugees in transit. Additionally, Spanish activists were overrepresented abroad, for example, in the Greek camps. In fact, Spaniards are considerably more concerned about refugee issues than are most of their European counterparts, as various surveys show.¹ The inexistence of a relevant political opposition to the refugees also proves the favourable political context for the solidarity movement in Spain.

Despite the general strength of the solidarity movement in Spain, the spread of protest, its features, and citizens' reactions vary dramatically from town to town. In this chapter, we focus on three subsets of cases, which we will explore in detail, based on our fieldwork: the Southern border, Barcelona, and Andalusia and Galicia. Before moving to the empirical part, we highlight the importance of the local dimension—and especially of varying local-level opportunity structures—for the mobilisations in solidarity with refugees. We conclude by highlighting the main contributions of this chapter.

Political Opportunities at the Local Level in Spain

Despite the relatively low number of refugees, Spain has a long history of dealing with waves of immigration, with long-established NGOs and organisations focusing on the issue (e.g. CEAR). Citizens' mobilisations tend to have a transnational scope, but they are deeply rooted at the local grassroots level and are characterised by the—comparatively rare—absence of relevant anti-refugee protest events led by racist counter-movements. However, the solidarity movement with refugees in Spain is quite heterogeneous, assuming different characteristics in different municipalities, which became crucial arenas for contention, given their capacity to carry out specific policies independently from the national ones.² Regarding refugee policies, the relevance of local agency relative to national policies has been highlighted (e.g. Katz et al. 2016; Juzwiak et al. 2014). As far as contentious politics is concerned, places like Tahrir Square in Cairo, Puerta del Sol in Madrid, and Gezi Park in Istanbul have played a central role as (symbolic) arenas of political action. In fact, since the 1990s, the relationship between space and contentious politics has received growing attention in the social sciences (Andretta et al. 2015, p. 200), and so has the study of the political opportunity structures at the local level.

In his pioneering work, Eisinger conceived political opportunity structures 'as a function of the degree to which groups are likely to be able to gain access to power and to manipulate the political system' (Eisinger 1973, p. 25). Later, other authors would elaborate this idea by suggesting that institutional factors were mediated by the characteristics of protesters' allies and opponents (e.g. Kriesi 1989, 1991; della Porta and Rucht 1995). In fact, social movements interact with a variety of actors within the public administration, in the party system, among interest groups, and within the civil society. During a cycle of protest, including recent campaigns for the refugees' rights, relationships of conflict or co-operation among these actors intensify.

As far as allies are concerned, several social movements have developed special links with political parties, such as the labour movement and the socialist parties, ethnic movements and regionalist parties, ecologists and

the Greens, and so on. According to Goldstone, 'political parties and social movements have become overlapping, mutually dependent actors in shaping politics' (Goldstone 2003, p. 4). Although the configuration of power on the left is particularly important for social movements (Kriesi 1989, p. 296), some authors argue that participation by left-wing parties in government has a negative effect on collective action because it discourages those who are potentially more protest-prone from actual protest. For example, Koopmans and Rucht (1995) found that left-wing protest increases under right-wing governments and vice versa. Thus, when faced with a government to which they feel closer, social movements reduce the use of protest and increase their use of direct pressure. In addition, the presence of powerful allies has a moderating influence on social movement tactics (della Porta 1995; della Porta and Rucht 1995), in part because when in power, progressive politicians tend to support moderate demands on issues compatible with their traditional voters (Kriesi et al. 1995, p. 59).

In Southern Europe, several cases of collaboration between parties and movements can be mentioned, including the feminist (della Porta 2003; Valiente 2003) and the global justice movements (della Porta et al. 2005; Tarrow 2005). Activists from these movements have influenced the institutional Left by focusing on the traditional demands of social rights and justice, which are also central to the social movement in solidarity with refugees. To sum up, 'the presence of powerful allies is generally a factor facilitating social movement success' (della Porta and Diani 2006, p. 218). Although the availability of allies is expected to increase the mobilising power of protest, it may in fact weaken anti-government performances in the streets when the allied party is in office.

Another dimension of the political context that is crucial for our analysis is the policing of protest. In Spain, we have identified two locations, Ceuta and Melilla, where the level of coercion applied to the collective action by asylum seekers and their supporters has been increasing in the last years. Techniques developed in these sites have also been applied elsewhere in the EU. This is consistent with the conservative narratives and securitisation policies focused on stimulating panic, which have presented juvenile protestors as a threat to social order in a country with low criminality rates but high levels of fear of crime (Calvo and Portos 2018).

In this chapter, we look at the activists' perceptions of the local opportunity structures and their impact on social movement strategies. In studying the role of activists' allies and opponents, the Spanish case has the advantage of a lot of variation. Following the previous cycle of anti-austerity mobilisations, a number of movement parties (della Porta et al. 2017b; Portos 2016) emerged in the country. Along with cities governed by traditional parties, such as the conservative PP and the social-democratic PSOE, a number of municipalities are run as so-called cities of change, by Podemos-backed candidacies—among them Madrid, Barcelona, Santiago de Compostela, and Zaragoza. Social movement studies would expect the presence of allies in government to facilitate movement success, but also to reduce the need for contentious action, which would instead grow in radicality when opportunities are limited.

To address this issue, we have compared cities with different political opportunities. We start the analysis with a case in which the local government was indeed elected on a platform in which solidarity with migrants occupied a central role: Barcelona. We then continue by comparing, within Galicia and Andalusia, some Podemos-backed local governments (A Coruña, Cádiz) with municipalities led by the PSOE (Seville, Córdoba) and PP (Ourense). Finally, we look at the two enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, where political opportunities are particularly closed, with high levels of repression. In all the mentioned localities, we carried out more than 30 semi-structured interviews with key informants, plus desk research. Although most of the interviews were conducted between April and October 2016, our research time frame covers the period between 2015 and late 2016.

Barcelona: Does the Movement Jump into the Institutions?

In the European context, Barcelona is a special case. Politically, the city council co-ordinates the European refugees' network at the inter-municipal level. Moreover, a number of protest events for refugees' rights have taken place regularly in the city, promoted by a broad range of groups, associations, and networks focused on solidarity initiatives at the

local level (e.g. hosting refugees in private houses) and internationally (e.g. volunteering in the refugee camps abroad). Regarding network configurations, these mobilisations are of a mixed nature. On the one hand, they are connected to previous activism, in particular (but not only) in the fields of immigration and development. On the other hand, they include groups and organisations created in 2015 and 2016, many of them as a consequence of personal or very small-scale initiatives.

Although there are tensions, in Barcelona there is more proximity between movement and party than in other Spanish cities. Among the new SMOs created during the crisis, Stop Mare Mortum was built from collaborative networks and personal relationships to gradually become an umbrella platform aimed at co-ordinating most of the various initiatives by civil society.³ It focuses on challenging the current regional, national, and European policies of migration and asylum, and on major monitoring of the business agreements (including halting the selling of weapons to countries in violation of human rights) and the destination of aid and development funds (Stop Mare Mortum 2015). Its spokesperson defines its concrete role in the whole panorama of Catalan SMOs working on refugees as follows:

When we started, there were already people working on the causes of the problem. That is, war. The peace movement here has a long tradition and its main organisations had been claiming against arms' trade and the situation of the Middle East conflicts, for example. Also, there were well-established NGOs welcoming refugees who had already arrived here. But in between there was a vacuum. No one was dealing with the transition since these people leave their home countries until they reach our society. (Interview S7)

As the movement network around the refugee issue was flourishing in the depths of the crisis in the Mediterranean, the 2015 municipal election brought in Ada Colau—a social activist and former spokesperson of the PAH (Platform of those Affected by the Mortgages)—as the city's new Mayor, with the issue of refugees as one of her political priorities.

Similarly to other Spanish cities, local activism in Barcelona is trying to fill the gap between what the central government has promised to do and what it has done in reality. While the government pledged to facili-

tate the arrival of thousands of refugees, since the beginning of the crisis, the numbers have been much smaller. The head of the city council's refugees' office confirms the existence of such a gap: 'The Spanish State has not allowed us to fulfil our duties as citizens and as institutions in order to welcome asylum-seekers following international law' (Interview S10). According to our interviewees, this gap is one of the main reasons why non-politicised people have joined the social movement in solidarity with refugees.

In sharp contrast to other parts of Spain, religious organisations have played a marginal role in the mobilisations on refugees in Barcelona. In the words of a local activist, 'even though some of them are rebellious, their focus here is usually on assistance. They have signed manifestos, but there is always the element of saving people, assisting them, rather than the political confrontation that characterize us. We need political confrontation, because we want to change the policies' (Interview S14).

In the evolution of 'the refugee crisis', two turning points have been identified. As elsewhere in Spain, one of them is the picture of the drowned child Alan Kurdi, which reached people with profiles different from the traditional activists and dramatically increased protest participation. As confirmed by a participant in many demonstrations, 'in May 2015, there were no more than 30 people in our demonstrations. In September 2015, we were already 500' (Interview S13). Moreover, several local associations were created following this event.

The second significant moment in this evolution was the EU agreement with Turkey. According to the same activist from SMM: 'paradoxically, it helped the movement. Prior to that, we were overemphasizing several internal differences we had. This agreement strengthened the cohesion of the group' (Interview S13). Meanwhile, the movement kept expanding. In March 2016, 15,000 people demonstrated. As the activist continues: 'we had to create "open assemblies" because more and more people kept coming to our internal meetings. We began to say "no" to some invitations to give talks' (Interview S13).

Regarding the diffusion processes, there have been efforts to create local sections of SMM in other Catalan cities, such as Girona, Lleida, and Tarragona. In addition, in other parts of Spain such as Galicia, proposals have emerged to create similar platforms with the same political project

of focusing on the right to safe passage for refugees in transit from their countries of origin to the countries of destination. In the words of an activist from SMM, 'it was unimaginable that it could reach the level of mobilization that has been achieved' (Interview S14). On 19 June 2016, more than 100 organisations came together in a joint call for a demonstration, with representatives of the local government opening the march, thus showing that the social movement has evolved and become an established actor within the civil society.

Friends and Foes

Even in Barcelona, however, activists define their relationship with the city council as cordial but claim that flows of communication could be improved. We have already noted the diversity existing within the platform, which includes members of different left-wing political parties. The activists who are more closely aligned with Ada Colau's coalition, Barcelona en Comú, are not among the most active, despite the favourable discourse of the Mayor of Barcelona toward the refugees' cause. The availability of allies at the local level seems to increase the resources available to the movement and to present an opportunity to advance their claims in the institutional arena, expanding their popular support and enhancing their influence over the policy-making process. However, as a side effect, internal tensions and disputes have arisen over the movement's strategic choices (collaborative versus confrontational tones with institutions), along with criticisms of the Mayor for turning the refugee issue to her advantage without effectively redressing the situation. As described by this activist from SMM, there are opportunities but also challenges related to the presence of political allies in the city council:

This is a movement that emerges from below and remains this way. It cannot be controlled by the City Council of Barcelona or by the regional government. Sometimes, people close to the City Council have tried to take our place. There is a very specific political orientation and an attempt of the municipality of the city to become the leader of the defence of the refugees' rights. They truly believe in this cause, but there is a political

advantage for them. From an electoral standpoint, this is an appealing issue in Barcelona. (Interview S11)⁴

As far as the opponents of the movement are concerned, ‘only tourists sometimes criticize our protest events’, says a local activist (Interview S13). This situation is quite exceptional in the context of the European Union, where organised far Right groups have targeted refugees, sometimes even physically. While Catalan activists working on immigration issues are often insulted through online networks, Barcelona has not seen any anti-refugee protest events. This might be explained by a number of factors. Some might posit that the tiny number of refugees in the city does not challenge coexistence—but in other countries (e.g. Poland), there is strong opposition against refugees despite their small numbers. Rather, the existence of a local, grassroots anti-racist and anti-fascist movement might have contributed to the lack of resonance of anti-immigrant and anti-refugees’ frames for mobilisation. In addition, the Indignados movement has channelled citizen discontent in a more constructive and tolerant way than in other countries. Importantly, immigrants were overrepresented and very active in many social endeavours that have large popular support (e.g. the Platform of those Affected by the Mortgages, PAH, which fights evictions). Additionally, the political agenda in Catalonia was focused on countering austerity and promoting independence. Mobilisations on both issues used and pre-figured democratic-emancipatory and inclusionary frames (della Porta et al. 2017a), which are not compatible with non-solidary conceptions around the refugee issue.

Finally, although there might be demand for a populist radical right party, there is no strong national-level successful force within this ideological spectrum. On the one hand, (potential) populist radical Right parties are punished by the Spanish electoral system (Alonso and Rovira-Kaltwasser 2015). On the other hand, the party competition system and electoral strategies of the conservative Partido Popular are successful in appealing to both moderate and (also extreme) right-wing-leaning citizens. While many of its founding members had ties to the Francoist regime, the PP has become a sort of catch-all party on the right wing of the electoral spectrum, at least until the national-level irruption of the

centre-liberal Ciudadanos. Also, advancing an anti-immigration agenda in Spain while detaching from Francoist reminiscences would be problematic—this is particularly important in Catalonia, where civil society actors tend to portray themselves as leaning toward the Left. As a member of the International Commission of SMM stressed, ‘we come from a dictatorship still very recent and this makes us a little scary to link us with xenophobic movements coming from the extreme right. Fortunately, there is not an anti-immigration party. And potential supporters of such a policy do not want to be associated with the dictatorship. They would feel disappointed’ (Interview S14).

Andalusia and Galicia: Discursive Opening in the ‘Cities of Change’

In the last few years, various Podemos-backed local governments have launched the ‘cities of change’ network of municipalities in Spain. Most of them have participated in launching the ‘Refugees Welcome’ initiative. In order to assess the impact of potential allies on the characteristics of the mobilisations, we studied two different regions (Andalusia and Galicia), comparing in each of them municipalities run by movement-related candidacies with others led by more traditional forces. Specifically, we focus on two cities run by Podemos-backed candidacies in very different settings, Cádiz and A Coruña, and others ruled by more traditional forces (PSOE and PP) such as Córdoba, Seville, and Ourense. According to our empirical evidence, having forces of change such as Podemos in office in several city councils has some consequences, but mainly at the discursive level. While such potential allies embrace the movement’s demands, they neither necessarily act accordingly nor lead the transformation of claims into policy priorities. In part, this may be explained by the Spanish government’s unwillingness to implement pro-refugee policies. Since the commitments regarding the number of refugees to be let into the country have not been transformed into actual country-wide policies, most local politicians have, in the words of a local policy-maker, their ‘hands tied’. That is, they cannot use their own resources to welcome the refugees that have not arrived as they were supposed to.

Beyond local politics, the configuration of the social movement in Spain combines different strategies and objectives. While some of the solidarity groups have traditionally focused on direct help (e.g. Andalucía Acoge, Teranga, Cáritas) and raising social awareness (e.g. Acción en Red), more recent—grassroots—initiatives emphasise refugees' empowerment and organise contentious activities (e.g. Córdoba Ciudad Refugio). In addition, pre-existing networks have played an important role in the emergence and persistence of the solidarity campaigns. In smaller cities, several solidarity platforms emerged from Catholic Church-related foundations and organisations that operate from a charitable work perspective. Finally, there seems to be a trend toward an increasing regional- and national-level co-ordination, as several campaigns are on the rise (e.g. No Somos Delito, SOS Racismo, Caravana a Melilla, Caravana a Grecia). Having said this, we also noted that, as the numbers of asylum seekers who have actually arrived in Spanish cities are scanty, people have tended to demobilise.

In Andalusia, the solidarity movement with refugees faces several challenges. On the one hand, as a social activist based in Cádiz argues, 'people are sensitized, but the socio-economic conditions of the local population are bad. This is one of the reasons why the refugee issue is a bit blocked here' (Interview S18). On the other hand, the actual number of refugees that make it to the region remains low. As an activist from APDHA in Cádiz continues, 'different from what happens in Italy or Greece and with the exception of Ceuta and Melilla, here we have not encountered the problem of refugees' arrival in conditions of needing direct aid' (Interview S2).

As in other places, the movement in Andalusia consists of a mix of traditional SMOs and new projects created since 2015. The Asociación Pro Derechos Humanos de Andalucía (APDHA) is the most important organisation working in the field of immigration in the region. APDHA is a well-established and widely known organisation that has maintained its subversive character. It consists of grassroots activists, many of them with long records of protest, together with younger volunteers. It is closely related to the Catholic Church, as one activist from APDHA in Cádiz explains: 'our association was founded by a priest and we have many links with the working-class people within the Catholic Church,

which are very progressive' (Interview S2). While APDHA does not only deal with migrants, this section is particularly strong in the towns located in the Bay of Cádiz—where migrants would normally arrive on boats from Africa. In absolute terms, 'we are a modest organization (we work only in Andalusia) but also ambitious (we defend all human rights). We aim to give voice to the underprivileged people, such as prostitutes, imprisoned and migrant population' (Interview S2). Although varying in size and profile, APDHA's mission on activism around migrants and refugees has three components: (a) to facilitate their reception, by proposing the instruments needed so that the municipalities can accommodate refugees; (b) to put pressure on the governments, pointing at their responsibilities; and (c) to raise awareness within the local population, which is particularly hard hit by the crisis. In this perspective, activists have deployed mixed tactics. In Seville, they would organise one gathering or night vigil in the main square of the city every time one person died in the Mediterranean. They also conduct research and generate reports and are often present in the media.

The relationship between the new groups and more established organisations is not always smooth. In the words of a local activist of the *Plataforma Activista Social*,⁵ 'large NGOs deliver awareness-raising activities, which is something that needs to be done, but we do something else' (Interview S17). With regard to the associations working on human rights issues, they view these new initiatives with mixed feelings: 'This is ethically acceptable, these people try to do good from the heart, but they do not always know how to single out where the real problems are' (Interview S2).

With regard to the activists' backgrounds, in Cádiz the *Indignados* movement that took to the streets in Spain on 15 May 2011 and shook the country during the following months has played a less significant role than in other cities, such as Madrid or Barcelona. The most meaningful effect of the 15M is the politicisation of some (arguably key) social actors, including the current Mayor of Cádiz. As a human rights activist noted,

He [the Mayor] had been active with the *Hermandad Obrera de Acción Católica* [Worker's Brotherhood of Catholic Action, a working-class organisation set up by the Catholic Church], which is a relatively strong organization of the progressive Church. The participation in the squares contributed to his

political commitment. Moreover, many young people started to work with us after the 15M (Interview S2).

Indeed, the selection of Cádiz as a case study was motivated by the fact that its Mayor has one of the most progressive public discourses in relation to the refugee issue, quite similar to Barcelona's Ada Colau. However, our research suggests that the situation in Cádiz is not much different from that of other city councils with a traditional political party in government. Generally speaking, activists admit that access to institutions has improved with the new parties in government, although they also complain that the new municipal policy is more about 'nicer and more radical words' than about a real change in concrete policies (Interview S5, local activist). Perhaps because activists' expectations were so high, the local governments' policies have failed to meet them.

After the publication of the picture of Alan Kurdi, several city councils of the region began to declare themselves as 'cities of refuge'. Most of them created 'a committee for refugees' to co-ordinate efforts with the various actors working on this issue. Activists use these committees to pressure institutions to move from solidarity statements to solidarity policies. In the words of a local activist from the Plataforma Activista Social, 'all these "cities of refuge" are mere mechanisms to catch media attention. They are formulas that are useful to improve their reputation in relation to the movement of solidarity with refugees. But we ask the institutions to take the lead' (Interview S17). For example, activists complain that city councils do not use all of their potential instruments, including municipal television and radio stations, to raise awareness within the local population. Interestingly, according to a human rights activist, 'the only city council that has done it is Jerez, with a PSOE Mayor' (Interview S2). Moreover, he continues, 'among all the refugee committees in the region, the only one that works fairly well is the one in Jerez', in part because this is the only place where there are actually refugees (Interview S2, activist from APDHA in Cádiz). Aware of their limitations, activists blame local governments for not doing more. A local activist summarises it this way: 'It is not something that should remain in the realm of charity or in the solidarity of the people, but it must be a governmental commitment' (Interview S17).

Comparing Cádiz with two cities run by the traditional centre-Left (led by PSOE, which also governs at the regional level), Córdoba and Seville, we note similar tensions with governments considered as discursively supporting refugees but hesitant in translating words into practice. While Córdoba has been a left-wing leaning city (the IU or PCE has ruled the city town hall for almost 30 years), Seville has historically alternated between the conservative PP and social democratic PSOE.

In Seville, the capital of Andalusia, actions in solidarity with refugees are co-ordinated through the Somos Migrantes platform ('We are Migrants'). Formerly known as 'Platform against Institutional Violence', the group has moderated its framing to make it resonant for a wider audience. Most organisations working with refugees and migrants at the local level are members of this network—including several NGOs and foundations, as well as grassroots actors linked to the Catholic Church, but also some local political parties and unions. Overall, we find a wide array of well-established organisations in this field, which however has not clearly grown in members after 2014–2015.

In the wake of the crisis, a new grassroots organisation was born and gained considerable strength though: the Asociación de Ayuda al Pueblo Sirio de Andalucía (AAPS). This group is critical of the largest international organisations working in the field which are perceived, as highlighted by this grassroots activist, as more interested in money than in action: 'I have lost all respect for them [ACNUR and the Red Cross]. They do not have credibility, they get huge amounts of money, but do nothing to redress the situation. For them this is business' (Interview S19). Many of the activists have participated in the 15M campaign and other anti-austerity protests. Not by chance, they tend to frame the conflicts and their social engagement by pointing at the linkages between the issue of refugees and the neoliberal critical juncture. In the words of the same grassroots activist, 'we do not speak about a crisis of refugees, we do speak about a humanitarian crisis, caused by ruling neoliberalism and selfishness' (Interview S19).

Both AAPS-Andalucía and the organisations working under the Somos Migrantes network feel that left-wing actors (traditionally IU, but also Podemos and, in general, the local Participa Sevilla platform) are more willing to listen to their claims. As observed in other areas, while the PSOE has

a discourse that is receptive to the movements' claims, actions do not follow. As confirmed by a local activist from Somos Migrantes, 'the declaration of Seville as a city of refuge, which the Platform promoted, is now on standby' (Interview S21). Some people from AAPS-Andalucía are also critical of the cities of refuge initiative, which they consider 'nice, but empty of content' (Interview S19). Most activists claim that the local government is supposedly sensitive, but not really committed to the issue of refugees.

On another front, there are some rather spontaneous far Right actions against migrants—including some personal attacks—but these events are very rare and loosely co-ordinated. In addition, police tend to repress illegal street vendors—many of whom are immigrants without legal permits.

In some regards, the situation is similar in Córdoba, where the municipal government has set up an umbrella platform (Plataforma Córdoba Ciudad Refugio) that encompasses the most relevant civil society actors in the field, including unions and parties. Activists' perceptions of the (left-wing) local elites are rather positive. While their relationships with the PSOE local governments (supported by IU-Ganemos, which is a citizen platform related to Podemos, as well as former activists from IU) 'have not been bad, they should be much more committed with the refugees and migrants' (Interview S1). This mismatch between discourse and action when the Left is in power is also stressed by the co-ordinator of APDHA's regional Migration Committee, who happens to be based in Córdoba. He complains that 'I have never been granted an official meeting with the former IU mayors of Córdoba. I think they (left-wing local politicians) often regard us as traitors of the left ... but we owe nothing to anyone. We come here to stand for human rights, regardless of the party in office' (Interview S12). Nevertheless, according to the same activist, relationships with the PSOE government are better than with the conservative PP, which literally 'made our lives impossible' (Interview S12).

Similar to activists in AAPS-Andalucía in Seville, grassroots activists in Córdoba tend to conceive their field of action in a broader sense. As a local activist stressed, 'we need to make a shift and try to converge with pro-Palestine and pro-Sahrawi platforms in order to globalise our discourse. After coming from Calais, where there are refugees from all over

the place, we saw and remembered many conflicts, which we seem to have forgotten about' (Interview S1). On the one hand, this is consistent with the biography of most assembly members in Córdoba: many hold previous records of activism and even report current, overlapping memberships with other social movements (anti-globalisation, labour, austerity, feminist, pro-Sahrawi, etc.). In sharp contrast with members of other organisations more devoted to assistance or mere awareness raising, many activists have travelled to hot-spots in order to contribute to easing the humanitarian crisis.

A similar picture emerges in Galicia from the comparison of Ourense, a conservative bastion (traditionally PP-ruled), and A Coruña. A Coruña has traditionally been run by the PSOE, but since 2015 a left-wing nationalist and Podemos-backed platform, Marea Atlántica, has been in office. Notwithstanding the different colours of the administrations, regarding mobilisation around the refugees and migrants, there are many similarities among both cities. They have well-established NGOs in the field of migration that channel these efforts: many of them are linked to the church and work from an assistance-centred perspective. Additionally, there have been some recent—still ongoing—efforts to co-ordinate and replicate umbrella platforms, based on the model of Barcelona's SMM (Interview S7, activist from SMM in Barcelona).

In general, despite being conservative, the local PP government in Ourense is quite receptive to these actors—in part because they deliberately avoid disruptive repertoires. In the words of a local activist:

[W]e do not need to protest, we can just ask for a meeting and give a call, and someone from the city town hall will help us out ... and it does not make much sense to react against big, broad policies in a small city full of old people ... it is really hard to mobilize people here unless there is something that directly touches them. (Interview S23, social activist in Ourense)

Although activists in A Coruña find that the local-level government is now more open, there is a tension between their 'real lack of will to coordinate the platform actions' and their discourse, which often tries to 'appropriate the movement's success'; some activists claim that there have been some personal co-optation attempts (Interview S24, social activist in A Coruña).

The Southern Border ('Frontera Sur'): Closed Borders, Closed Opportunities

The Spanish (and European) Southern border includes two enclaves on Moroccan land—Ceuta and Melilla—but also the Canary Islands and the Andalusian coast. Because of their current (and symbolic) importance, we focus in this part of the chapter on Ceuta and Melilla.⁶

Interestingly, these two enclaves share a very closed local political opportunity structure, characterised by increasing levels of violence and repression by the police and far-right groups, which in Europe are only (to some extent) matched by the situation in Calais. In a way, it seems that Ceuta and Melilla held back the historical pace in the 1950s or 1960s. From a demographic perspective, a significant percentage of inhabitants is related to the police-military forces—patriotic symbols can be found everywhere, with continuous references to the army—while at the same time another significant portion of its population has a Moroccan background. NGOs and activists have often protested against the *devoluciones en caliente* ('hot returns'), in which Spanish authorities sent back some migrants to Morocco who managed to reach the Spanish territory—either by sea or by land. Such 'hot returns' are not only illegal and risky for the physical safety of migrants but make it difficult for them to apply for a refugee status.⁷

To some extent, the immigration and asylum policies implemented by the whole European Union during the so-called refugee crisis have mirrored the Spanish government's traditional policies in these enclaves. In the activists' perception, the idea of 'fortress Europe' was first applied here. As one interviewee in Córdoba put it, 'the Southern border of Spain is a laboratory for EU-wide migration policies' (Interview S1). These measures not only included fortified frontiers (through, e.g. increasing police repression, militarised border controls, and—razor-wire—fences between the Spanish and Moroccan territory) but also a co-operation agreement with the Moroccan government, similar to the 2016 deal between the EU and Turkey.

According to ACNUR, at least 60 per cent of immigrants coming through the Southern border could be entitled to the status of refugee.⁸

Such asylum seekers try to cross the border by different means, such as hiding in cars or reaching a Spanish beach from the sea—provided they can afford it. If they cannot, they try to jump over the fences, in increasingly dangerous and risky ways. In just the first half of 2016, 45 people died trying to reach Spanish soil via the Moroccan-Spanish route (a threefold increase relative to 2015).⁹

With regard to the organisation of the pro-refugee movement, in Ceuta and Melilla, there are few groups working specifically with migrants and refugees; however, their numbers have grown steadily since 2015, in part due to the newly available EU funds for co-operation at the European frontiers. In terms of configuration of local opportunity structures, both cases can be defined as closed settings. Activists in the two enclaves face strong institutional closure and opposition from a good portion of local society. They have tense relationships with the police forces and do not often find allies—or sympathisers—within the local-level elites and main political parties, the conservative Popular Party being the dominant force in both cities.

Whereas they co-ordinate some of their actions with like-minded organisations from other Spanish regions, the international co-operation with human rights associations in Morocco is very limited. From the Moroccan side, both Ceuta and Melilla tend to be considered colonies and collaborating with Spanish organisations as legitimising Spanish colonisation. From the Spanish side, civil society organisations in Morocco are seen as unreliable given their lack of independence from the Moroccan state.

Since 2015, many of those successfully crossing the border have come from Syria. For a well-known activist in Melilla, migrants are mainly escaping wars: ‘The peaks of people who arrive increase when there is a war. People from Mali stopped coming in 2006. Then, many people from Mali came in 2012 and 2013. No one from Syria had ever come here. In 2012 and 2013 came one person, then 5, then 100, then 1000, etc. Is there a refugee crisis? Well, there are wars behind the peaks’ (Interview S16).

Despite the fact that the local population has been witnessing the arrival of refugees for a long time, it has not connected that reality with the long summer of migration. This might explain why the effect of the

refugee crisis (in terms of the mobilisation of civil society) has been felt later and less significantly here than in other places. As explained by a local activist from Ceuta:

[...] people here tend to be informed about migration and refugees issues through the national press and the TV, including the jumps over the fences that take place at 500m. from their place. They watch the news and they may start crying, but then I tell them about the fences and there is no reaction. It seems like a parallel universe that is thousand miles away. (Interview S15)

Even on the occasions when several people crossing the border have died in confrontations with the police (most notably in 2005 and in 2014), the local population has failed to show solidarity with the migrants.¹⁰ An activist from ELIN remembers that in 2014, ‘at the burial ceremony [of the migrants] there was not one single person from Ceuta, but myself’ (Interview S3).

Once they reached Spanish soil, refugees would stay for up to two years in the Centro de Estancia Temporal de Inmigrantes (CETI). In January 2015, a group of 144 Syrian refugees rebelled and camped in the main square of Ceuta. The government ended up changing its policy and opened asylum offices, but only (or mostly) for Syrian citizens. In that moment, the local population was not aware of any refugee crisis. In the words of a human rights activist, ‘at first, the local government sanctioned them on the basis of the norm that prohibits camping in the street. In a radio interview, I remember that I had to explain what was happening, tell them that they were actually refugees who were escaping war, that this was not a problem of people invading our public spaces’ (Interview S2). In February 2015, APDHA and other smaller NGOs organised a demonstration for migrant rights in Ceuta. The same activist thus describes the difficult context of that protest event: ‘during the anniversary of the deaths of Tarajal, we filed an application to the delegate of the government of Ceuta. There was a series of restrictions, but we managed to gather 2000 people, mostly from other parts of Spain. Part of the local population insulted us from the windows ...’ (Interview S2).

Another event with a powerful impact among the Spanish civil society was an award-winning photograph taken on 22 October 2014, which

shows 15 people from Ghana atop the Melilla fence, while a couple plays golf on the nearby course. The photographer, an activist from PRODEIN, remembers that episode well: ‘on that day there was a golf competition. While the competition was going on, the Sub-Saharan immigrants remained on the fences the whole day. At night, the lights went off for 15 minutes and when they went on again nobody was there. The migrants had been taken back to Morocco’ (Interview S16). The picture had an international media impact as well, even reaching the European Commission: ironically, the golf course had been built thanks to funds for EU development aid. A few days later, the EU passed a new regulation banning the use of development aid to build golf courses. At that moment, PRODEIN was already widely covered in local media and well known by public opinion. The picture made them famous throughout Spain and attracted more attention to their cause.

In fact, PRODEIN is the main SMO in Melilla, performing an important task by raising awareness outside the enclave, both at the national and international levels (Manzanedo et al. 2016, p. 39). Despite the fact that they have gained some public visibility, they argue that potential supporters are afraid of publicly collaborating with them. In the words of one of its founders, ‘many people support us, but most of them do not join us. The risk is high and also the cost we have to pay’ (Interview S16). Their potential collaborators—musicians, actors, and the like—rarely pass by, as the place is difficult—and expensive—to reach. In contrast, due to Ceuta’s geographical situation closer to the Iberian Peninsula, this sort of synergy can be more easily generated there. In addition, Melilla comprises some far-right groups who attack immigrant children at night, as explained by the PRODEIN activist: ‘like in South America, with bats and dogs ... and children appear smashed in the mornings’ (Interview S16). There is a Facebook group called ‘popular opinion’ that consists of 11,000 people, most of them non-locals, who have organised demonstrations demanding ‘more security’. According to the PRODEIN activist, ‘the leaders are some far right-wingers, but they have dragged many people who do not have much idea about these issues’ (Interview S16).

In Ceuta, the most relevant organisation is ELIN, an SMO founded by two progressive Spanish nuns, which is now part of the European network Migreurop. Interestingly, because most of the people they work

with are Muslims, all of their religious activities are in fact interreligious. The church in Ceuta has a strong relationship with (and organisationally depends on) the church in Cádiz, as the bishop of Cádiz is also the bishop of Ceuta. As a local activist from APDHA in Cádiz explains: ‘religious organizations are not confrontational with the institutions, but still they work a lot. Although the current bishop is a very conservative one, the priests and nuns tend to be relatively progressive and we get along very well with them’ (Interview S2). At the same time, the society of Ceuta is very conservative, with many families related to the police, the military, and other law enforcement bodies. In the words of a local activist, ‘they feel they are Spanish bastion with the mission of fighting everything that is not Spanish. However, more than half the population is Muslim’ (Interview S3). Another local activist stresses the existence of anti-refugee activism in Ceuta: ‘the population is very right-wing leaning here, but they are not organized. There are huge Spanish flags everywhere. There is the fear of invasion. Many people here feel like they are forgotten from the rest of the Spanish territory’ (Interview S15).

In contrast with most of the Spanish territory, activists in Ceuta and Melilla carry out direct actions. As explained by an activist in Ceuta, ‘a network connected through WhatsApp has emerged these days. When someone finds out that there is a jump on the fences, they alert the others and people go to that point to film or take pictures or to report what is happening. That puts pressure on the police They feel their actions are being monitored’ (Interview S15). There are some contacts among activists in both enclaves, and good personal connections between the key activists in PRODEIN in Melilla and ELIN in Ceuta, but little coordination among them. It should be noted that collaboration is complicated by the 400 kilometres of tortuous routes through the—rather dangerous—Rift Valley that separates the two enclaves.

Finally, some Spanish NGOs, such as APDHA, have connections with various NGOs from Morocco; however, according to these human rights activists, these are ‘always difficult relationships’ (Interview S12). Among them are several women’s rights and human rights associations. Moreover, ‘there is also a racist component within Morocco in relation to the sub-Saharan people’ (Interview S16). APDHA also has a delegation in Morocco, in Tangier. However, they admit that the Moroccan authorities

do not make activists' life easy, which is clearly perceived from the history of a protest campaign, 'the Caravan to the fence of Melilla'. In the words of a human rights activist:

[...] every year we used to commemorate cases in which high numbers of migrants were killed at the fences, with a concentration on both sides of the fences. Year after year, the assistance on the Moroccan side was diminishing and after its fourth year it had to be suspended. Also, when we have done actions in Tangier, the police have come to identify us and sometimes they have not allowed us to carry them out. (Interview S2)

From this perspective, Moroccan activism should not be judged by European standards. Whereas some activists consider that 'it is difficult to find counterparts in Morocco, they do not dare to confront the state and, in the end, they do nothing' (Interview S16), others are more empathetic with the Moroccan activists: 'We know that they are risking more than we do' (Interview S2). In fact, while pro-migrant rights Moroccan activists complain about systematic violation of migrants' human rights, our interviewees from AMDH and the Delegación de Migraciones of Tangier's Archdioceses in Nador expressed awareness of the need to be extremely careful, as their activity is closely monitored by Moroccan authorities (Interview S6). Pressing circumstances often make them prioritise the ability to help refugees over direct confrontation with the Moroccan state. Not only the configuration of allies and opponents but the repressive strategies of Moroccan-Spanish states and authorities make them extremely cautious.

Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, we focused on varying political opportunities at the local level, comparing municipalities governed by movement-connected parties with others run by more traditional political forces. Although tensions exist, in Barcelona an administration that has labelled itself not only on the left, but explicitly on the side of pro-refugees, is more open to activists' claims and demands. The municipality has even led some public

protest on this issue. In contrast, Ceuta and Melilla are cases with very closed opportunities for mobilisation. These enclaves are highly securitised and activists heavily repressed, bringing about few actions and weak movements. In between, we found mixed results in Andalusia and Galicia, with less clear-cut effects.

Some of these results support Eisinger's expectation that protest is less likely in extremely closed places, as well as in extremely open ones. On the one hand, in totally closed places, 'not only is protest likely to be an inadequate tactic for enhancing political opportunities, but it is not likely to be tolerated' (Eisinger 1973, p. 28). To a certain extent that could explain the situation in Ceuta and Melilla, where for years the level of mobilisation has been minimal and is still based on certain individuals' commitment, despite the continuing presence of migrants and refugees' needs. In these two enclaves, an additional element is crucial: the level of securitisation and repression.

On the other hand, protesting might not be the most effective way to influence policy-making in a very open political system, where activists have easy access to decision makers and 'government is not only responsive but anticipates needs and meets them' (Eisinger 1973, p. 28). That circumstance could help us in understanding several of the situations we found in the cities led by Podemos-backed candidacies, such as Cádiz. From this perspective, local protest will be more likely in settings with partially open political opportunity structures. That would be the case for places such as Seville in Andalusia or Ourense in Galicia.

As far as the case of Barcelona is concerned, the situation is exceptional in various regards, including the fact that the current Mayor (as well as many of her main collaborators) is an activist with a long history of participation in social movements in which migrants are well embedded. Although Barcelona has fewer refugees than most large European cities, Stop Mare Mortum shows that the action repertoire here has gone beyond the solidarity realm, becoming more protest-centred. In other words, in Barcelona there is not only more popular mobilisation, but activism is also more protest-oriented than in other places. The first element (mobilisation) would be related to the fact that both the movement and the party share some objectives (i.e. the Mayor has based part of her political programme on the defence of refugees). The second element (protest)

could be connected to activists' resilience in order to keep their independent and politicised profile.

From a comparative vantage point, a low number of refugees arrived in Spain during the long summer of migration, relative to other countries such as Italy and Greece. However, if the increasing trend in the number of arrivals through the Moroccan route that began in the summer of 2017 remains high, it could bring about a profound change in the configuration of—and perceptions around—political opportunities for mobilisation in solidarity with the refugees in the different cases examined.

Interviews

- S1: Joint interview with local activists, 11 October 2016, Seville.
- S2: Activist from APDHA, 13 October 2016, Cádiz.
- S3: Local activist, ELIN, 5 October 2016, Ceuta.
- S4: MEP of Podemos (Grupo Confederal de la Izquierda Unitaria Europea/Izquierda Verde Nórdica), 30 November 2016 (via phone).
- S5: Local activist from Cádiz, 12 October 2016, Cádiz.
- S6: Spanish religious activist, 8 October 2016, Nador, Morocco.
- S7: Local activist from Stop Mare Mortum, 28 June 2016, Barcelona.
- S8: Spanish Fotomovimiento activist, 23 May 2016, Barcelona.
- S9: Local activist, Sagrada Família district, 28 June 2016, Barcelona.
- S10: Barcelona city council, 11 July 2016 (via phone).
- S11: Local activist from Stop Mare Mortum, 28 June 2016, Barcelona.
- S12: Spanish activist from APDHA, 13 October 2016, Córdoba.
- S13: Local activist from Stop Mare Mortum, Barcelona, 22 May 2016, Barcelona.
- S14: Stop Mare Mortum, International Commission, 28 June 2016, Barcelona.
- S15: Member of ELIN, 5 October 2016, Ceuta.
- S16: Founder of PRODEIN, 8 October 2016, Melilla
- S17: Activist from Plataforma Activista Social, 13 October 2016, Cádiz.
- S18: Activist and researcher, 13 October 2016, Cádiz.

- S19: Asociación de Ayuda al Pueblo Sirio, Seville, 10 October 2016 (via phone).
- S20: Activist from Fotomovimiento who volunteered in Calais, 27 June 2016, Barcelona.
- S21: Activist from Acción en Red, 11 October 2016, Seville.
- S22: Joint interview with three activists from Plataforma Córdoba Ciudad Refugio, 12 October 2016, Córdoba.
- S23: Local activist, 21 December 2016, Ourense.
- S24: Local activist, 22 December 2016, A Coruña.

Notes

1. See, for example, the Refugees Welcome survey by Amnesty International: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/05/refugees-welcome-survey-results-2016/>. Another example, in the words of a local activist from Cádiz, is the following: ‘a few days ago, the UNHCR representative in Spain was here. In recent months they have delivered a campaign to collect signatures for a petition. They had collected over 1.5 million in total. 500,000 came from Spain, by far the country that had signed the most’ (Interview S18).
2. For the case of language policies at the local level, see Fettes (2015); Alcalde (2016).
3. See <https://stopmaremortum.org/>
4. This SMM activist goes on: ‘Every now and then there was a proposal to call for a macromanifestation. It seemed their objective was to assemble one million people, take a picture of a crowded city centre, but this could have not been done’ (Interview S11).
5. See <http://www.plataformaactivistasocial.org/>
6. An analyst from Open Migration puts it this way: ‘today, fluxes have changed and barely a few hundred people attempt to escape via the western route. The crossing to Gran Canaria is too dangerous, the patrols too frequent, leading sub-Saharan migrants to head north instead, towards Ceuta and Melilla...’ (Lanni 2016).
7. In the words of a local activist from Cádiz, ‘when there was bad weather (i.e. strong wind coming from the east-side of the strait), nobody used to dare to cross, but now they do it to avoid such pushbacks. With bad

weather conditions, the Moroccan patrol boats stay and the immigrants try to take advantage of this' (Interview S18).

8. See EFE (2014).
9. See EFE (2016).
10. The 2014 case has to do with a number of sub-Saharan immigrants who tried to reach the Tarajal beach in Ceuta by swimming. At 7 a.m., while it was still dark, the Spanish police used anti-riot material to prevent migrants from entering into Spain, firing rubber balls and smoke canisters from the Spanish land. As a result, at least 15 people died (some survivors talk about 87). See the award-winning documentary *Tarajal* (2016) by Metromunster—Metromunster is a social company made up of activists who met in the Indignados squares in Barcelona.

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