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From Victims and Villains to Protagonists: Immigration and Citizenship in Modern Italy

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*From Victims and Villains to
Protagonists: Immigration and
Citizenship in Modern Italy*

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Senior Honors Thesis

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Prologue

I first became interested in the topic of immigration in Italy in January 2010 during a conversation with a Bolognese taxi driver. After a short exchange of “where are you from”’s and “why are you here”’s someone on the radio began talking about the riots that had recently occurred in Rosarno, Calabria after an agricultural laborer from Africa was shot by two men, suspected to be connected to the mafia.

“Foreigners are responsible for all of Italy’s problems,”¹ the driver said.

I thought for a moment I’d misunderstood, this was, after all, my first time speaking to an “Italian” in Italy and after twelve hours of travel I wasn’t exactly at my prime translating capacity— but then he continued,

“The Africans rob all of the money from Italians. There’s so much violence in the streets. A young girl like you, you need to be careful. You can’t walk alone. This city, all of Italy, isn’t what it used to be before the *extracomunitari*.”²

I remember being surprised by how quickly a casual conversation between strangers turned into such an open condemnation of Italy’s foreign population. At the time, I didn’t understand that the word *extracomunitario* was not used to refer to all immigrants from outside the EU, but to a specific kind of immigrant. While people from “developed” countries like the United States, Canada, and Australia are not part of the European Union, they are not typically labeled with the condescending term *extracomunitario* which has been reserved for immigrants who are nationals of “third-

¹ Gli stranieri sono responsabili per tutti I problemmi in Italia.

² “Gli africani rubbano tutti I soldi dagli italiani. C’è un sacco di violenza nelle strade. Una ragazza giovane, bella, come te- devi fare attenzione. Non cammini da sola perche questa citta, anzi, l’italia non è quello che era prima degli extracomunitari.”

world” countries that come primarily from Northern Africa, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Asia.

Throughout the next few months (January- June 2010) I was bombarded with conflicting representations of Italy’s relatively recent influx of “third-world nationals.” On the one hand, I read articles in Italian newspapers linking immigrants to homicides, violence, and prostitution. I saw *ambulanti* (street vendors) trying to sell bracelets or *fasoletti* (thick tissues) chased away by angry shopkeepers. When my roommate went to buy groceries down the street she would say she was getting them “*dal pakistano*” or “from the Pakistani.” I heard elderly men speaking in dialect in the main square about how immigrants were getting houses from the state while Italians were left to go hungry.

There were other segments of the Italian population, however, which seemed to adopt a much more sympathetic approach towards Italy’s “foreign” population. Liberal university students held protests throughout the country claiming that immigrants needed our help and criticized the government’s response to the recent events in Calabria. Many Italians left change for the man from Morocco who spent every day outside of the church by my house dressed as a mummy for tourists. News articles about immigrant women who were trafficked into Italy often advocated for their increased access to social services and programs that would eventually grant them legal residency.

As the topic of immigration, usually in relation to the recent riots in Rosarno, often found its way into casual conversations I had with professors, friends, and shopkeepers, it soon became apparent to me that Italians often took one of two increasingly rigid positions on the subject. Put simply, they either felt (like Ricardo, the owner of the fruit stand down the road) that foreigners were a menace to Italian culture

and society, or they insisted (like Anna, my Italian roommate, president of the liberal students' organization) that immigrants were victims who required the Italians' help and compassion. There were few Italians I met who shared my image of Italy's "foreign" population as a highly varied group of individuals, who, for a host of very different reasons, left their countries of origin and are now attempting, often with very limited means and a lack of formal access to political, social, and cultural rights, to adjust to life in a new country.

I believe that both existing perceptions of immigrants I encountered, which essentially considered immigrants to be either villains or victims, work to deny them *protagonismo* in Italian society and reinforce their exclusion from rights and protections granted through formal citizenship. *Protagonismo* literally means being a protagonist, a primary and important figure. In plays, actors and circumstances must react to the needs, desires, and actions of the protagonists. The audience is able to understand the unique qualities and motivations of the protagonists and often, even when the main character makes mistakes, is able to sympathize with him or her. When activists say they are advocating for the *protagonismo* of immigrants, I believe they are implying that immigrants must occupy a central and determinative position within Italian society, politics, and their own lives so that Italians will be able to understand and sympathize with them as individuals (rather than view immigrants as part of a dehumanized statistic) and will therefore be more open to the societal changes necessary in order to accommodate them. According to members of the activist organization Coordinamento Migranti, it is only through *protagonismo* that the rest of Italian society will be able to

“hear immigrants’ voices” and therefore be willing to take the necessary steps in order to better incorporate them.

Thus, I decided to write this paper for two primary reasons. First, I wanted to illuminate the ways in which their representation as either villains or victims and denial of access to citizenship has created many difficulties in the daily lives of Italy’s “foreign” population and contributed to the denial of their political, cultural, and social rights in Italy. Secondly, I wanted to call attention to the many strategies immigrants themselves have been using to combat these stereotypes and reclaim rights on the basis of universal subjectivity by asserting what has been called “insurgent citizenship” (a term first used by Holston (2008) and reappropriated by Razsa (2011) to signify “the creative ways in which immigrants have managed to act politically, even when they have none of the legal rights afforded to citizens”) in order to lay claim to the same rights, meanings, services, and privileges as those with formal membership in the Italian nation-state.

Citizenship and Insurgent Citizenship

“One word that I hold a lot to is citizenship. Citizenship can’t be a piece of paper. To be female citizens, male citizens, in society, means to hold to heart where you live. It’s like having a sense of responsibility to where you live... let me explain, this comes from small things— in respect to the environment, the space, knowing your rights. ..All of this is what citizenship is, it isn’t a paper that says I’ve been here 5 years, 10 years. If you don’t leave home, don’t learn the language. It’s like you are clandestine in life. Like everything that happens never touches you. It doesn’t phase you...” Tiziana Del Pra, founder of *Trama di Terre*

It is clear from Tiziana’s statement that citizenship is not simply a legal status but a complex institution that contains a multitude of meanings. Citizenship is “neither entirely legal nor sociological but an idea that finds its expression in law” (Dell’Olio 2005: 7). The significance of citizenship, however, has changed throughout history and continues to vary between and within nations throughout the globe. In order to better

understand how citizenship has functioned and continues to function in relation to “third-world nationals” in Italy, therefore, it is useful to consider how the institution has been manipulated to serve political, social, and cultural goals throughout its history. In the following pages, I will provide a few historical examples of how citizenship has been and continues to be used and perceived by various groups and individuals. I will then discuss the institution’s limitations as a means of “protecting privilege” by addressing the ways in which immigrants, often lacking formal citizenship status, have been able to lay claim to many of the same rights, meanings, and services that formal citizenship entails.

To some extent, citizenship’s multilayered character that has emerged throughout history renders it impossible to arrive at a single comprehensive definition of the term. Considered by many to be the oldest institution in Western political thought, as societal circumstances have transformed, citizenship has had different defining goals and powers. Even within specific nations, the significance of citizenship continues to vary between groups and from person to person.

From the Greek city-state through the Roman Republic, for example, citizenship was “small-scale, monolithic, discriminatory and also moral, spiritual, active, participatory and communitarian” (Dell’Olio 2005: 18). At this point, citizenship was not yet made into an abstract legal status but was defined by active participation in public life (Dell’Olio 2005: 19). This notion of active participation is still relevant in many modern conceptions of citizenship. As Tiziana del Pra, founder of Trama di Terre, stated in the beginning of this segment, being a citizen means actively participating in the social and political life of one’s society, it is not, “simply a piece of paper” but “having a sense of responsibility to where you live...leaving your home...and learning the language.” In

modern democracies, one of the ways in which we see this active component of citizenship is through the right to vote, which ensures that only those with formal status are granted the ability to participate in the nation's political decision making process.

One of the potential hazards of this definition of citizenship, however, is that it sometimes works to reinforce the tautology that depicts non-citizens as inactive. By asserting that only citizens can be politically active one promotes the belief that non-citizens are lazy, complacent, and not positively contributing to Italian society. In this way, many immigrants (particularly third-world nationals) have been denied access to rights on the grounds that they have not been active members of society, even if in reality this perceived inactivity is a direct result of their exclusion from basic political rights.

In the passage from the Roman Republic to the Roman Empire, citizenship was extended first throughout Italy and then abroad in a number of ways (for example, it was no longer strictly linked with Italian birth or origin and the emperor was able to grant citizenship to whomever he wished) and as a result, its value and significance changed and the distinction between citizen and non-citizen was gradually superseded by the distinction between wealthy and poor, regardless of citizenship status (Dell'Olio 2005: 21). Citizenship's decrease in societal relevance continued until the end of the Middle Ages, when immigration and naturalization were first institutionalized. At this time, movement of citizens between cities was allowed and citizenship served to delineate societal boundaries. As common needs generated a potential for universal citizenship and acceptance of immigration that prevailed over xenophobia and suspicion, the nature of citizenship became considerably less exclusive and discriminatory than it had been (or would later become) at other points throughout the institution's history (Forcina 1994:

22). Finally, with the birth of nation-states, we see the rise of a more passive citizenship alongside its traditional active component in which one was a citizen so long as he/she approved the legitimate function of representative institutions, courts, and welfare systems (Dell'Olio, 2005). In addition to being required to be politically active participants in creating the law, citizens now also expected to be protected by the law (Dell'Olio, 2005). Thus, citizenship in the modern nation state is both active and passive, citizens are both protected by the law and expected to be active political participants.

Though some scholars claim that in modern times citizenship has lost its value, most acknowledge that it does represent the current measure of formal membership in the nation state and come with access to a variety of benefits and protections. In protecting the rights of citizens to be active participants in Italian society and providing them with the means and privileges necessary to do so, however, citizenship simultaneously performs an exclusionary function by denying these rights and protections to non-citizens (Dell'Olio 2005: 25). The primary function of modern citizenship, therefore, concerns both privilege and exclusion from privilege (Dell'Olio 2005: 30). It attempts to maintain the well-being of some by simultaneously preventing access to the same rights, privileges, and protections to others. To a large extent, the link that currently defines who is privileged and who is an "other" in Italy is nationality. Through citizenship "legality is attached to nationality and the ability to exercise civil, political, and social rights" becomes "contingent upon national belonging" (Dell'Olio 2005: 7). In the creation of national communities a class of outsiders (non-citizens) is simultaneously defined as those who, for a host of reasons, are unable to attain or sustain membership.

Under the present political circumstances in many Western European countries, these "others" (mostly individuals who have immigrated from other nations who have

been unable to attain citizenship) live without formal access to civil, social, and political rights. In a survey conducted in 2005, Italian immigrants claimed that the principal advantages of attaining Italian citizenship were: freedom of movement through Italy/ the EU/ and in other Countries, an end to bureaucratic problems, a stop to the many minor discriminations they must endure in their social lives, the potential to acquire political rights, and the possibility to work in Italy without limitations (Codini, 2007). Immigrants residing “illegally” in Italy, therefore, cannot legally lay claim to these rights or privileges because they are not considered to be members of the nation-state.

Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that in spite of formal exclusion from membership, many immigrants have been able to attain access to the same privileges, rights, and services that are granted to “legal” Italian citizens. This is partly due to the fact that at least to some extent, in recent years social needs across the globe have been becoming more deterritorialized and cross-national. Many rights, such as the right to work and the right to freedom of movement, are being claimed in the name of common humanity and universal subjectivity rather than citizenship. I will use the term subjectivity throughout the remainder of this paper to imply “a redefinition of the concept of legality detached from nationality and based on the active exercise of civil, political, and social rights” (Dell’Olio 2005: 12). This switch from claiming rights in the name of citizenship to asserting worthiness on the basis of universal subjectivity is necessary to “side-step the difficulties entailed in any attempt to separate citizenship from nationality in theory and practice” (Dell’Olio 2005: 12). Thus, many scholars (myself included) advocate for the introduction of universal subjectivity as a means “to deprive citizenship of its regulative functions in terms of inclusion and exclusion” and “reduce the

importance attached to the inherent link” between basic human rights and nationality (Dell’Olio 2005: 12).

Methods and Overview

In the remainder of this paper, I will attempt to show that through *protagonismo* and by claiming rights in the name of universal subjectivity, immigrants are asserting a type of insurgent, substantive citizenship even if they lack “legal” citizenship in Italy. I argue that all actions that contribute to immigrants’ *protagonismo* in Italian society and/or exercise the same rights and privileges that have been legally denied to non-citizens due to a lack of formal membership in the nation-state, whether they are performed at the individual or group level, consciously or unconsciously, constitute a new, insurgent, form of citizenship. For many, this process begins with the decision to “illegally” escape from their country of origin and continues in their struggle to overcome daily obstacles involved in Italian bureaucracy and find work in Italy. Some immigrants also practice insurgent citizenship through the positive discourse they use, grounded in the concepts of free movement of persons and universal subjectivity, in order to speak about themselves and lay claim to their rights.

In spite of this resistance, however, it is important to also acknowledge the ways in which “the redefinition of immigration as a law and order problem” continues to affect immigrants negatively “by creating an unequal distribution of social rights between citizens and non-citizens, impeding the operation of economic and social rights afforded on bases other than nationality” even if in some ways immigrants have been able to overcome these obstacles (Dell’ Olio 2005: 15). Any attempt to show immigrants’ resistance to the unequal distribution of rights would be incomplete, therefore, if it did

not also mention the continuing inequalities that exist between citizens and noncitizens in spite of these efforts (Holston, 2008). As reform does not typically follow a linear progression, this paper must be about both the persistence of inequality in regards to citizens and non-citizens in Italy as well as its contestation through various forms of insurgent citizenship.

For the first part of my paper I draw upon a variety of scholarly articles on immigration in Italy and immigrant's representations in the media, ISTAT and CARITAS immigration statistics, interviews conducted during my fieldwork in Bologna, and Italian newspaper articles in order to provide a legal and historical framework for analyzing the situation of immigrants in Italy. I then attempt to provide an overview of the ways in which immigrants are represented by the media, political parties, and immigrant-related social service organizations to illustrate how these actors deny immigrants' *protagonismo* and therefore contribute to their exclusion from basic rights and privileges in Italy. I will then draw on interviews conducted during fieldwork, memoirs, and immigrant organizations' activities in order to show that immigrants in Italy combat these stereotypical representations through their actions, the way in which they talk about themselves, and how they advocate for their rights both individually and collectively. Finally, I will highlight the ways in which, in spite of continuing inequalities, these actions of resistance have allowed many immigrants to become insurgent citizens and have contributed to their *protagonismo* within the Italian state.

A Quick Note on Terminology

At the definitional level, an emigrant is someone who leaves their country of origin and an immigrant is someone who enters another country (Pojmann 2006: 12).

Anglo-American researchers, however, have tended to adopt the term migrant rather than immigrant when referring to more recent shifts in migration patterns. Unlike the term immigrant which suggests someone who intends to become a permanent resident or citizen in the host country, the term migrant connotes a more “mobile, temporary status, or someone who lives transnationally, or in two or more countries” (Pojmann 2006: 12). Like Pojmann, I will be using the term immigrant rather than migrant because I believe that the notion that immigration is a temporary phenomenon and that immigrants do not intend to permanently reside in Italy has been used to unfairly justify their exclusion from Italian society at both the social and political level.

I recognize, however, that neither term is a perfect fit. By using the term immigrant in this way I am to some extent also reinforcing the view that denies freedom of movement and asserts that political and social rights only be granted on the basis of national belonging. Nonetheless, temporarily ignoring the many problems associated with nation-based citizenship, I have chosen to use the term immigrant in the hope of combating the perception that foreigners are only “temporary” residents in Italy which has been used as an excuse for their continued exclusion from Italian society and failure of the government to take a comprehensive approach to the changes caused by their presence (Pojmann 2006: 12).

Chapter 1: Context

In order to better understand both the persisting inequalities in regards to citizens and non-citizens as well as immigrants' resistance to them it is necessary to have a sense of the Italian nation's history in regards to immigration. First, I will highlight the ways in which Italy's past as a country of emigration and internal migrations has greatly influenced the way in which "third-world nationals" residing in Italy are perceived by Italian nationals today. Next, I will provide a brief history of immigration and immigrant-related legislation in order to place current patterns in context. Finally, I will provide an overview of Italy's current population of immigrants using statistics from Caritas and ISTAT to highlight its diversity and give readers a more nuanced vision of the individuals being discussed.

From Emigration and Internal Migrations to Immigration

It is useful to understand the nature of early patterns of immigration because in many ways, the experience of Italians who immigrated to different regions of the country and Italian emigrants abroad parallels and has influenced the situation of "third-world nationals" living in Italy today.

Previously considered a country of emigration and internal migrations, Italy only began receiving large numbers of immigrants beginning in the late 1970s. Italians, however, had been moving to other countries since shortly after national unification in 1861 and continued to emigrate in large numbers until the economic miracle in the 1960s. Between 1876 and 1976, twenty million Italians emigrated; 12.5 million of whom went to other western European nations, and 5.5 million of whom took up residence in the United States (Pojmann 2006: 20). Though there are always multiple factors which influence

patterns of migration and it is important to recognize that the decision to leave one's country of origin is ultimately made for personal motives at the level of the individual (Mezzadra 2004) structural factors frequently cited as the impetus for Italian emigration during these years include ineffective land management policies, overpopulation as a result of increased access to medical care and steady food supplies following unification, and the destructive economic effects of World War II. Although Italian emigrants came from a variety of regions and economic backgrounds within Italy, including educated northern elites as well as poor southerners, Italians abroad "were often labeled as impoverished undesirables, especially in the first part of the twentieth century" (Pojmann 2006: 21). Thus, to a large extent, Italian emigrants abroad were depicted as "semiliterate, unskilled workers from rural worlds" and it is only since the late 1970s that the image of Italy as a "poor nation with a backward economy and an unstable political system" has faded, at least to some degree (Carter 1997: 212).

Though internal migrations, like emigration abroad, had been occurring in Italy since shortly after unification, the economic boom of the 1960s led to a decrease in emigration abroad and increased movement within Italy, particularly from the South (and to a smaller extent, Eastern regions) to the northern and northwestern parts of the country (Pojmann 2006: 21). This occurred in part because many of the causes cited for emigration above more severely affected the southern and northeastern regions whose economies were primarily based on agriculture. Following unification, the Italian government began to industrialize the Northwest (the industrial triangle of Genoa, Turin, and Milan in particular) but failed to address the rising poverty level in other parts of the

nation. This led many southern and northeastern Italians to leave their farms in order to find work in northern factories.

To a large extent, however, the state was unable to adequately provide for the large number of immigrants in the North and, like Italian emigrants abroad, southern Italian immigrants developed a reputation as uneducated, barbaric, lazy, and a drain on the economy which still persists today. While conducting fieldwork in Bologna, I witnessed a lot of anti-southern sentiment in newspapers, on the streets, and in colloquial conversations with northerner Italians. One day, for example, while doing research at the Sala Borsa, the public library in the center of the city, I sat down on the floor because all of the chairs had already been taken. After about five minutes, a security guard came over to a man with a long grey coat sleeping in an arm chair beside me and clapped loudly next to his ears to wake him up. He said “It’s not fair that this poor girl needs to study on the floor while you sleep in the chair...get up!” At this point I began feeling pretty uncomfortable as the angry, recently awakened man replied in a dialect that was somewhat difficult (though possible) for me to understand that this was a public library, open to everyone, and he had the right to use the chair however he wanted. The security guard turned to me and said sarcastically “Do you mind translating? This man isn’t speaking Italian..is there someone here who can speak to a *Napoletano*?” While it was clear that the man was not speaking standard Italian, if I, as a non-native speaker, could understand what he was saying I would assume that the security guard could as well and that his comment, therefore, was meant to offend the man sleeping by implying that he was not a “real” Italian. The man responded, “I’m not speaking *Napoletano*, I’m speaking Italian... we’re in Bologna. We’re speaking Italian.” At this point the security guard said,

“That's not Italian, that's *Napoletano*... *Bolognesi* (people from Bologna) don't sleep in chairs while poor young girls have to study on the floor...get up or I'll get you up!” The man finally got up and the security guard refused to leave until, with a guilty conscience, I took his chair. The snorer gave me a dirty look and muttered something under his breath before exiting the Sala Borsa and I resumed my reading.

This incident seems to be emblematic of northerners' attitude towards southerners, showing that many still feel (and have no qualms about expressing) that those of southern origins are rude, lazy, and not “really” Italian. I have chosen to highlight these negative sentiments towards Southern Italians here because to a large extent, they are the same slurs applied to “foreign” immigrants in Italy today. It is also interesting to note that the way foreign and southern immigrants are viewed in Italy is strikingly similar to the way Italians were once viewed abroad. Tracing the history of derogatory terms, it is remarkable to see that in many cases, the exact same words (lazy, uneducated, crime-ridden) that were once applied to Italian emigrants abroad were then used to describe southern Italians in the North and, finally, reappropriated to describe “foreign” immigrants in Italy (Pojmann 2006: 21). Thus, in a certain sense, the Italian situation represents a role reversal—once the recipients of racism and an “othering discourse” that lead to social and political exclusion, today Italians are using those same tools to exploit others.

Additionally, it is possible that a great deal of the uneasiness regarding “foreigners” in Italy today stems from the fact that serious issues concerning healthcare, housing, and work were never satisfactorily resolved for this first wave of Italian immigrants (southerners) and as a result “many Italians do not view Italy as a receiver nation capable

of incorporating a permanent migrant community” (Carter 1997: 213). The problems that “foreign” immigrants in Italy face today (racism, social exclusion, poverty, lack of access to adequate healthcare and housing, etc.) recall “the many unresolved difficulties of the former generation of Italian migrants “in the north of Italy and elsewhere” (Carter 1997: 211). Thus, it is important to remember that at least to some extent, the “immigrant problem” in Italy is not entirely recent, but reflects the continued inability of the Italian state to adequately provide for all of its residents and a history of xenophobia and anti-Southern sentiment.

History of Immigration and Immigration-Related Legislation

As mentioned above, until the 1970s Italy was largely considered to be a country of emigration and internal migrations and the presence of “foreign” immigrants was minimal. Although other nations such as France and England have had long histories of immigration from former colonies, Italy’s first significant wave of “foreign” immigrants came after the Oil Crisis in 1973 when other European countries began to limit the entry of non-European Community workers (Castles, 2000). At this time, single male migrants from the Middle East and Africa often looked towards Italy in order to find unskilled manufacturing jobs in the Center-north and agricultural South and Catholic organizations recruited large numbers of women domestic workers from the Philippines, Cape Verde, and Italy’s former African colonies (GENPROM).

It was not until 1986, when a report was commissioned by the Italian Ministry of labor called “The Condition of Foreign Immigrants in Italy” that the government first formally recognized what they now refer to as the “foreign question”, that is, the presence of foreign immigrants in Italy (Carter 1997: 196). Up until this point there was no legislative regulation of immigration because the number of immigrants entering Italy

was still fairly limited and it was assumed that most sought only short term, unskilled employment. To a large extent, policy on immigration in Italy “has been inspired by two different logics: the first to organize the reception of immigrants, provide them with the necessary social assistance and facilitate their integration which are referred to as *immigrant policies* and the second, which fall under the heading of *immigration policies* that aim to regulate the flow of immigrant entries and in particular, to clamp down on illegal immigration” (Bigot and Fella 2008: 305). While there has been widespread agreement throughout the past two decades by both the left and right wing political parties in Italy regarding the necessity for a tightening of *immigration policies* to further prevent illegal immigration to Italy, it is important to note that in spite of the Berlusconi government’s increasingly anti-immigration agenda there have also been some attempts on the part of left-wing political groups and immigrants’ rights activists to advocate for more effective *immigrant policies* in order to promote the integration of immigrants already present in the country.

In January 1987, the Italian government enacted Law 943, whose primary aim was, consistent with the trend elsewhere in Europe, to prohibit illegal immigration (Merrill 2006: xxi). The law granted amnesty to immigrants who legalized their status, thus encouraging foreigners to register so that the government would have a clearer picture of the immigrant population and it could be more easily managed. Some studies estimate that as many as 100,000 immigrants legalized their status at this time (Pojmann 2006: 23). Critics of the law often claim that its wording did not further immigrants’ social integration since it defined them as “workers” as opposed to emphasizing their role as citizens which would imply their active participation in other dimensions of Italian society (Salih 2003: 142). Finally, although the law did officially close the Italian

borders, evidence shows that in practice, illegal immigration continued to accelerate (Merrill 2006: xxi).

The next important piece of immigration legislation occurred three years later in the context of European unification when other governments accused Italy of “becoming a gateway for third world immigrants wishing to enter European countries” and threatened that it would have to create a stricter policy in order to become a signatory of the Schengen treaty. Though the Schengen treaty allowed for free movement of persons in between EU member states, it simultaneously strengthened Europe’s external borders by requiring signatories to adopt harsher immigration policies (Merrill 2006: xxi). The resulting legislation in Italy, enacted in February of 1990, became known as the Martelli Bill and held that “the number of immigrants the country was ready to admit had to be based primarily on the needs of the national economy, the availability of administrative bodies and resources able to integrate immigrants according to international standards and finally, on international and European agreements” (Salih 2003: 142). The enactment of the Martelli bill was meant to demonstrate “to other European nations that Italy was now undisputedly a destination for immigrants and that a unilateral tactic would be needed if Italy were to step up efforts to patrol its vast coastline and control the entry of foreigners” (Pojmann 2006: 23).

At this time (the late 1980s and early 90s) acts of intolerance, specifically the killing of a young South African immigrant recognized by the United Nations as a political refugee and the spontaneous demonstrations of “illegal” immigrants calling for the end of racism increased, and politicians felt pressure from the left to begin addressing the many concerns of legal immigrants in Italy (Carter 1997: 202). Thus, though it tightened *immigration policies*, the Martelli Bill was somewhat lenient in regard to

immigrant policies since it also granted amnesty to anyone who could prove entry into Italy before the end of 1989 by giving them a two-year residence permit or “permesso di soggiorno” (Pojmann 2006: 23) and included a reference to the right of immigrants to ‘socio-cultural insertion and preservation of cultural identities and the right to education and housing’ (Salih 2003: 142). Critics of the Martelli law, however, claim that despite this provision it has primarily emphasized immigrants role as a “work force useful to the national economy” and largely “ignored the problem of social and cultural integration” (Pojmann 2006: 23). It has also been criticized for “treating immigration as an “emergency” thereby laying the framework for a continued sensationalized approach to the matter” (Pojmann 2006: 23) and contributing to the image of the global South as an area full of “pain and desperation” (Carter 1997: 202). Thus, the Martelli Bill had a two-pronged effect, while “it relieved the situation of intolerance and alarm within Italy by presenting formal permission to exist within the Italian territory,” it also “sought to erect barriers in the same moment against a world of pain and desperation— just to the south of the known world” (Carter 1997: 203).

Shortly after the Martelli Bill was passed, the government called for a *sanatoria* or the rapid and immediate registration of “foreigners.” “The *sanatoria*, in combination with the Dini Decree (1996) offered immigrants not legally resident in Italy the possibility to regularize their legal status, provided they showed evidence of regular employment and proper housing” (GENPROM 20). These protocols in combination with the government’s creation of regional bodies called *consulte* which claimed to ‘promote the insertion of ethnic communities in the society through social services’ (Salih 2003: 142) represented an attempt by the Italian government to regulate, legalize, and integrate its “foreign” population. In spite of these efforts to improve *immigrant policies*, however,

Italian border control became increasingly stricter throughout the 1990s and in August 1991 Italy expelled approximately twenty thousand impoverished Albanians attempting to enter the country (Merrill 2006: xxi).

In 1992, the first significant law regarding the nature of Italian citizenship was enacted since 1912, when Italy passed the law for granting citizenship on the basis of *jus sanguinis* (bloodline and inheritance) in contrast to the territorially based *jus soli*. Scholars maintain that the switch “endorsed a notion of nationality as a tenacious bond that could endure emigration and be passed down to descendents in the diaspora” (Ballinger 2007: 44). Law 91, as it is called, established five criteria for the acquisition of Italian citizenship. The first was birth. An Italian parent (either mother or father) can transmit citizenship status to their child. The second grants citizenship status to “foreigners” who are born in Italy and reside there without interruption until the age of majority and formally declare that they wish to become citizens in their municipality of residence (Ballinger 2007: 44). Additionally, the law states that if someone lives in Italy for 10 years, entered legally, has a permesso di soggiorno, and all the requisite paperwork they can apply for naturalization to become citizens and may or may not be obtained (Ballinger 2007: 45). Finally the law states that foreign spouses may obtain Italian citizenship by applying for it six months after the marriage if living legally in Italy or 3 years after the marriage if living abroad and that adopted children from abroad automatically become citizens if they are brought in legally by the parents. All of these measures reinforce the *jus sanguinus* principle and have made naturalization (as well as all of the rights and privileges that go along with the formal acquisition of citizenship) increasingly more difficult to obtain for those who were not born in Italy and do not have “Italian” family members.

In 1998 the Italian government finally published the first “wide range of provisions...to uniformly regulate several legal and social aspects of immigrants’ lives such as entry, legal stay, family reunion, civil rights, medical assistance, education, and bureaucratic procedures” (GENPROM) known as the “Testo Unico” or “Consolidated Law” which is still referred to today as the primary document regulating all fundamental aspects of immigration. One of the most important aspects of the document was the creation of a distinction between the “temporary immigrant” and permanent “citizen” by introducing the permanent resident card or *carta di soggiorno* “which granted immigrants who had been regularly and continuously resident in Italy for a period of at least five years the right to unlimited residence” (Salih 2003:143). Under the new law approximately 200,000 permanent resident cards were issued, creating a more stable foreign resident population that did not have to renew temporary permits of stay every two years (Dell’Olio 2001: 113). The law also formulated an anti-racist agenda aimed at condemning any act of discrimination on a racial, ethnic, or religious basis ” (Salih 2003: 143) and provided for the extension of access to services such as emergency healthcare and schooling for both documented and undocumented immigrants (Pojmann 2006: 23). The law addressed women immigrants in particular by providing the legal possibility for women who joined their husbands in Italy to enter the labor market, granting the residence card to victims of trafficking, sexual exploitation, and other forms of violence, forbidding the expulsion of pregnant women with children under six months, and providing judicial protection against all forms of discrimination (GENPROM).

Though the law “undoubtedly represented a first step towards the recognition that residence could replace nationality or blood as a condition of citizenship” and certainly promoted “respect for cultural difference, recognition of civil rights, and intercultural

education” it was nonetheless received quite negatively by activists in the field of immigrants’ rights (Salih 2003: 143). The new protections and rights afforded to foreign immigrants (and particularly those living in Italy for at least five years) were accompanied by a crackdown on “illegal” immigration which led to increased control of national borders (Salih 2003: 143), easy removal of the new residency status, and even quicker deportations (Pojmann 2006: 24). Between January and October of 1999 nearly 61,000 deportations took place. Thus, while the Testo Unico represented a cooperation on the part of the centre-right and center-left in that it tightened *immigration policies*, it also appeased members of the left through the provision of more lenient *immigrant policies*. Subsequent immigration legislation, however, is largely representative of the center-right’s “hard-line” on immigration and has involved a significant tightening of borders and increased deportations without the former attention paid to the social and political integration of “foreign” immigrants already resident in Italy.

In 2002, shortly after Berlusconi’s center-right government took office, it produced (following a series of debates with Alleanza Nazionale which wanted tougher immigration policies and the overtly anti-immigrant Lega Nord or Northern League party) the Bossi-Fini law, which was significantly stricter than its predecessors (Pojmann 2006: 24). The Bossi-Fini law ties the residence permit directly to regular work, maintaining that a contract must exist between the employer and the immigrant before the immigrant can enter Italy and that termination of employment warrants deportation (Pojmann 2006: 24). The law also employed measures to tighten borders by allowing only for spouses and children under 18 to join family members in Italy and giving navy ships permission to patrol for and intercept suspicious vessels near the Italian coastline (Pojmann 2006: 24). At the same time, efforts were stepped up to expel illegal

immigrants with about 5,000 cases being processed each month during 2003 (Pojmann 2006: 24).

The last essential piece of immigration-related legislation that has been enacted in recent years is the *Pacchetto Sicurezza* or Security Package, approved in 2009, which takes an even tougher stand on immigration than Bossi-Fini and has been widely criticized by a variety of human rights organizations. According to the new bill, being an illegal immigrant in Italy is now officially considered a penal crime punishable by deportation and a fine ranging from 5,000 to 10,000 Euros. Those applying for citizenship must now pay a 200 euro tax, pass an Italian language exam, and undersign the *accordo di integrazione* or integration agreement with points that will either increase or decrease depending on their behavior. If they are married to an Italian citizen, they must wait two years in order to begin the application process. The Security Bill also eliminates the ban which prohibits doctors from reporting illegal immigrants who seek medical care to the police. Perhaps partially as a result of this legislation, recent studies have shown that immigrants are rarely using Italy's medical facilities, even when they are in dire need of care. An article in *La Repubblica* published on March 31st 2010, for example, states that many migrants don't frequent hospitals because they are afraid of being reported even though they are sick more frequently because they "*affronta condizioni di vita pesanti*" or "affront heavy conditions of life" sleeping in inadequate locations and eating poorly (Dazzi, 2010)

According to the new *accordo di integrazione* announced on February 4, 2010 by Roberto Maroni, Minister of the Interior, immigrants now have a set amount of time after obtaining their *permesso di soggiorno* "to learn the Italian language, know the constitution and the civil rules of the country, make their children study, and get their

paperwork in order.” If they have managed to do these things, they are eligible to obtain the *carta di soggiorno*, will have more rights, and be better integrated. If they are unable to accomplish these tasks or have violated the law in any way their *permesso di soggiorno* will expire and they will face expulsion (Custoderro, 2010).

Many feel these legislative measures, though claiming to promote integration, in reality only make it more difficult for immigrants already resident in Italy to obtain citizenship status and facilitate their deportation. Some also argue that they are unjust because they require immigrants already resident on Italian soil to abandon the language and culture of their country of origin in order to assimilate to Italian norms. A paper distributed by Coordinamento Migranti, a leftist activist organization that claims to fight for the *protagonismo* of migrants in Bologna and throughout Italy, summarized the current situation in this manner:

“What is there to say? The laws which have disciplined immigration, first the Turco-Napolitano, then the Bossi-Fini, and finally the entrance in vigor of the Pacchetto Sicurezza, limit the autonomy of the migrant, connecting it to the work contract, therefore, to the decisions of *padroni* (complacent politicians). Today, millions of migrants are at risk of deportation due to the economic crisis. It is impossible to travel because the authorities take long periods of time to renew the permit, leaving the migrant with the old invalid permit. In this way, we are assisting in a massive *clandestinita*...the result of which is not expulsion but the formation of rigid social hierarchies that separate regular and irregular, Italians and migrants, threatening the liberty of all.”

Thus, it appears that both Italy’s *immigration* and *immigrant policies*, while occasionally giving legal immigrants access to resources and claiming to promote their integration, have largely functioned to further exclude third-world nationals from legal access to the basic rights and services associated with formal Italian citizenship. In recent years, as the government as members of right-wing political parties such as the Lega Nord and Berlusconi’s Popolo della Liberta have had increasing influence on legislative

measures, *immigration policies* have become increasingly more stringent and it has become more difficult for “third-world nationals” residing in Italy to obtain formal Italian citizenship and access the rights and privileges that “legal” membership guarantees.

Current Stats Italy’s Migrant Population

In spite of this increasingly difficult situation, evidence shows that in recent years, the number of immigrants residing in Italy has continually increased. According to statistics published by Caritas at the beginning of 2010, within the last ten years, the foreign presence in Italy has nearly tripled. ISTAT recorded 4,235,000 foreign residents in Italy but, including all of the people currently residing in Italy that haven’t registered with the authorities, researchers believe the actual number is closer to 4,919,000. That would make one of every twelve people residing in Italy “foreign” with *clandestini* or “illegal” immigrants being more numerous than legal foreigners. Lombardy has the largest presence of foreign residents (23% of the population), followed by Lazio (11.8%), Veneto (11.3%), and Emilia Romagna (10.9%). As of January 2010, Milan was listed as the Italian city with the largest number of foreign residents.

Women immigrants make up about 51.3% of the immigrant population in Italy. Currently, most foreign nationals come from Europe (53.6%), followed by Africa (22%), Asia (16.2%), and America (8.1%). By far the most prominent country represented is Romania (21%), though Albania (11%), Morocco (10.2%), China (4.4%), and the Ukraine (4.1%) also represent prominent portions of Italy’s foreign population. A report conducted in 2005 by ISTAT claims that while 47% of Italy’s foreign population described its motivation for coming to Italy as work-related, 36.5% decided to immigrate

because they had relatives already resident in Italy, 3.1 % moved for educational reasons, and about 13.8 percent came to Italy for other motives.

In 2005, 58.5% of foreigners in the work force were employed (in comparison to 42.5% native italians) while 8.1% were looking for employment (5.6% native population). About 45% of foreigners are occupied in the industrial sector (31.9% in manufacturing, 12.2% in construction), 32 % are employed in the tertiary sector (principally in the sectors of public administration, healthcare, and education), 11.2% work in “domestic services”, 7.5 % in hotels and restaurants, and finally, 5.9% are employed in agriculture. These statistics vary significantly in relation to gender since the majority of women immigrants occupy jobs in the domestic service sector.

It is clear, therefore, that Italy’s “foreign” population consists of a highly varied group of individuals who have chosen (in spite of increasingly stringent immigration policy) to immigrate for different motives, come from a diverse array of backgrounds, and do a variety of different jobs in Italy.

Chapter 2: Immigrant Representations

In spite of their diversity, however, immigrants are still seen as a uniform mass by much of the Italian population. There are multiple actors in Italy that contribute to this block image of immigrants which functions, I will argue, to deny them *protagonismo* and encourage their exclusion from the rights and privileges formal citizenship entails.

Through these sources, immigrants are either depicted as uniformly violent, helpless, or too different to fit in.

It is interesting to note the ways in which the speech patterns and actions used to deny immigrants *protagonismo* differ significantly for male and female immigrants. While males are often accused of making Italy unsafe because they are violent (falsely connected to rapes, murders, thefts, drug dealing) women are more frequently said to be polluting Italian morals because they are sexually promiscuous (and are often connected to prostitution). The Italian left, on the other hand, often depicts both male and female immigrants as an economic drain on Italian society because they use public services and welfare without paying taxes. This victimizing discourse is applied more firmly to female immigrants, particularly Muslim women, who are seen as helpless not only due to their status as immigrants but also as a result of various patriarchal oppressions they encounter both in Italy and within their countries of origin. Culturalist racism, or the belief that immigrants' cultures are so fundamentally different from Italian culture that it would be impossible to integrate them, also manifests itself differently depending on the gender of the immigrant. While women are primarily depicted as oppressed by their inescapable culture, men are typically shown to be stubbornly blindsided by a cultural and/or religious fundamentalism to which they willingly ascribe. It is worth acknowledging, therefore, that within every discourse female immigrants are given less agency and depicted as relatively weak in comparison to male immigrants.

I highlight the language and actions of each institutional setting (whether it be within political parties, social services, the media etc.) below because they have all, in some sense, helped to produce these simultaneously existing representations of immigrants in Italy today. Though the list is certainly not completely comprehensive, I have carefully selected these particular actors because they represent some of the most

prominent figures associated with immigration and therefore have helped form what I believe are the predominant stereotypes of immigrants in Italy today. Through an analysis of these institutions, therefore, I hope to show how representations of immigrants (as villains, victims, or incompatibly different) have convinced 49% of Italians to see immigration as more of a problem than a resource³ and have therefore contributed to the denial of immigrants' *protagonismo* which has allowed their continued exclusion from formal citizenship in modern Italy.

Male and Female Immigrants in Italian Newspapers

To a large extent, Italian newspapers have helped to deny immigrants' *protagonismo* in Italy by electing to publish articles that either depict them as uniformly violent, helpless, or culturally incompatible with the Italian way of life. One way in which this is accomplished is through the printing of articles that connect immigrants to crime or illegal activity. Often the details of the crime are written using a highly sensationalized language and the articles carefully emphasize the fact that the perpetrators were not native Italians. Flipping through the local right-wing newspaper in Bologna, *Il Resto Del Carlino*, for example, it is typical to see a multitude of articles about rape, robbery, kidnapping, and murder that either assume male immigrants have committed the crime or explicitly cite the known felons race and/or immigrant status in order to draw attention to the fact that the criminal was not "Italian." Over January, for example, I read an article in *Il Resto del Carlino* called "*Sgominata gang di rapinatori*" or "Disordered Gang of Kidnappers" claiming that at least four felonies had been attributed to three *Magrebini* (people from the Maghreb region of Northern Africa) that were recently arrested by the police. The three men are currently accused of rape,

³ Results from survey conducted by Marshall in 2009.

beating, and kidnapping an old woman and doctor. Like many news stories, the article uses a highly sensationalized language to describe the crime in order to instill a sense of physical threat and fear in the reader. Shortly after the crimes are brutally described the article closes by emphasizing the perpetrator's nationalities "in handcuffs are a clandestine Palestinian immigrant and two Moroccans, "regular" on Italian territory."⁴ The fact that the only details provided about the perpetrators of the crime were their nationality and whether they were legal or illegal residents establishes a link between immigrants, their country of origin, their legal status, and violence.

Women immigrants are also villified in Italian newspaper articles, but they are more frequently associated with prostitution scandals as opposed to rapes, kidnappings, murders, and robbery. In an issue of *La Repubblica*, a popular left-leaning national paper, published April 30, 2010 there was an article called "*Annunci per baby-sitter cinesi ma le obbligavano a prostituirsi*" or "Announcements for baby sitters but they force them to prostitute themselves." The article describes a group of women who published advertisements for babysitters in a Chinese language newspaper to attract other immigrant women who they then beat and forced into prostitution. There were 17 people in the organization, most of whom were Chinese immigrants, and they all ended up in jail. Like the previous article, this article is also careful to emphasize the nationalities of the perpetrators, stating multiple times that the heads of the organization were Chinese. Though some of the immigrants were "forced into sexual slavery" the article does show that a few had agency when it states that some of the women were willing participants in the scandal. Even those who were prostitutes by choice, however, rarely received a fair

⁴ "In manette sono finite, un palestinese clandestino di 23 anni e due 25enni marocchini regolari sul territorio italiano."

share of their earnings because the organization sent about 20,000 euro a month to China or used it in order to “acquire luxury goods.” Thus, the article contributes to the sexualization of the immigrant woman by repeatedly calling attention to the prostitutes’ Chinese nationality. It also suggests that their loyalties remain in China by pointing to the fact that they sent the money they made exploiting the women that was not used to buy “luxury” goods back to their families.

Many Italian newspapers also assist in denying immigrants’ *protagonismo* by publishing articles that depict them as victims, leading Italians to assume they are a burden on society, and not only incapable of positively contributing but also unable to help themselves. This discourse is much more commonly applied to women than it is to men, and it is common to see articles in both left and right wing newspapers that depict immigrant women as quasi-slaves, whether they are employed in the home or are being forced into prostitution. The result is that, in public opinion, the image of the immigrant woman often passes directly from the domestic to the prostitute, with neither incarnation being capable of positive contribution and both needing above all, help and protection that will drain Italy’s resources (Lutz 2008: 16).

An article published in *la Repubblica* on June 14, 2010, for example, called “*Omicidio Sanaa, nessuno sconto ergastolo al padre omicida*” or “Sanaa’s Homicide, noone tells the story of El Kataoui Dafani, a Moroccan immigrant who was recently put in jail for killing his 18 year old daughter. This article is particularly telling, as it performs the dual feat of villifying the male immigrant while simultaneously representing the female immigrant as a helpless victim. The article says the girl was killed by her father with a kitchen knife for wanting to assimilate to Italian cultural norms rather than

maintaining the subjugated status of a Muslim woman. Minister Carfagna, associated with the far-right political party the Lega Nord says, this was a “historic sentence” showing that those “who oppose integration will have to pay the price in our democracy... “the penalty” he says, is “severe and fair” because “a process like (this) shows that young immigrants can trust in our country, they need to take back liberty that here (unlike in their country/culture of origin) can be realized.”⁵ Though it is possible that the “facts” of the tale are true and that the father did kill his daughter, the way in which the paper chose to tell the story, that is, emphasizing their nationality as the motive for the murder and resorting to stereotypical depictions of the male immigrant as a villain and female immigrant as a victim without accounting for circumstantial details creates a black and white image of immigrants in Italy that functions to deny them *protagonismo*.

An article in the *Corriere del Mezzogiorno*, a right-leaning southern newspaper, on May 13, 2010 shows another representation of the immigrant woman as victim by discussing the establishment of CASA RUT, a social service created by Italians to help immigrant women “find a way out of prostitution.” The article begins, “Stories of slavery. Of lives robbed and dignity erased... First the fear, the terror, then not even that. Life becomes empty, until becoming an agonizing walk through the dark, the same dark of the streets in the periphery (of large cities) where thousands of women every night are forced to prostitute themselves after having undergone violent attacks and before having to undergo them again.”⁶

⁵ “Chi ostacola all’integrazione attena alla democrazia... un processo come quello che si è appena concluso dimostra che le giovani immigrate si possono fidare del nostro Paese, devono denunciare i loro aguzzini e riprendersi la libertà che qui viene loro riconosciuta.”

⁶ “Storie di schiavitù. Di vite rubate e dignità cancellate. Di emozioni calpestate. Prima la paura, il terrore, poi nemmeno più quello. La vita viene svuotata, fino a diventare un’angosciante cammino verso il buio, lo stesso buio degli stradoni di periferia dove migliaia di donne ogni notte sono costrette a prostituirsi dopo aver subito violenze, e prima di doverne subire ancora.”

Casa Rut, organized by Rita Giaretta is a community that has hosted and assisted immigrant women who want to “escape from prostitution” since 1993. The majority of these women, the article explains, are young from 17-30 years of age, some coming from countries in Eastern Europe and many more from the “the poorest regions of Africa where the conditions of poverty are such that they can’t even be imagined by those who have not seen them: they are so grave that those who go through them sometimes aren’t even able to imagine a “trip of hope” (trip to Italy) could make them better.”⁷ Many do, however, end up making “voyages in the dark” in *clandestinitá* and *irregolaritá* which “almost always result in slavery.” The women that Casa Rut tries to help, says the article, are not prostitutes, but “exploited prostitutes by a criminal mechanism that has worked to enslave the majority of illegal immigrant women on Italian soil.” The article ends emphasizing Italians efforts to help illegal immigrants escape their own victimhood, saying “to all of these women we want to give our support.”⁸

Other forms of victimhood applied to immigrant women, while not resulting in forced prostitution or death, are similarly disempowering. An article in *Corriere della Sera* on January 20, 2010, titled “In Italy 2,000 baby brides a year. And many are forced to go back to their original country...marriages above all between Indians and Pakistani...a young girl is saved in Novara” discusses the way in which immigrant women between the ages of thirteen and sixteen are frequently taken out of school and sent back to countries of origin in order to get married. The article contributes to the victimization of immigrant women by neglecting to mention the many girls who rebel

⁷ “...regioni piu povere dall’Africa, dove le condizioni di miseria sono tali da non poter essere nemmeno immaginate da chi non abbia mai vistato quei posti: sono talmente gravi che per chi le subisce talkvolta non resta anche aggraparsi al sogno di un viaggio di speranza che possa migrliorale.”

⁸ “...a tutte queste donne vogliamo dare il nostro support.”

against their families traditional values and choose to remain in Italy. If the article mentions women who are able to find a way out of adhering to their families' wishes, it is only through the help of an outside actor and in conjunction with rehabilitation provided by Italians. The article states, "last Friday, a girl was saved a Novara. She was 17 years old, had a daughter of 4 months and was maltreated by an arranged marriage. Now she is in a community in Rome because a neighbor was able to denounce the situation. She wasn't able to, she didn't know even who to go to." Thus, the article portrays all immigrant women as victims of an oppressive culture unwillingly imposed upon them by fundamentalist family members.

Immigrant Representations by Italian Political Parties

Italian political parties have also been prominent participants in the production of immigrant stereotypes in Italy. Much like Italian newspapers, political parties often contribute to the denial of immigrants' *protagonismo* through their speech and actions that aim to represent them in a uniform way. The methods most popularly employed, however, often vary significantly depending on the party's political orientation. While right-wing parties such as the *Lega Nord* tend to rely more heavily on villainizing discourse and culturalist racism to pass increasingly stringent immigration policy, left and center-left wing parties are predominantly reliant on victimizing discourses in order to promote policies that would increase access to social services and integration for legal residents while simultaneously working to close Italy's borders to new immigrants in order to prevent further draining of Italian resources. Since the right and far right have been more powerful political actors in Italy over the course of the past decade, I will primarily focus my analysis on the actions and statements of the *Lega Nord*, which I will

argue has maintained a strong influence on immigration policy and public sentiment towards immigrants since the early 1990s. I will also mention some of the strategies employed by Berlusconi's party, *Popolo della Libertá*, formerly *Forza Italia*, representative of the center-right, and the *Partito Democratico*, representative of the center-left, that have contributed to the denial of immigrants' *protagonismo*.

The Northern League's Influence on Public Opinion

The Northern League or *Lega Nord* in Italian is known throughout much of Italy and the world as one of the most openly xenophobic political parties in Europe. Headed by Umberto Bossi, the party currently governs in conjunction with Berlusconi's *Popolo della Libertá* and *Alleanza Nazionale* (former fascist party) and has maintained both an anti-immigrant and anti-Southern political agenda since its conception in 1991. The League has attempted to foster an anti-immigrant environment not only through its influence on legal policy, but through various forms of anti-immigrant activism and in its wide diffusion of anti-immigrant rhetoric. Evidence suggests that the Leagues' actions significantly influenced public opinion and have helped to politicize the issue of immigration. In a study conducted by Ilvo Diamanati in 2001, just as the League began to step up its anti-immigrant rhetoric, 42.8% of Italians interviewed claimed that immigrants were a threat to public order and security, 32.3% claimed that immigrants threatened jobs, and finally, 25.2% felt that immigrants represented a danger to Italian culture and identity (Zaslove 2011: 7).

The Lega's diffusion of anti-immigrant sentiment occurs through a diverse set of actions, ranging from the game "*rimbalza il clandestino*" or "bounce the illegal immigrant" whose aim was to mouse-click on boatloads of immigrants approaching the

Italian coast and “make them disappear” launched on the League’s facebook page in September 2009 to the actions of young league members a few months later who began distributing “anti-immigrant soap” in the streets to protect Italians from the “immigrant invasion.” The main arguments that political parties have used in order to foster their anti-immigrant and anti-immigration agenda upon which I will elaborate below are that (1) immigrants threaten Italian cultural identity because they come from different cultures that cannot coexist with Italian culture (2) immigrants are an economic drain on Italian society and finally (3) immigrants are criminals so their presence will lead to the physical and moral degeneration of Italy.

Culturalist Racism

Radical right parties throughout Europe have employed a “differentiating discourse” embedded in a culturalist racism, or the belief that “Europe is being invaded by immigrants so culturally, linguistically, or religiously different” that they cannot be incorporated into society without grievous consequences for national cultural identity (Schain 2008: 12). The Front Nationale in France, the British National Party in the UK, “Progress” parties in Denmark and Norway, and the “Freedom party” in Austria, to give a few examples, have all portrayed the presence of immigrants as a cultural threat.



Consistent with the views of other far right parties in Europe, Italy's Northern League frequently emphasizes that the "immigrant invasion" will lead to the destruction of Italian culture and national identity. The poster above, distributed by members of the League during the elections in April 2008, reads "They couldn't make immigration laws, now they live in reserves! Think about it" and displays a large picture of a Native American. While this poster clearly has multiple implications, one way in which it can be interpreted is that the League uses the example of Native Americans, whose "culture" no longer has a definitive presence in "American culture" outside of their reserves to imply that the same thing will happen to Italian culture in Italy (and perhaps, Italians in Italy) if immigrants, representative of a variety of different cultures, are permitted to enter. Thus, as Zaslove eloquently articulates, the Northern League blames "the immigrant, multiculturalism, and the Americanization of society... for homogenizing culture and history, extending these accusations to the conclusion that the particularity of civil society is being destroyed and the local is being eradicated "(Zaslove 2004).

Later, during an interview in 1990, Bossi made the assertion that "excessive social differences are fatal to social peace... if your streets and plazas are full of people of

⁹ Poster taken from Zaslovee article.

color,” Bossi says, “citizens feel that this is no longer their own world.” (Gold 2003: 84). These fears of multiculturalism and “Americanization” are clearly consistent with the ideology of “new racism” articulated above and show that a discourse of cultural incompatibility has been used to desubjectify immigrants even before the Lega Nord party was officially established.

Shortly after the party was formed, it published the following in its political programme:

Our party’s strongly critical attitude towards migratory policies stems from our specific concept of mankind. A human person is not simply an economic agent: he or she is also made up of affections, cultural values, and identities which can find their best expressions in separate historical and environmental communities. Immigrations, having a purely economic value, break up this equilibrium which forms a vital part of human nature. The theorization of a ‘multi-racial society’ as the predestined future for mankind is both vain and openly instrumental (Bull 2001: 174).

While this pamphlet is in some ways, a step forward from economic “push and pull” models of immigration which entirely deny immigrants’ *protagonismo* by covering up elements of agency in their decision to migrate and depicting them as a uniform mass without personal motivations, this alternative depiction of the migrant as personified yet statically attached to a set and incompatible culture promoted here by the Lega Nord also functions to deny those who elect to leave their country of origin *protagonismo* by representing them as a threat to established ways of life.

Another articulation of the League’s use of culturalist racism can be found in its vehement attacks on Islam, which significantly increased after September 11, form a major component of the party’s anti-immigrant rhetorical toolkit, and find many echos even amongst more moderate Italian political parties and individuals. Pitting “modern” and “civilized” Catholic Europe against the “anti-modern” and “uncivilized” world of

Islam, party members emphasize the inherent link between Islam and Muslims' private and public life, between religion and politics, in order to argue that the religion does not allow for a separation between Church and state. Thus, in the eyes of many Italians, Islam is not simply a religion, but a politics that threatens European democracy, Catholic values, and ultimately, European culture and society.

An article in the League's newspaper, *La Padania*, confirms the presence of this viewpoint. Referring to an article in *Civiltà Cattolica* it reads, "when authorizing the construction of mosques, it must be remembered that this is not only a place of worship but a political, social, and cultural reality... it is a place of religion, from whence, however, political decisions originate" and where "revolutions and popular uprisings" are born (Zaslove 2004: 17).

The League's anti-Muslim political position manifests itself in its political mobilization as well as its rhetoric. In the fall of 2000, for example, *Lega Nord* supporters and militants opposed the construction of a mosque in the town of Lodi. Declaring that Europe is Christian and must remain so, a politician affiliated with the *Lega Nord* asserted that the anti-mosque protestors in Lodi had come to "protect their own identity." Later, he continued "besides, Islam is an intolerant religion that wants to implant its conditions without respect for our culture and our Catholic religion....We will not accept being colonized by those who do not respect our laws and our traditions" concluding that "all of the globalizing left knows....that the *Carroccio* (a common term used in newspapers to refer to the *Lega Nord*) is ready to start a new crusade to protect our culture, our identity, our territory, and our future" (Zaslove 2004: 17).

These anti-Muslim sentiments have found a current articulation in Italian legislation in the recent banning of the “burkini,” a body-concealing swimsuit made up of a veil, a tunic and loose leggings in the Piedmont town of Varallo Sesia in August 2009. Those wearing the “burkini” at swimming pools or riversides in this region now face a fine of €500. Claiming that “the sight of a ‘masked woman’ could disturb small children,” Mayor Gianluca Buonanno asserts that “we don’t have to be tolerant all the time...imagine a Western woman bathing in a bikini in a Muslim country. The consequences could be decapitation, prison or deportation” (Sheikyermami). Again, in this instance, the Lega Nord presents a fundamentalist version of Islam as its only incarnation and points to the incompatibility of Muslim and Italian culture to insist that if immigrants are to stay in Italy, they must assimilate by renouncing all of their previous cultural and religious practices.

Many members of Berlusconi’s center-right wing party, *Popolo della Libertá*, share these anti-Islamic sentiments. In 2009, Isabella Bertolini, a member of the Italian parliament states:

“I’ve asked the parliament and the Minister of Interior to stop the construction of all new mosques for at least two years...we also need to monitor all the existing mosques to verify what exactly is going on inside these places. Many of these Muslims don’t want to integrate with the larger European society...they live separate lives. For example, here in Italy 80 percent of the Islamic women don’t speak Italian. 83 percent don’t go outside the house without their husband or a man from their family. They educate their children in separate schools. They speak only Arabic. This is a problem.”

This anti-Islamism has been accompanied by initiatives to deport immigrants that do not completely assimilate to Italian culture and Catholicism. The Lega secretary of Vicenza, for example, proclaimed that ‘it is important to emphasize the Catholic identity and family...this is the only way to protect society and values from drugs, islam, and

globalization” all of which are ripping Catholic society apart (Zaslove 2004: 15). In addition to lumping Islam among drugs and globalization as elements that will lead to Italian society’s deterioration in their speeches, many Lega Nord members have launched legal initiatives to deport immigrants who do not assimilate. In 2009, longtime *Lega Nord* member Claudio Abiendi who leads security policy on the city council, organized the “*Natale Bianco*” or “White Christmas” initiative which sent the police throughout the town of Coccaglio in an effort to round up illegal immigrants for deportation. In an interview with *La Repubblica* he claims that he started the initiative as a way "to start cleaning things up...For me, Christmas isn't the celebration of hospitality, but rather of Christian tradition and our identity" (Israely 2009).

It is important to note, however, that not all Italians are in favor of these laws claiming they violate the right to practice whatever religion one chooses and that they do not believe that all Muslims are fundamentally incapable of integrating into Italian society. Members of the Partito Democratico, for example, have publicly criticized laws banning the burkini in Italy, claiming that “the burka is a false problem. To believe that with these violations the problem of integration will be resolved shows that we haven’t understood that anti-Western rhetoric is nourished by legislation like this”¹⁰ (*Corriere del Mezzogiorno*). While most PD members, like Vittoria Franco, maintain that «il burqa e una prigione e una forma di esercizio del predominio maschile/ the burka is a prison and symbol of male dominance” they believe that prohibiting its usage by law is a mistake “because it would be an abstract intervention that wouldn’t really help the women to

¹⁰ “quello del burqa e un falso problema. Credere che insistendo con I divieti si risolve il problem dell’integrazione significa non aver capito che la retorica anti-occidentale si nutre proprio di questi divieti...”

emancipate themselves and “free choice is an individual right”¹¹ (*Corriere del Mezzogiorno*).

Immigrants as a Resource Drain

In the 2008 election campaign, the following poster was distributed by representatives of the Lega:



In the poster above, an elderly Italian man is pushed to the back of the line by a group of immigrants who are depicted in highly stereotypical caricature in order to convey the message that immigrants have a privileged access to a variety of resources while Italians lack adequate housing, health care, and employment. Thus, the Lega attempts to desubjectify immigrants by claiming that they take jobs, homes, and social services from local citizens without directly contributing to the Italian economy through payment of taxes.

¹¹ “...perché sarebbe un intervento astratto che non aiuterebbe le donne a emanciparsi... come libera scelta è un diritto individuale.”

¹² Translation: guess who’s last. For rights regarding housing, work, and health. Wake up!

It is important to note here, however, that many Italians do reject this claim, by asserting that immigrant labor forms a fundamental component of the Italian economy and immigrants, therefore, do make essential contributions to Italian society. In his new novel *Blacks Out* for example, Vladimiro Polchi, gives a highly realistic description of a day in the near future when the 10 percent of Italy's working population who are immigrants decide to go on strike in which “factories shut down, families struggle to cope without the hundreds of thousands of home helpers who clean the toilets, look after old people, and baby-sit the children, and produce rots in the fields,” (Randall). There is also evidence to suggest that without migrant labor, the costs of production would go up and goods and services would be significantly more expensive. In the end, therefore, it would appear that native Italians who are able to buy items in stores and supermarkets and receive services at affordable prices (not immigrants who are overworked and paid less than minimum wage) are the primary beneficiaries of the current structure of immigration in Italy that not only has created a low-cost source of labor but has denied the individuals who are performing an essential function in Italy’s economy basic rights so that they can be more easily exploited. Nonetheless, the League and other right-leaning political parties continue to blame immigrants for “exploiting the Italian system.”

Immigrants are also portrayed as “stealing” resources away from Italians by political parties both in the field of healthcare (which is universal in Italy) and the housing market. Venetian regional councillor Fabrizio Fracassi proclaimed in an article in *La Padania* entitled “Enough with Anti-Padanian Racism” which attacked recent decisions to give homes to immigrants while local citizens “remain without”, that “an intervention is urgently needed: citizenship must once again be an indispensable requisite

for social housing.” Along a similar vein, many officials in the Northern League have also stated that they believe citizenship should be a requirement for medical treatment. In February 2009, for example, shortly after the centre right government led by Silvio Berlusconi approved the “*Pacchetto Sicurezza*” or “Security Package” according to which illegal residence status in Italian territory is declared an administrative crime, five senators of the Lega Nord party proposed an amendment of the existing legislation, making it obligatory for doctors to report irregular migrants seeking health care to the authorities (Turone 2009). Fortunately, the law was dismissed thanks to strong opposition from multiple healthcare professionals.

Immigrants as Criminals

Another essential way in which political parties such as the Lega Nord work to deny immigrants’ *protagonismo* is by linking immigration to the increasing crime rate in Italy. Last January, when I asked a Bolognese taxi driver if the city of Bologna was safe, he responded “all of the crime in Bologna, wait, all of the crime in Italy, is due to immigrants.” This view is far from isolated and to a large degree has been encouraged by political parties who insist on depicting immigrants as thieves, prostitutes, and murderers who threaten Italians’ physical safety and will lead to the moral degeneration of Italian society.

In 2001, for example, the Northern league held anti-immigration rallies throughout Italy during election campaigns in which speakers read aloud lists of crimes committed by immigrants (BBC News). Again shortly prior to the elections, in 2008, Lega Nord-affiliated mayor of Cittadella Massimo Bitoncini states “I am not against an immigrant who can prove he has a job and who can support himself coming here, but

what has exploded in the Veneto is the problem of crime....with the immigrants,” he explains, “the number of burglaries has risen sharply.” Such concerns inspired local Venetians to organize a nightly patrol, something that sounds dangerously close to vigilantism (Mail Online). In his blog, “A Small Mosque and Keltic Masses” immigrant Miguel Martinez discusses how at a dinner organized by the Lega in which Bossi attended, immigration was clearly the issue Lega supporters felt most strongly about. He claimed that Italy has become a place with “prostitutes in the streets, Tunisian drug pushers, and nimble-fingered Gypsies” and that “out of four million of ‘these people’ 90% are criminals,” (Kelebelker). Today, members of the Lega Nord can be found patrolling the streets in green uniforms and calling themselves the Po National Guard. Established in July 2009 by leader Max Bastoni, an LNist famed for his slogan “*Bastoni contro gli immigrati*” or “Sticks Against Immigrants,” the Po National Guard “takes group walks” looking for immigrant-related criminal activity so that they can “defend themselves and their city” (Presseurop).

The most recent culmination of this logic is represented in the *Lega*’s response to the riots that occurred in Rosarno this January. After two immigrants were shot at with air rifles by unidentified gunmen, thought to be members of the mafia, hundreds of migrants, most of them Africans employed illegally (in large part by criminal organizations) as agricultural laborers for less than £25 a day, were tear-gassed after they attacked cars, set fire to rubbish, threw objects from balconies, and marched on town hall (ItalyMag). Newspapers estimate that at least 66 people were injured in the street violence (Times Online). In response to the riots, rather than blame the criminal organizations that continue to bring in immigrants illegally to Italy so that they can be exploited for their

agricultural labor, *Lega* member Maroni claimed the tensions were a result of “too much tolerance towards clandestine immigration” and held the African workers responsible for the violence.¹³

Even Italian politicians affiliated with center-right parties echoed these accusations. Shortly after Rosarno, Berlusconi stated “we must reduce the number of immigrants in order to reduce the number of crimes and criminals”¹⁴ (*La Repubblica*). It is important to acknowledge, however, that there has been resistance by Italian politicians to these statements. In an article published on January 29, 2010 in *La Repubblica*, Angela Finocchiaro, head of the PD, claims that “immigrants are victims of organized crime... It’s shameful to mask like this a failing of government.”¹⁵ Another politician, Paolo Bonaiuti, agrees, stating “to compare the immigrants to criminals is very grave, and I’ve found the comparison truly hateful.”¹⁶

Additionally, student groups and far left political organizations, though their influence on formal Italian politics has been somewhat limited in recent years, have launched demonstrations to show their outrage regarding Italian politicians’ use of Rosarno as a way to crack-down on illegal immigration rather than addressing the more pertinent issue of organized crime on Italian soil. In February 2010, shortly after the events of Rosarno, I ran into a group of student protestors handing out fliers outside of the political science building in Strada Maggiore that read:

“We are with the immigrants and their struggle, we want to sustain them for that which they contain and express, affirm their dignity and humanity. The responsible ones are the politicians that with their racist laws on immigration jeopardize the city of many brothers

¹³ <http://www.marxist.com/italy-revolt-rosarno-orange-pickers-against-racism.htm>

¹⁴ “...ridurre gli immigrati per abbassare il numero dei reati e dei criminali.”

¹⁵ “Da Rosarno a Castelvoturno gli immigrati sono vittime della criminalità organizzata....E vergognoso mascherare così un fallimento del governo.”

¹⁶ “...paragonare gli immigrati ai criminali è gravissimo, e ho trovato questa equiparazione davvero odiosa.”

and sisters that arrive in this country in search of a better life and like in this case, finish in the hands of criminals...we need to recognize them as members of the human community and unite them in the struggle for a better life free of fear and of mafia violence. There is only one identity and one community, the human community!"¹⁷

It appears therefore, that although the political parties with the most direct influence in Parliament continue to crackdown on illegal immigration and contribute to the denial of immigrants *protagonismo* with overtly xenophobic and/or culturally racist statements, other political organizations within Italy are beginning to protest against these representations. All of these discourses (ranging from openly xenophobic to inclusive *protagonismo*-affirming) exist within Italy (though perhaps not in equal amounts) and form part of the way in which the Italian public views its "foreign" population.

Representations of Immigrants By Social Service Organizations

Even though, as mentioned above, the left side of the political spectrum does not adhere to many of the same notions about immigrants and immigration as the center and far-right, center-left political parties and the social service organizations that have been established as a result of their legislative endeavors also sometimes present immigrants in a light that contributes to the denial of their *protagonismo*. While it is unlikely to hear members of leftist social service organizations rail off about immigrants being *spacciatori* (drug dealers) and criminals, they often present immigrants (and women

¹⁷ "Siamo con gli immigrati e la loro lotta, la vogliamo sostenere per cio che contiene ed esprime, affermare la propria dignita e la propria umanita. I primi responsabili sono I politici che con le le loro leggi antirazziste sull'immigrazione mettono a repentaglio la cita di tanti fratelli e sorelle immigrati che arrivano in questo paese alla ricerca di una vita migliore e come I queto caso, finiscono in mano a cimrinali senza scrupoli. Condanniamo le aggression e la ferocia con cui tanta gente comune si e acanita contro gli immigrati, anziche riconoscersi nella comune umanita e di unirsi alla lotta per una vita migriore libera dall paura e dalla violenza mafiosa. C'e una sola identita e la nostra comune umanita! Vogliamo essere persone migriore, impregnate, piu libere e felici insieme; vogliamo ingormare e contro-informare, sostenere e appoggiare chi lotta per la liberta e la dignita in questo paese come altrove nel mondo."

immigrants in particular) as victims of circumstances beyond their control and offer them “help” which requires them to abandon traditions deemed culturally backwards. They also contribute to the notion that immigrants rob Italy of its financial and social resources by arguing that immigrants are need of Italian assistance. In the section that follows, I will highlight a few of the ways in which social service organizations, while often useful and certainly progressive in some respects, can also contribute to the image of immigrants as weak and culturally backwards that is used to deny them *protagonismo* and supports the notion that they are unworthy of Italian citizenship.

Case Study: Trama di Terre

The social service organization with which I spent the most time while in Italy, *Trama di Terre*, is specifically focused on helping immigrant women and is located in Imola, a small city about a 20 minute train ride outside of Bologna. Arriving at the entrance of *Trama di Terre*, one is struck by the *Trama Tree*, a large poster that lists a host of different events, initiatives, and stories associated with the organization. Laura, an intern working at the center who studies immigration at the *Universita degli Studi di Bologna*, explained that the *Trama Tree* is the organization’s way of ensuring that immigrant women have a presence in the city.

The courtyard is full of pictures, paintings, and inspirational phrases. Walking through the kitchen, I noticed an extensive international menu posted against the well-decorated wall. All of the rooms, in fact, appeared incredibly comfortable, immaculately clean, and beautifully furnished. Laura also told me that comfort and cleanliness are very important to them, as the organization hosts five or six immigrant families who live in the building full time until they are “adjusted and can get back on their feet.” While visiting

the organization I had the pleasure of eating with the families. I remember having a long conversation with Jamila, an immigrant from Morocco who has been in Italy for 19 years and is now living at the center with her husband and 14 year old son. She said that because her family is in financial trouble, they are staying with *Trama di Terre* while she studies to be a nurse instead of a house cleaner. She is very friendly, tells me that she has always felt “at home” in Italy, and in spite of her recent financial struggles is optimistic that her situation will change. The meal the women had prepared was, as Italians say, *davvero abbondante* (really abundant). They served many Middle Eastern specialties like shakshuka, Moroccan eggplant in onion, olive oil, and garlic, and freshly baked Moroccan bread with beans of various varieties. According to Tiziana, anyone in the city of Imola who is hungry is welcome to come to the center and eat the meals. Communal meals allow the immigrant women who live there to have daily interaction with the women working at the center and other people who live in the city. While breaking bread (which was, incidentally, always homemade) immigrant women are able to communicate their concerns and desires for the program and give visitors a holistic and human image of the city’s foreign population.

Walking into the main office, barely mobile after my Moroccan feast, a cat brushed against my leg. The language classroom is painted yellow and purple, decorated with old frames and collages. On the walls are pictures of women in veils, a Moroccan tapestry, a large tree, Russian dolls, a cartoon taken from a book called Burka and various posters with immigrant women speaking about difficulties they’ve had to overcome. Laura speaks to me about the language classes offered, highlighting their role in creating a comfortable environment for women to have meaningful social interactions

with one another. For many immigrant women in Imola, she says, Italian language lessons at the center are the only time during the week in which they will leave their houses and have the opportunity to talk to people “like them.” The intercultural library, connected through a door at the back, has between 3000 and 4000 books on immigrant women.

In many ways, the organizations’ founder, Tiziana del Pra, is a prime example of an Italian associated with an immigrant-related service-based organization who takes the idea of *protagonismo* seriously and understands the need for immigrants to become visible as agents in their own betterment. Some of this, I believe, comes from her feminist approach towards development. Her first words during our interview were “I am a feminist. In all the atmospheres, in political and social work, I’ve always had a gendered view of things even in neutral places and when I did politics as a young woman. I was always interested in women— even when I was in psychiatry I always worked with women.”

When she arrived to Imola in ’93, her thoughts weren’t focused on immigration, but after working with many immigrant women at the *manicomio* (psychiatric hospital) and teaching an Italian language class through the CGIL, she realized “it would be useful to begin a *corso di formazione* (course of formation/education)” for immigrants that would “go beyond the simple course of Italian language and basic medical care that was funded through the European Union.” That was when, in 1996, she founded the organization *Trama di Terre* whose main objective is, she claims, “to give foreign women a different way to read the things that are happening to them.” She encourages immigrants to view obstacles as opportunities, not “to say oh, this happened to me, I

don't know what to do" but to recognize that "they aren't *poverine* (poor girls), they aren't objects that things happen to." The organization, she claims, also tries to make Italians "understand that many of these problems (that immigrant women face) are problems of Italian women as well because they are problems of class."

When asked how *Trama di Terre* differs from traditional organizations, women working at the center mentioned that their goals go beyond providing material sustenance and basic language facility to immigrants by working to combat predominant stereotypes of immigrant women in Italian society that contribute to their disempowerment and giving immigrant women the confidence necessary to be active participants in their own and others' lives.

"It's like this," says Tiziana, "I give you the possibility to begin to work because you have money, understand things, you move. You go to take the bus, you confront people, buy a gelato..from the small things is born that when you're given a *tufone* (hit) you have the power to say "I'm leaving." Laura echoes these sentiments, adding that *Trama* is different than other organizations because it gives women "not only material things...we don't speak only about assistance in the sense of a roof... we're talking about a feminist place that works for the *conoscenza* (understanding) of women...the study of gender is central."

In the media, says Tiziana, "the immigrant women are represented according to categories... the Muslims are repressed... also the Asians. There isn't a very positive image of immigration... Immigration is seen as a problem— in the hospitals, in society, in schools. It's not seen as a resource, the capacity" of immigrants is not recognized and "one is never shown the full cycle... for these women, where they come from, the

difficulties, abandoning their children... instead they show... this Romanian woman married an 80 year old ...the woman who has been hit...the woman who robbed a house.” She also mentions that in particular, the media never shows the difficulties involved in the work immigrant women do. “We try to always give back this part” of the message to Italian society, says Tiziana, “...this part of the message that's missing.”

When asked how the organization attempts to combat prejudice, she said “with meetings, encounters.” Workers claim some of the most important initiatives are those that directly involve other people in Imola. “There was an ethnic dinner where women here cooked for the 25th of November against violence. Many people from Imola were here...they also prepared a show here in the *corso di formazione*. ...” Laura explained. These initiatives that connect the women directly with members of society allow immigrant women to have a positive presence in Imola and therefore, work to combat prejudice.

Another difference that both Laura and Tiziana were careful to emphasize about Trama was that they “try to take precise positions on things.” Laura says, “the difference between us and a *sportello* (government sponsored aid) is that here for example, the women don't wear the burka. The burka is clearly, according to us, representative of submission.” When asked what would happen if a woman wanted to wear the Burka for religious reasons in the center, Tiziana replied,

“Yes it happened one time in 2000 when we did a summer restaurant of Arab food. There was a woman, she lives in Brussels right now where I think she isn't wearing it because also there it's prohibited. We all saw this woman had a big contradiction in herself. One night we invited a woman to do a dance performance. Inside all of her religious fanaticism, this woman with the burka was in the kitchen watching though she said she didn't want to be in the room for religious reasons. She said she saw it as extremely sinful because in Islam you couldn't see the body... fundamentalism prohibits you from dancing, singing, doing all these things. But because she was really just a normal girl you

could tell that watching this she had an explosion inside of herself to do these things and that really, she liked the dance. When she came here and said she wanted to wear the burka no one told her to leave. It's not that this association tells you that ...but you need, clearly, to respect the association's position. It's a very difficult job. If there's someone inside *Trama di Terre* with a burka something is wrong. Either she's made a mistake or we have because we don't accept the burka. In the moment in which you ask to be part of an association that tries to liberate women and you arrive with a burka, there's something that doesn't go— either you haven't understood or we haven't. So I had to ask that she wouldn't wear that garment...a garment that constrains your body, that mortifies you, that denies you, that prohibits you from access to normal life— to eating, speaking, observing, touching, from living. Because that's what the burka is.”

I include this story because it illustrates one of the ways in which, in spite of Tiziana's desire to give women agency and promote their *protagonismo*, it must be acknowledged that the type of agency Italian social service organizations such as *Trama di Terre* allow is often a very particular, limited, Western form of autonomy that simultaneously functions to reinforce the belief that some Middle Eastern and African cultural practices are backwards and immigrants need Italian help in order to escape their heritage. This agenda also manifests itself in the way Tiziana describes the Middle East and in her representation of Muslim men in Italy as unwilling to and or incapable of reconciling their religious beliefs with Italian laws. She says, “We have people coming from different models of life. I needed to go to their countries and really understand why they're like this. If you're used to living in an apartment that's dirty, broken bidets, etc... you do things you'd never do if you had been educated. In their societies they don't have many things, they don't support women, they don't understand them.”

Tiziana represents Muslim men as particularly unwilling to and/or incapable of adapting to life in Italy due to their religious beliefs. She says Muslim immigrants in Italy who abuse their wives and daughters “think ‘I don't live under your laws, I don't care at all about your Italian laws. I live under Muslim laws.’ Laws are laws... It's a religion

being Muslim. That's seeing your own religion as law. The Shar'ia doesn't exist...even in Morocco women are more free. It's an illusion that comes strong in the process of immigration proposed by these ignorant men.”

It is my belief that many women from the non-Western world would find these statements (and the fact that women are prohibited from wearing the burka inside the organization) to be offensive and assert that their religion, culture, and male population are not more “oppressive” or less “educated” but simply different. While I was in Italy, I attended a conference called “*L’Islam e la Donna il Pregiudizio Colpisce Ancora/ Islam and Women, Prejudice Still Exists*” Entering the conference which took place in a room full of Jesus frescos, I immediately noticed the two burka-clad women and one veiled woman seated underneath an archway surrounded by cameras that stood out like sore thumbs amongst the throngs of university students in the audience. The point of the conference, I was informed, was to dispel the myth that Islam is inherently oppressive to women and that all women in the Middle East are its victims. The women spoke eloquently about feminist aspects of Islam, the ways in which they were able to represent themselves in Islamic society, and how the religion has promoted women’s equality. The women end the conference by noting that though “there are undoubtedly still forms of oppression in Islamic societies they are no worse than Western forms, just different. Italian women are abused in different ways— they are overly sexualized and there is too much attention focused on their appearance. The burka, while in some ways oppressive, also gives us a way to be recognized for things other than our bodies.”

Thus, though Tiziana claims that at Trama di Terre “you don't see a flag, you don't see a religious symbol or a symbol of a party... we don't say, conform to my

position, we ask you to construct an idea together that is different that has both your position and my position” in some ways I believe that Trama di Terre does have a political agenda which forces women to conform to Western ideals rather than simply giving them the space to find their own forms of *protagonismo*. In this respect, the organization does promote the belief that Western ideas and culture are superior and immigrants are victims that need to be “educated” and “saved.” Trama di Terre, therefore, while offering the basic forms of rehabilitation necessary for immigrants’ survival and working to give immigrants *protagonismo* also, in some ways, diminishes immigrant women’s agency through its own Westernized political agenda.

While most social service organizations that work predominantly with immigrants give them even less credit than *Trama*, contributing to the idea that immigrants are victims in need of help, I did manage to see a few organizations that had a more progressive approach than in *Trama* regards to promoting immigrants’ *protagonismo*. Two organizations that seem to have particularly progressive philosophies are SOKOS, an organization of volunteer doctors that provides special healthcare services for immigrants and Scuola Migranti XM, an Italian language school in Bolognina (a neighborhood in Bologna located behind the train station).

SOKOS was created in Bologna in 1993 for the purpose of freely assisting anyone who lives in “conditions of social exclusion, refugees, immigrants without a *permesso di soggiorno*, and people without a fixed salary.”¹⁸ According to its website, the overall objective of the organization is “the promotion of civil solidarity and individual health, in terms of both treatment and prevention of illness.” The statute of the organization affirms

¹⁸ Quotes are translated from Sokos website.

that all humans are born free and equal and should therefore, be guaranteed healthcare as a fundamental right. This view seems to me to be progressive in that it guarantees access to basic rights on the basis of universal subjectivity rather than citizenship and works to provide immigrants with one of the basic necessities (health) in order to be able to actively contribute to society without placing limitations on what their contributions after given the assistance might be.

Similarly, the Scuola XM Migranti aims to provide immigrants with a basic tool for integration and political participation in Italy, language facility, without requiring that they simultaneously abandon their own cultural or religious views. According to its website the school also adds to its linguistic *percorso* (objective) a political *percorso*, because it opposes “racist laws of the Italian state in terms of immigration and sees “the *percorso* of learning Italian as intrinsically political in as much as it is an instrument of emancipation, selfdefinition, and socialization.” The actions of the organization, therefore, are connected to “overcoming the political climate” and “diffusing practices and struggles that guarantee migrants an effective right to migration, recognizing them not as criminals or *corpi-merce* (bodily merchandise) but as subjects, to which should be attributed *tutele lavorative* (workers’ benefits) and the rights to political and social participation.”¹⁹

Thus, to some extent, the media, political parties, and many social service organizations play a role in creating a unified image of Italy’s immigrant population as either too violent, too helpless, or too different to successfully integrate into Italian society that allows for their continued exclusion from the basic rights and privileges associated with formal citizenship status. That said, it is also important to recognize that there are some far-left political activists, organizations (like SOKOS, Scuola Migranti

¹⁹ Quotes are translated from Coordinamento’s Website.

XM, and to some extent, Trama di Terre), and media sources which are beginning to move beyond these representations, highlighting immigrants' individuality and providing them with the social and material support necessary to care for themselves and better their own situations. In the following section, I will discuss the ways in which immigrants themselves are working to change the way in which they are represented and lay claim to some of the rights and privileges associated with formal citizenship status.

Chapter 3: Immigrants' Resistance

While it is clear that in many ways, immigrants are denied *protagonismo* by the media, social service organizations, and political parties in Italy, many immigrants are not complacently accepting these unjust representations or their exclusion from the rights and privileges associated with formal citizenship. Immigrants, I will argue, are asserting forms of insurgent citizenship everyday, when they are able to do things typically reserved to those who are “formal” citizens of the Italian state. Their resistance often begins with the initial decision to immigrate, continues as they take advantage of Italy’s resources, laying claim to the same rights and privileges as formal citizens, and has culminated in their political and social participation in Italian life at the individual level, within intercultural centers, and through their organizations. Furthermore, they often directly challenge the logics that contribute to the denial of access to formal citizenship through positive discourse, which emphasizes human rights stemming from universal subjectivity and advocates for free movement of persons. Ultimately, as immigrants increase their participation in Italian life in these ways, with or without legal permission to do so, they increase their *protagonismo*, allowing Italians to begin seeing immigration as a resource rather than a problem.

The Autonomy of Migration

As I alluded to in the introduction to this paper, many academic studies use statistics to represent migration in terms of flows and recessions from a predominantly economic framework which does not allow readers to consider immigrants as subjects capable of political participation, but instead, promotes the belief that migrants are a “disposable quantity which can be turned on and off through economic policy”

(Bojadzijeve 2009: 2305). As Bojadzijeve points out in “Migration Struggles and the Global Justice Movement,” however, immigrants “do not passively follow investments of capital, but rather there is a codetermination between the two processes” (Bojadzijeve 2009: 2305). Though some individuals are “forced” against their will to leave their countries of origin, the majority of immigrants chose, for a variety of circumstances over which they have had varying degrees of control, to immigrate. Yann Moulier Boutange (1992) calls this decision the “subjective factor” of migration and claims that it has been suppressed in many theoretical and political analyses and public debates. By calling attention to the individual decisions of immigrants to leave their host country or, as Bojadzijeve calls it, the autonomy of migration, scholars are attempting to combat the representation of Italy’s immigrant community as a statistic whose presence on Italian soil can be adjusted through simple manipulations in legal or economic policy and encouraging Italians to stop viewing immigrants as a uniform mass (Bojadzijeve 2009: 2306). Additionally, the decision to immigrate from their country of origin often represents the first way in which immigrants assert insurgent citizenship, exercising the right to freedom of movement although it has been formally denied to them by Italian authorities.

The Italian government and media have attempted to cover the subjective aspect of migration in a number of ways. One way in which this is accomplished is through emphasis on trafficked and/or refugee-status (i.e. “forced” migration) as the primary way to obtain Italian citizenship. In her article, “Respect for all: The Political Self-Organization of Female Migrant Domestic Workers in the European Union,” Schwenken makes the distinction between the popular usage of the words *trafficking* and *smuggling*.

While people tend to use trafficking to describe movement of individuals against their will, smuggling is typically used to refer to more voluntary movements on the part of the immigrant (Schwenken 2003: 47). Thus, she claims, in determining an individual's right to refugee or trafficked status, one creates a false dichotomy between "voluntary" and "forced" migration.

Limiting one's labeling of migrations to these two options, however, becomes problematic when one considers the varying degrees of agency individual immigrants had in their decision to come to Italy. As Schwenken shows, "voluntary" and "forced" are not the only ways in which to describe patterns of migration but "highly constructed terms which form the two ends of a continuum" (Schwenken 2003: 47). Jo Doezema describes the potentially problematic effects of using only these two terms to describe migrations in his article about sex workers, claiming that it reinforces the image of either guilty/voluntary or innocent/forced prostitutes. He advances the idea of "forced to choose" to show that even sex workers who "voluntarily" chose their profession were often motivated by circumstances beyond their control.

The same distinction can be applied to immigrants described as smuggled or trafficked. When an immigrant is described as a trafficked person, they are regarded as a victim and given access to more social services. Immigrants who are labeled as smuggled, however, are often villified by the Italian media and government and regarded as unwelcome intruders illegally trespassing on Italian territory. In reality, most immigrants who come to Italy are neither trafficked nor smuggled in these extreme senses of the words. They are not sold or kidnapped, nor have they simply chosen to leave their countries to buy Gucci purses and eat more pasta. Thus, the large majority

of migrations are neither entirely “forced” nor “voluntary,” but *chosen* in order to access opportunities and rights that were previously unavailable to them in their countries of origin.

The Italian government, however, failing to recognize the varying degrees of choice or freedom exercised by immigrants, maintains an entirely different set of laws for refugees and trafficked individuals which highlights their *denuncia* (confession; the story they tell condemning their traffickers and/or need to escape due to war-like conditions) as the central component necessary in order to obtain Italian citizenship. This promotes the view that “forced” migrations are the only legitimate way for people born in other nations to enter Italy and reinforces the Italian public’s view of immigrants as victims by requiring that immigrants represent themselves as powerless in order to gain access to social services. On the other hand, those who chose not to declare themselves trafficked or refugees remain illegal residents on Italian soil, contributing to the public opinion that immigrants are criminals.

Many scholars maintain that whether or not the circumstances which motivate individuals to leave their countries are entirely within their control, migration always constitutes an act of resistance (though not necessarily consciously) to the nation-based global regime because it exercises the right to freedom of movement. In this way, immigration becomes, as Sandro Mezzadra calls it, a means to express one’s “right to escape” which, if properly interpreted, may also represent a “privileged way to subjectivity” (Mezzadra 2004: 267). Mezzadra asserts that in order to “come to terms with the image of the immigrant as a weak subject, hollowed by hunger and misery and needing above all care and help” scholars must acknowledge the fact that in order for

migrations to exist, there must be “an individual motion (made concretely by a concrete woman or man, embedded in a family and social network but nonetheless capable of agency) of desertion from the field where” the ‘objective causes’ of migration operate, “a reclaiming precisely of a ‘right to escape,’ which, even if most of the time unconsciously, constitutes a material critique of the international division of labor and marks profoundly the subjectivity of the migrant also in the country where she/he chooses to settle down” (Mezzadra 2004: 270).

Interviews I conducted during my fieldwork in Bologna confirmed Mezzadra’s theory. While conducting research at the Centro Zonarelli, I encountered many immigrants who, in telling their stories, were careful to emphasize the fact that they themselves chose to come to Italy and advocated for the right to “free movement of persons.” As Mohammed, president of *Sopra i Ponti*, eloquently articulates “Borders are created...as you see there’s free circulation of goods...human beings when there’s war, when they are hungry... don’t need to die for the global system as strategy...I chose to come to Italy to find work...to change my life.”²⁰

Other examples of immigrants asserting their right to freedom of movement and emphasizing their own agency in migration are abundant in Manuela Foschi’s book, *Vite Senza Permesso (Lives Without Permission)*, in which she conducts interviews with immigrants who work as *ambulanti* (street vendors). One male immigrant from Algeria, Abdel, highlights his decision to come to Italy in order to find work and describes himself as “human” to show that he is entitled to basic rights regardless of where he was born

“I don’t want to be Algerian or Neopolitan, but only human. I chose to come here to work and not to do evil or rob. Why don’t they let me find a job?”²¹ (Foschi 2009: 104).

²⁰ “Le frontiere sono create...come vedi c’è la libera circolazione delle merce...gli esseri umani quando ce Guerra, fame non devono morire per il sistema globale come ideologia come strategia...ho scelto io di venire a trovare lavoro per cambiare la mia vita”

It is important to note that there are, however, immigrants who did not come to Italy for strictly practical reasons such as work, famine, or war. Many women come to Italy, for example, because they meet Italian men traveling in their country of origin and end up getting married. Others like Bass, originally from Senegal, claim they wanted to come to Italy because of their curiosity and desire to experience a new way of life. Bass states that he came to Italy in order to “meet people, go out, go to the clubs to cafes with friends, and for my great curiosity to see what there was on the other side, in the West”²² (Foschi 2009: 115). These migrations also constitute acts of resistance since most of the individuals who express similar opinions also believe in the right to free movement of persons, asserting that as “citizens of the world” they are entitled to certain basic rights and privileges wherever they are currently located. Speaking of his struggles shortly after arriving in Italy, Bass continues,

“Even with the legislative restrictions in this country I go forward because only in this way can we have a better society. We need to believe in ourselves. I feel like a citizen of the world able to adapt to any situation. I could live anywhere” (Foschi 2009: 122).²³

While female immigrants also emphasize their decisions to immigrate, in my experience they are more likely to do so with a sense of guilt, highlighting circumstances beyond their control that motivated them to leave. Many immigrants who published memoirs in LinguaMadre 2010, for example, an anthology of stories by immigrant women compiled by Daniella Finocchi, questioned the legitimacy of borders and

²¹ “Non voglio essere algerino o napoletano, ma soltanto umano...sono venuto qui per lavorare e non per fare del male o rubare. Perche non mi fate trovare un lavoro?”

²² “conoscere gente, uscire, andare in discoteca o al bar con gli amici... e per la mia grande curiosita di vedere cosa c’era dall’altra parte, in occidente.”

²³ “Nonostante le restrizioni legislative in questo paese, vado Avanti, perche solo cosi si puo arrivare a una societa migliore. Bisogna crederci. Mi sento cittadino del mondo, libero e capace di adattarmi in qualsiasi situazione. Potrei vivere ovunque.”

articulated the right to free movement of peoples, but continued to express feelings of guilt for leaving their country of origin. When discussing her decision to leave her children in Moldavia to go to Italy in her short story “*Tre Anni*” (“Three Years”) Eugenia Dandara Grajdieru states, “I felt my heart pull, for the sense of guilt, but I didn’t see another way out. Life in Moldavia was too hard. I needed to leave”²⁴ (Finocchi 2010: 96). There are also, however, many women who are beginning to articulate the right to freedom of movement and their own agency in migration without apology, with the same ferocity of male immigrants. Indira Barroso Lopez, for example, speaking about the right to freedom of movement says:

“Maybe people think that when you’re born in an unfortunate place you are stuck there forever, that you don’t have the right to go anywhere else, you pertain to another category of people. They think that those who have suffered hunger need only to eat to be happy, it’s enough to give them potatoes and flour...and this person never needs to complain and in the case that they had the desire for a little meat needs to remember that before they never ate. And so they shouldn’t even allow themselves to dream about a little meat or fulfill other spiritual satisfactions. To me it doesn’t seem just, we are all equal, and we all have the same rights”²⁵ (Finocchi 2010: 144).

She ends her story emphasizing her own agency in her decision to migrate to Italy from Cuba:

“I want to tell you that I made a decision, I won’t allow the negative forces to distance me anymore from the right way, from my mission, to turn out the light inside of me. I won’t justify myself anymore because I am not afraid to dream”²⁶ (Finocchi 2010: 145).

²⁴ “Sentivo il cuore stringere, per il senso di colpa, ma non vedevo altre vie d’uscita: la vita era diventata troppo dura in Modavia. E spietata. Dovevo partire.”

²⁵ “Forse le persone pensano che quando si nasce in un posto sfortunato sei segnato per sempre, che non si abbia diritto ad andare oltre, Si appartiene a un’altra categoria di persone. Pensano che chi ha sofferto la fame necessity solo di mangiare per essere felice, basterebbe argli patate e farina e questa persona non si dovrebbe mai lamentare e , nel caso avesse il desiderio di un po’ di carne, bisognerebbe ricordarle che prima non mangiava. E quindi non dovrebbe neanche permettersi di sognare un po’ di carne e tanto meno avere altre soddisfazioni spirituali. A me non sembra una cosa giusta, siamo tutti uguali, e abbiamo gli stessi diritti.”

²⁶ volvevo dirti che ho preso una decisione, non permetterò che le forze negative che allontanano l’uomo dalla sua vera strada, dalla sua missione, spengano la fiamma che c’è dentro me. Non mi giustifichero piu, non avro paura di sognare.

I believe that the persistence of immigration and the fact that immigrants are openly advocating for the right to “freedom of movement” particularly in the face of the increasing militarization of borders and the elaborate anti-immigration regime in Italy and Europe more broadly, constitutes an act of insurgent citizenship which works (consciously or unconsciously) to combat the stereotype that immigrants are weak by highlighting their ability to advocate on their own behalf and act in order to better their situation (Bojadzijeve 2009: 2305). In this way, autonomous decisions to migrate constitute a practice of resistance by migrants who “unseat social relations, break with convention, flee, take off, leave, modify, communicate, transfer” and often openly articulate their own right to freedom of movement as global citizens (Bojadzijeve 2009: 2307).

Positive Discourse: Resilience, Rights Based v. Help-Based Advocacy

Immigrants often have to overcome tremendous obstacles in their countries of origin, and, shortly after arriving in Italy, must attempt to adapt to an unfamiliar situation without the support of loved ones, adequate financial resources, and while confronted with xenophobia and racism on a daily basis. Immigrants often cite their perseverance in spite of these circumstances, or resilience, as evidence of their capacity to positively contribute to Italian society. In Adelle Herana’s speech at the “*Forum Metropolitano delle associazioni di cittadini non comunitari di Bologna e provincia*” (“Metropolitan Forum of Associations of Citizens outside of the EU of Bologna and Surrounding Areas”) for example, she stated

“I was saying that often, foreigners are treated with paternalism, like people who need to be assisted, helped, rarely taking into consideration the strength, capacity, and competency that they have. The strength, for examples, that they needed to have in order to reach the decision to emigrate, to leave their own countries; the strength, for example,

to abandon their own lives, without knowing exactly where they were going, not only the desire to be emancipated, but also to realize their own desire to better their lives. Next, according to me, one of the greatest strengths that the immigrants have is that once arriving here, they need to adapt to roles that are already preconfigured for them.”²⁷

It is precisely this ability to adapt in spite of difficult circumstances that many immigrants are beginning to cite as evidence of their capacity to positively contribute to Italian society. Amara Lakhous, an Algerian immigrant, recently published a novel intending to give Italy’s foreign population *protagonismo* by highlighting their resilience. Each chapter of *Scontri di Civiltà per un Ascensore a Piazza Vittorio (Clashes of Civilization for an Elevator at Piazza Vittorio)* published in 2006, provides a reaction by a different member of Italian society to the accusation of Amedeo, an immigrant from the Middle East, of killing “il Gladiatore” or Lorenzo Manfredi, a resident in his building. Lakhous describes the situation from the perspective of a number of characters, many of whom are also immigrants, in order to show readers the variety present within Italy’s foreign population.

Many of these characters point to the difficulties they have had to overcome in order to reach Italy as well as their continued ability to survive in spite of problems encountered after arriving to prove their innocence and show that they are capable of caring for themselves. The character of Parviz, for example, who is unable to find work in Italy, often speaks about how before leaving Iran, he lost everything— his house, his restaurant, his family— in the blink of an eye (Lakhous 2006: 20). He left Iran because

²⁷ “Dicevo che spesso le straniere vengono trattate e vengono guardate con paternalismo, come delle persone che devono essere assistite, devono essere aiutate, raramente prendendo in considerazione la forza, le capacità, e le competenze che hanno le donne immigrate. La forza, per esempio, che hanno dovuto raccogliere per arrivare alla decisione di emigrare, di allontanarsi dal proprio paese; la forza, per esempio di scommettere tutta la propria vita, senza sapere certo quale direzione andare, non soltanto per desiderio, come si diceva prima, di emancipazione, ma anche per realizzare il proprio desiderio di migliorare la propria vita. Poi, secondo me, uno degli sforzi maggiori che le donne immigrate fanno, e quello, una volta giunte qua, nei luoghi di accoglienza, di adattarsi ai ruoli già prefigurati per loro.”

he felt his life was threatened and now that he has arrived in Italy, he is unable to find a stable job or obtain the rights guaranteed to citizens and political refugees. He claims that the other residents and the Italian authorities often treat him like he is a drug dealer and make racist remarks. When “il Gladiatore” urinates in the elevator and Parviz tries to tell him to stop, he responds “If you say it again I’ll pee in your mouth! You’re in my house, you don’t have the right to speak. Have you understood piece of shit? Italy for the Italians! Italy for the Italians!”²⁸ The character of Parviz, therefore, is a prime example of the way in which resilience is used to show worthiness of citizenship, because he claims that after all he has experienced and continues to endure, he deserves to be treated with the same respect as the other inhabitants of Piazza Vittorio.

While doing fieldwork I met many individuals who, like Parviz, used their speech to highlight their resilience in order to show that they are capable of positively contributing to Italian society and deserve to be treated with respect. Their statements show the beginnings of what Schwenken describes as a *rights-based* rather than *help-based* discourse. In her article, “Respect for all: The Political Self-Organization of Female Migrant Domestic Workers in the European Union” she uses two-competing frames to discuss the way in which immigrant women domestic workers go about obtaining greater opportunities for themselves. According to Schwenken, the frame one uses to make their argument (either *rights-based* or *help-based*) can determine whether immigrants are seen as subjects/agents or simply as victims. The Council of Europe report, for example, talks about domestic workers as “victims of a new form of slavery.” A “domestic slave,” it states, is a “vulnerable individual forced, by physical and/or moral

²⁸ “Se lo dici ancora ti pisci in bocca! Tu sei a casa mia, non hai il diritto di parlare! Hai capito, pezzo di merda! Italia agli Italiani! Italia agli Italiani!”

coercion, to work without any real financial reward, deprived of liberty and in a situation contrary to human dignity” (Schwenken 2003: 48). It recommends employing measures to prevent trafficking in human beings including providing information and combating poverty, implementing repressive measures like stricter border controls and police cooperation, increasing protection and assistance of victims, and regulating domestic work (Schwenken 2003: 48). While many of these objectives have been met, Schwenken argues that this report did not adequately address the needs of women immigrants because they are still seen by the Italian public as victims rather than agents.

The Charter of Rights for Migrant Domestic Workers, on the other hand, more adequately addresses the needs of women immigrants by referring to them as “people and workers” in different social situations as opposed to slaves. Domestic work is described as “demanding work which requires a variety of skills” but which is not adequately acknowledged” and it claims that immigrants employed in this way are entitled to “workers’ rights, human rights, and womens’ rights” (Schwenken 2003: 49). Global regulations to guarantee extended rights for (undocumented) immigrants such as these, however, are thus far only ratified by so-called “sending countries.” Global regulations which depict immigrants as victims needing help like those detailed in the Council of Europe’s Report (i.e. laws which intend to combat organized crime, human smuggling, and trafficking), however, have been ratified by a much greater number of states (Schwenken 2003: 50). Thus, Schweken argues that although the first approach, that of considering domestic laborers as “victims of a new form of slavery” has led to increased access to social services and to some extent, more opportunities for immigrant woman, it

has also limited their access to other opportunities by proliferating images of immigrant women as victims.

Schweken's article is central to the argument I am trying to make about the importance of using a *rights-based* vs. *help-based* discourse because it shows that in spite of quicker successes with other strategies, many immigrants chose to advocate for their rights on the basis of universal subjectivity and highlight their ability to endure difficult circumstances in order to avoid being seen as victims. Many of the individuals I met, for example, claimed that the fact that they dealt with racism on a daily basis entitled them to more respect. Rowland, a man who came from Nigeria to live in Italy 20 years ago, states

“When you find yourself in a place that isn't yours, I'm speaking now mostly about people of color like me, people that come from countries in northern Africa...you seem like a delinquent, like someone who robs things. I remember years ago, I went to church to pray and sat next to a person and this person moved, I went and sat next to them again and then they moved again. There's racism everywhere. The experience of obtaining citizenship is difficult. I pay taxes; I have kids who were born here that are still not citizens. I've been here twenty years but I don't have rights. You need a ton of money to obtain citizenship. I began and needed to abandon it because it cost too much.”

Another immigrant I met at the center, Conco, has been living in Italy for 30 years and claims that he still feels like a foreigner.

“There's still a lot of racism. The Italian society sees immigrants as people that don't work, as invaders in their cities. I've been here 30 years and still I am not accepted, I don't feel at home, I don't feel comfortable. I feel like a foreigner. I don't feel Italian, I feel like a foreigner. I deserve more.”

Tiffany, an immigrant from Fiji with whom I spoke at Trama di Terre, echoes these sentiments, adding that her ability to walk away from difficult circumstances with a smile is the reason she has friends. She states:

“I've been in Italy about ten years now. I came from Fiji because I was getting married to an Italian man and now I'm getting divorced. I have one child and she's here and nine years old. My husband is from Bologna. He's Italian. I want to work a job in a

supermarket now. It's difficult to find a job. Where I'm born if someone comes looking for work it's very easy because there I know the language. I don't like it here because I don't like the way people act. In every place it's very difficult but you have to know how to survive...or how to act. Over here they don't know how to act. There are plenty problems but in my place, in Fiji, the people don't go around making sad face like over here.... In the morning you tell people good morning and they don't even answer and they say they have problems so they don't want to talk to anyone that's why I don't like it. There's racism in Italy but I've got plenty friends because they always see me smiling, laughing. I know how to handle it."

Thus, Tiffany cites the fact that in spite of racism and difficulty finding work, she is able to make the best of her situation in order to show that she is strong. Another woman, Rosana Crispim Da Costa, originally from Brazil, uses a *rights-based* discourse to show her strength. When her son's school party alienates foreign students with its overtly religious theme, she speaks out by quoting from the Italian constitution:

"All of the citizens have equal rights and are the same in front of the law, without distinction of sex, race, language, religion, political opinions, or personal and social conditions. It's the homework of the republic to remove the obstacles to the economic and social order that limit the liberty and equality of citizens and impede their full development as human beings and their effective participation. This is the country where I've chosen to live."²⁹ (Finocchi 2010: 69).

Perhaps the strongest individual statement I heard while in Italy that most completely articulated a *rights-based* discourse was made by Mohammed, president of *Sopra i Ponti*. His words not only spoke outwardly against the nation-state based nature of the global regime and advocated for free movement of persons, they also highlighted immigrants' capacity to better their own situations and resilience in spite of overwhelming obstacles. He states,

²⁹ "Tutti i cittadini hanno pari dignita soiale e sono uguali davanti alla legge, senza distinzione di sesso, di razza, di lingua, di religione, d'opinioni politiche, di condizioni personali e sociali. E compito della repubblica rimuovere gli ostacoli di ordine economico e sociale, che limitando di fatto la liberta e l'uguaglianza dei cittadini, impediscono il pieno sviluppo della persona umana e l'effettiva partecipazione. Questo e il paese dove ho scelto vivere."

“We believe that we are citizens of this world...that the world pertains to us..If in Italy I am comfortable, this is citizenship— it’s not the paperwork, not the passport, it’s the belief. We need to fight together for change. We are society and we need to change society. We don’t have the right to vote but we have a lot— we have the possibility to do a lot. We can communicate, we can stay together, we can live together in peace. This, we from below, can organize— with or without the right to vote. I don’t have the right to vote, it’s another right that I have been denied. It won’t be granted to me for a long time. In the meantime, however, we must live. We must try to create a society that helps all of us because we are all in it, and we are all citizens of the world.”³⁰

Intercultural Centers

One way in which this organization from below has occurred is through the use of intercultural centers. In addition to advocating on their own behalf and emphasizing their own agency in migration and resilience in spite of difficult circumstances through individual actions and speech, one of the strongest forms of resistance I witnessed while in Bologna took place within the context of intercultural centers. In her book, Il Tempo dell’Integrazione “I centri Interculturali in Italia” (The time of integration “Intercultural Centers in Italy), Graziella Favaro describes intercultural centers as “places of exchange, mediation, confrontation of practices and planned projects, places in which to become informed, share doubts, reflect, and negotiate different points of view,” (Favaro 2008: 11). She claims that intercultural centers are “a privileged atmosphere to construct together the walk towards integration” (Favaro 2008: 11).

It has been about twenty years since the first intercultural centers were established in Italy and as immigration laws have become increasingly stricter their uses have been

³⁰ “Crediamo che siamo cittadini di questo mondo...il mondo ci appartiene dove ci va e la mia cittadinanza.. in italia mi trovo bene e la mia cittadinanza- non e la carta, non e passaporto, e il credo...quindi dobbiamo fare la lotta insieme per cambiamento... .. l’italiano non vede in me il diverso ma vede in me uno della societa... entra nel meccanismo nel cervello del lavoratore che siamo la societa e che dobbiamo cambiare la societa..non abbiamo il diritto di votare la gente ma abbiamo molto la possibilita di fare tanto...possiamo comunicare, possiamo stare insieme, vivere insieme, in pace ... questo possiamo costruire noi dal basso non si sa quella della poltrana vota o non vota io non ho il diritto di voto e un altro’diritto negate...e lontano l’arrivo... nel frattempo viviamo insomma proviamo di far crescere una societa che da frutto a tutti quanti noi perche siamo dentro una societa e siamo cittadini del mondo.”

amplified. Favaro divides the last twenty years of work in intercultural centers into distinct phases. The first phase, from the late 1980s until 2000, represents what she refers to as *accoglienza*, which literally translated means “welcome” but is often used to describe encounters that involve a high degree of interpersonal exchange. Up until 2000, Favaro claims, the number of immigrants present on Italian soil was smaller and immigrants’ organizations attempted to promote diversity in an “exotic and slightly folkloristic manner” (Favaro 2008: 5). Cultural centers were then characterized by a “climate of openness and curiosity” and “worked primarily to promote actions for cultural insertion and reciprocal understanding” (Favaro 2008: 105). In the second phase, however, which Favaro claims has extended until modern times, there has been “a social climate of worry and emphasis on the theme of security and control,” and the actions of cultural centers have moved towards a more “compensatory” nature in order to promote the “integration of immigrants into Italian society” (Favaro 2008: 13). They have offered, for example, a multiplicity of Italian as a Second Language classes, cultural/linguistic mediations, social services, and assistance finding employment (Favaro 2008: 13). At the end of her book, Favaro mentions a third phase, which we have not yet entered but which she hopes to soon reach in which immigration will be widely perceived as a structural and stabile component of local communities, the goal of intercultural centers will be to promote and reinforce immigrants’ inclusion. At this point, the center’s initiatives would become government supported and be considered part of the formal Italian system so that they could be diffused in a homogenous manner to all who are in need. Above all, Favaro sees cultural centers as a means to facilitate the existence of “a pluralistic, multicultural society characterized by mutual respect and understanding” (Favaro 2008: 105).

Thus, as Favaro details, as the political and social climate surrounding immigration has become more heated, intercultural centers are becoming increasingly important as a location for immigrants' organizing. Intercultural centers are not only locations in which immigrants develop community amongst themselves but political locations, in which immigrants put aside "the thousands of differences that characterize them in order to collectively affront challenges, difficulties, and possibilities together, achieve dreams and work on individual, family, and group projects for the future" (Favaro 2008: 192). Intercultural centers also act as a means for Italians to see that immigrants are *portatrici di ulterior risorse* (carriers of resources) helping to dissipate their representation as either victims or villains with nothing to contribute to Italian society. Thus, immigrants have been relying on intercultural centers in order to provide sustenance and security in a material sense, as places of "confrontation and negotiation with public entities and institutions... for legal assistance" and perhaps most importantly, as locations in which they can organize themselves, discuss the different habits and customs in their societies of origin and in Italy, and learn to better negotiate the difficulties that result from immigration in order to advocate on their own behalf (Maciotti 2006: 118).

For these reasons I decided to spend the majority of my time in January 2011 at the Centro Massimo Zonarelli, the largest and most diverse intercultural center in Bologna. Before my first trip to the Centro at 8:30 on a Monday evening, my roommate told me to be careful because Bolognina, the area where it is located just beyond the train station, was "one of the least desirable places in Bologna and not suitable for a young girl to be walking alone in at night." Curious to learn more about the zone, I google searched

“Bolognina” and read this response to a person considering purchasing a house in the area:

“Bolognina is an African and Chinese zone...and consequently, there are many foreigners there in general... know that you are speaking with an *antirazzista*...but let us understand each other...we must acknowledge that foreigners are present there..that if one needs to sell drugs they go to a friend’s store and walk around a little bit and there will be people to buy them...this is the negative aspect of the area. Even my Albanian friend, *bravissima persona*, doesn’t like to go to the Piazza dell’Unita for that reason. But then there’s the positive aspect. Shops with low prices that are always open, haircuts at ten euros...an Islamic butcher with the best meat...it is well-served by buses even at night and very close to the train station...But at night, alone, it’s better not to go...”³¹

At this point I was well into my research and therefore, already familiar with the way immigrants were often unjustly associated with criminality (and or perennial victimhood) by Italians, even those who claimed they were “not racist,” yet, I couldn’t help feeling a little nervous traveling alone in the area after dark for the first time after hearing their warnings. While on the bus I purposefully sat with my hands crossed over my bag on my lap and while walking to the center, I found myself periodically looking behind me to check that I wasn’t being followed. Perhaps it is a testament to how strong an effect hateful discourse can have that even someone who had spent the past six months doing research to uncover the many unjust representations of immigrants could still, at some level, be unable to avoid internalizing them.

Shortly after my arrival, however, seeing the warm colors of the mural against the back room, dozens of people performing African dance to my right, and being greeted by

³¹ Bolognina e' zona africana e cinese,..e di conseguenza di molti stranieri in genere,..Cioe'..bada che stai parlando con un antirazzista,..intendiamoci,..ma diciamo che la feccia degli stranieri e' la,..diciamo che se uno deve spacciare va al negozio dell'amico,..che per intenderci sono molte coperture,..e gironzola nei dintorni a spacciare,..diciamo che un mio amico albanese,..bravissimapersona non ama andare piazzetta unita'... <http://it.answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20090720120730AAOJQYT>

Luca, the center's young and friendly director, I stopped checking my pocket to see that I still had my wallet and felt my shoulder blades retreat back down to their normal position. There was nothing frightening about the people in classrooms learning Italian, playing the drums, and conversing with one another.

In fact, after a few visits to the center, it soon became the place I felt safest and most comfortable in all of Bologna. The second time I studied abroad I lived in a relatively well-to-do area on the West side of the city, but it was rare to meet people in cafes, bars, or on the streets with whom I felt comfortable striking up a conversation. At the center, however, everyone with whom I spoke wanted to tell me about themselves and their experiences and some appeared to be genuinely interested in getting to know me as well. Perhaps they were so friendly because they too, were estranged from loved ones and eager to make new connections. Whatever the reason, the center felt like a community in which there was trust, respect, and a genuine desire to understand perspectives different than one's own. One need only spend a few moments there to see that immigrants are not helpless and that in their organizing, interactions (both with one another and with other members of the community), and ability to see situations from multiple perspectives are at least as capable of positively contributing to Italian society as native Italian citizens, if not more so.

On a typical weekday evening at the Zonarelli center, one might hear the loud music coming from the African dance and drumming class, people conversing outside of the classrooms before attending Italian lessons taught by local volunteers, or immigrants from all over the world gathered to rehearse for a play called "*I Confini dell'Umano*" ("The Borders of Man") in which they attempt to show the ways in which they have been

affected by the Bossi-Fini law. There are many different rooms in the center, each of which is used in multiple ways throughout the day. When I asked Luca, the director of the center, if he enjoyed his work, he responded:

“I am happy working at the center because of the type of work we are able to do here... The center helps to combat stereotypes because within our organizations and through the initiatives and sharing of space, we are able to develop a reciprocal respect for the traditions and cultures of others. We are able to help immigrants maintain their culture and traditions from their countries of origin, but also to be able to understand and appreciate others.”

On the side of the reception room there is a large space that has been used for “meetings, conferences, cultural initiatives, parties, concerts, and film screenings.”³² On the back wall there is a mural with people of all different races dancing and celebrating together. Other notable spaces in the center include classrooms, used primarily for meetings of organizations and Italian language classes, the *segreteria* (help desk) to which individuals can go to in order to find more information about the center, and a small kitchen, in which people often prepare cuisine from their countries of origin. There is always someone available to speak with at the center Monday-Friday from 9AM-6PM, but many of the center’s activities occur outside of these hours, either after work or on weekends, when more people are able to attend.

The center and organizations that use it see cultural diversity and its promotion as “a source of innovation and creativity, a powerful resource for development, and an indispensable component of democracy.”³³ The center’s website maintains that cultural diversity is “to society as biodiversity is to nature” and “for this reason, should be recognized and affirmed for the good of present and future generations.” Acceptance of cultural diversity, they claim, will lead to “full inclusion and political participation of all”

³² information translated from zonagidue.com

³³ Information translated from Centro Zonarelli website.

and it is time that Italians recognize other cultures as “a powerful resource (and) a motor of development, not only in terms of economic growth, but also as a method for a more comprehensive civil and moral development.”

The main goals of the Centro Zonarelli, therefore, are to promote the acceptance and recognition of cultural diversity in order to create the capacity to reflect, elaborate, and make proposals about crucial themes in the local government and life of the community, particularly in regards to “school, work, culture, health services, immigration, and preventing acts of racism and discrimination.” Believing that “communication represents the modern instrument through which you can open the world” the center represents itself not as a “place for foreigners” but as a center where intercultural dialogue is constructed through its own initiatives as well as by giving space and a minimal amount of material support to organizations, families, and individuals who have goals that are in line with these overarching values. In the most basic sense, as Sara Lettebrahn Zegai, leader of an Eritrea Riunione, an organization of Eritrean immigrants that meets in the center, said as the Forum Metropolitano di Cittadini non Comunitari di Bologna e Provincia,

“The center has given us, above all, the possibility, as I was saying before, to meet and know other cultures. We have participated for almost three years and the experiences that we have had in these years have been many. It has given the possibility, to us foreigners, to meet, to see each other, to get to know each other.”³⁴

Associazionismo

This ability described by Sara Lettebrahn Zegai above is often referred to as *associazionismo*. In her book *Donna Migrante: Il Tempo della Solitudine e dell'Attesa* or Woman Migrant: The Time of Solitude and Waiting Cristina Mariti Donna defines

³⁴ Il centro ci ha dato innanzi tutto la possibilita come dicevo, di consocere altre culture; noi partecipiamo da quasi tre anni e le espereienza che abbiamo fatto in questi tre anni sono tante. Cid a la possibilita, a noi stranieri, dif re le reunion, di frequentarci, di conoscerci.

associazionismo as the adhesion of organized groups in which the conservation of ethnic identity, religion, and culture go alongside the function of support and welcoming but not necessarily in a structured way. I argue below that these groups act as one of the strongest forms of immigrants' resistance and have significantly increased immigrants' *protagonismo* in Italian society. These organizations constitute a form of insurgent citizenship as they allow immigrants to be politically and socially active in Italian society even though many do not have legal permission to be there.

Many scholars have called attention to circumstances that have made *associazionismo*, particularly for the purpose of political activism, especially difficult for immigrants. Freedman, for example, points to the fact that immigrants' illegality often "makes it more difficult and more dangerous for...(them) to occupy a visible place in the public sphere"(Freedman 2007: 2). Schweken expands on these concerns, claiming that even legal migrants find that "restrictions on mobility and living in remote areas hinders their ability to assemble with other migrants and to participate in political demonstrations (and)... migrants often learn to be invisible and inconspicuous, especially towards state authorities, in order not to arouse suspicion" (Freedman 2007: 46). Additionally, due to the tenuous nature of many of their financial and/or employment situations, it is often difficult for immigrants to find "time to invest in meeting, writing petitions, going to demonstrations, discussing, socializing, and raising funds" (Freedman 2007: 46). Furthermore, she adds, "institutional factors such as the existence of special laws regulating associations of "foreigners" as well as fewer contacts to official institutions limit the migrants' access to official funding" making it increasingly more difficult to finance political projects (Freedman 2007: 46).

Immigrant women face even more challenges to organization and political mobilization. One reason why it is particularly challenging for immigrant women to organize is that the fields most work in isolate them in the household, making it difficult for them to build up contacts and make connections (Freedman 2007: 46). Freedman adds that “for many immigrant women the types of jobs into which they are recruited are also largely unskilled, low-paid, and insecure in terms of having little social or legal protection” so if their employer requires them to work 24/7 they have no means of appeal and cannot attend meetings (Freedman 2007: 3). There is also an underlying “public/private” divide which constructs a primarily familial role for women, further limiting their opportunities for participation in the public or political sphere (Freedman 2007: 2). Though many would argue that Italian culture has accepted that women will participate in politics and is open to their opinions, Italian women still have a significantly more minor presence in Italian politics than men and it is not uncommon to hear Italian men express the opinion that women are irrational and therefore, less capable of making logical decisions. In these ways, persisting gender stereotypes and gendered differentiation in the labor market create additional obstacles to immigrant women’s activism.

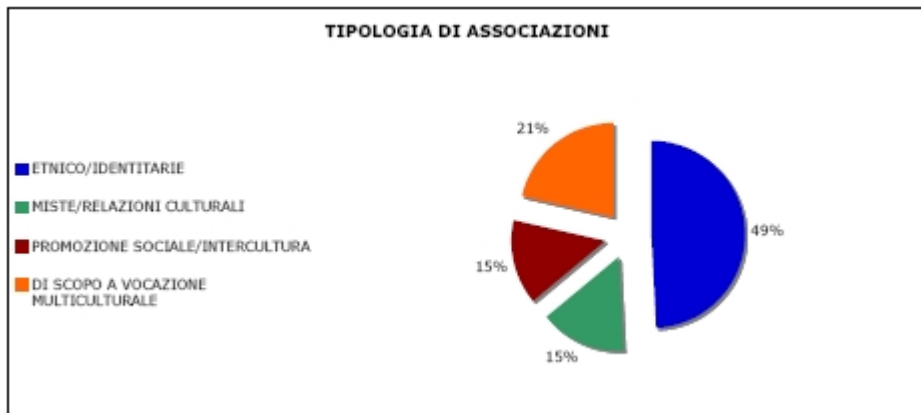
Nonetheless, in spite of these circumstances, immigrants still find time for *associazionismo*. Between Mohammed’s demanding job as a lawyer and his many familial obligations he hardly has an hour free to spend with his wife or two incredibly charming and well-behaved children. He still manages, however, to lead meetings, participate in activities that will raise money to send to Morocco, and attend events at the center. Many of the other people I met at meetings in the intercultural center also worked

long hours and had to make significant compromises in order to attend. Ben, who worked in construction Monday-Friday from 6:00 AM until 7:15 PM with hardly 40 minutes off for lunch, attended Italian language classes from 8:00 PM till 9:00 PM at the center every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday evening.

Even domestic workers, who typically only receive a few hours off every week and are often discouraged from leaving the house by their employers, often use their limited time off to attend meetings. While at the Centro Zonarelli, I met Zinaida, a Ukrainian immigrant who has worked as a housekeeper for seven years. She works every day of the week except Wednesday evenings when she comes to the center in order to socialize with other immigrants and attend Italian language classes. Many of the other immigrant women I met at the center that worked as *badante/colf/casalinghe* (caregivers for children or the elderly, housekeepers) had similar limitations and expressed the concern that their employers would disapprove if they found out where they were.

In spite of these challenges, however, both immigrant men and women have been successfully organizing in order to promote cultural, political, and social goals since the late 1980s. I believe this occurs primarily because immigrants find it useful, fulfilling, and perhaps even necessary to organize. Additionally, *associazionismo* provides an opportunity for immigrants to “feel at home” in a foreign country even if in some cases, it can also contribute to the isolation from the society of the host country by encouraging them to interact with other immigrants rather than the Italian public (Donna 2003: 116). Ultimately, I believe that it is this strong sense of community and belonging that convinces immigrants to continue meeting for political, cultural, and social initiatives in Italy’s intercultural centers.

The ninety-three registered organizations that use the Centro Zonarelli can be divided into four basic types: ethnic or identity based (49%), mixed/cultural relations (15%), social promotion/ intercultural advocacy (15%), and those with a multicultural aim (21%).



While some organizations are primarily aimed at the preservation of their cultural heritage others have more specific political, economic, or service-related goals. *Sopra i Ponti* (Over the Bridges), the organization I was able to spend the most time with at the center, seems in some way to represent all of these forms. Born in Bologna in 1995, *Sopra i Ponti* was started by a group of Moroccan citizens in order to help new immigrants integrate into the “Italian social fabric” and find adequate housing. As the organization grew, it began offering other social services and it expanded its goals to include the promotion of Arab cultural events throughout the Bolognese territory in an attempt to increase cultural awareness and understanding. They also began addressing the schooling needs of second-generation immigrants and started to raise funds in order to develop a few rural areas in the South of Morocco. Between sips of Moroccan tea, Mohammed explained to me that,

“We as an association help the people when they come— tell them where they can eat, where they can take a shower and then slowly slowly, we use Italian because this

language is the weapon for living together— to find work, to understand others, to understand your rights. The people who come here are workers, poor, they came here to make their lives better. I bring this with me— it's a guide to where to go for sleep, to take care of yourself, to find work... It's clear that Bologna doesn't offer much welcome and so we, as an association are trying to do that.”

Mohammed is careful to mention, however, that these actions are not meant to permanently keep immigrants in a situation in which they will be reliant on social services.

“We don't want to habituate people to *carità* (care) they need to learn a *mestiere* (profession) so we send the people to the center of professional work.”

Some of the most recent initiatives of the organization have been addressed at helping Moroccans living in Morocco get access to more advanced forms of medical care and warning them about the potential difficulties of immigration. Mohammed said,

“We've been to Morocco to show them the real story. We went to Tangier and Casablanca to meet the people to show them the dream isn't real. We are instruments that show them reality. Brought by us, as protagonists, I can give you a mirror of what life is here. I could have stayed there but I chose this invasion, this battle, but going back is my way of trying to do my part for my country. This woman here is a person in the desert. She had breast cancer. I said to the community— lets collect money, medicine, so we can send her support. This is positive. This is change.”

The ultimate goal of *Sopra i Ponti*, however, is to give immigrants in Italy the resources necessary to care for themselves and continue combating the stereotype that they are victims. Thus, organizations such as *Sopra i Ponti* promote immigrants' *protagonismo* by showing that they are not helpless victims economically draining the Italian state or villainous traders encroaching on Italian territory, but individuals capable not only of caring for themselves but also of bettering the situations of others in Italy as well as in their countries of origins.

Finding some of their gender-specific needs unaddressed by mixed associations, women immigrants often form their own separate organizations. Many scholars such as

Wendy Pojmann, for example, maintain that “gender based problems often have been ignored or minimized by groups that prefer to continue to see migrants as a unified group or tend to maintain the single male migrant from Africa as the dominant model” (Pojmann 2006: 39). Women’s organizations often argue that “the lives of women, Italian and foreign, are more conditioned by problems of reconciling professional responsibilities with family life” and a feminist methodology, one departing from the women themselves, is the only way we can hope to truly satisfy the unique needs and desires of immigrant women.”³⁵ The fact that these organizations are founded by the immigrant women themselves is also important because it helps to combat societal perceptions of immigrant women as helpless victims by shedding light on their hopes and desires for change. Thus, throughout Europe, women have been creating gender-segregated organizations in order to “expose issues affecting migrant women’s integration, influence national and European policymaking, empower migrant women through mutual support and information sharing, and make the positive contribution of migrant women to Italian society visible to the Italian public” (Freedman 2007: 7).

One of the more active groups of women immigrants at the Centro Zonarelli is called Agora Dei Mondi. The organization was formed in 2002 by women of many different cultures and nationalities who felt that immigration was “a phenomenon that cannot be seen as neutral” and believed that it was necessary to analyze immigration politics through a gendered lens. Fundamental to the organization is the belief that immigrant women need to have an active part in forming immigration regulations and that intercultural associations can be an effective means for women immigrants to advocate on their own behalf. According to its website, the main goals of the organization

³⁵ Translated from description of Project Sofi on Agora dei Mondi website.

are to “give visibility” to women immigrants, validate their experiences and capacities, help them become more economically and socially autonomous, and “create a point of reference for women so they will be better able to utilize their own abilities and experiences to facilitate their social integration.” The primary activities of the organization, therefore, revolve around the social, economic, psychological, and political empowerment of immigrant women in Italian society and bettering their quality of life. One of their main projects, “Project Sofi” (which stands for “*Servizi di Orientamento, Formazione ed Integrazione sociale rivolti a donne Immigrate*”) attempts to help immigrant women acquire knowledge and develop the abilities necessary to conduct a dignified and autonomous life through better social and occupational inclusion in Italian society. One of the ways in which they attempt to accomplish this goal is through the creation of a course of professional and cultural development for individuals working in the social service sector. There have been four phases of the project. In the first phase, members of the organization interviewed immigrant women in order to better understand the variety of developmental, work-related, family-related, and social needs that they had. Scholars paid particularly close attention to the conflicts created between familial and work-related obligations. In the second phase, members created and implemented a “course of development” specifically geared towards workers of the third sector employed with agencies that attempt to provide social services for immigrants. The objective of the course was to provide workers with the theoretical, cultural, juridical, and political background necessary to understand the unique gender and culture related problems of women immigrants in addition to offering reflections on the relationship between equality and citizenship. In the third phase of the project, members of the

organization provided the professionals with packets of information in a number of different languages for immigrants regarding typical dilemmas such as how to obtain professional certification, and where to go in order to get legal assistance, access to healthcare, and enroll their children in school. In the fourth and final stage, the organization held a meeting and public debate called “Practices of Women for Women” which illuminated some of the problems immigrant women were encountering on Italian territory and described the methods they were using to overcome them.

Thus, *associazionismo*, though often different for male and female immigrants, ultimately functions to promote the *protagonismo* of immigrants in Italian society by increasing their presence in the daily lives of Italians. Additionally, immigrant-run organizations also provide immigrants with material and emotional support and constitute a form of insurgent citizenship as many of their initiatives allow immigrants to be politically and socially active in Italian society in spite of their lack of formal citizenship status.

Conclusion

Therefore, it appears that through *associazionismo*, daily “illegal” actions, the way they speak about themselves and the act of immigration in and of itself, immigrants are asserting forms of insurgent citizenship that will, I believe, ultimately work to increase their *protagonismo* in Italian society. I saw evidence of this change while I was at a protest on March 1st 2010 in Bologna that was also being launched in many other places throughout Europe under the title “*Una Giornata Senza Di Noi*” or “A Day Without Us.” The protest took place in 60 different Italian cities. A paper handed out by the Movimento Federalista Europe summarized the activists’ agenda as follows:

“In the European Union there are atleast 25 million residents (without considering irregular immigrants) that pay taxes and social contributions, respect the laws, but are still excluded from the right to political participation and in many ways deprived of social and civil rights. We are asking that the European Union launch a united policy regarding “developing countries” that will favor their development...and that promotes a legislation for a unified politics regarding migration, welcoming, and legal insertion in the workforce and regulates in a uniform way the civil, social and political rights of immigrants and their relatives. It has been established by the the “Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union” that anyone who is permanently residing in the European Union is a citizen, not only those who were born within the Union.”³⁶

Immigrants in Piazza SS Annuziata shouted “Non siamo criminali. Non siamo clandestini, ecco a voi i nuovi cittadini” or “We are not criminals, we are not *clandestini*, we are the new citizens!” A man in a blue hat held a banner reading “migrare non é un reato/ migration is not a crime.” I approached a woman with two children at her sides

³⁶ Nell’unione europea ci sono almeno 25 milioni di residenti extracomunitari (senza considerare gli immigrati irregolari) che pagano tasse e contribute sociali, rispettano il nostro sistema di leggi, ma sono esclusi dal diritto alla partecipazione politica a in gran parte privi dei diritti sociali e civili. Chiediamo che l’unione Europea attui una politica comune nei confronti dei paesi in via di sviluppo, volta a favorire il loro sviluppo compatibile... e che promuova una legislazione per: uniformare la politica dei flussi migratori, dell’accoglienza e dell’inserimento legale nel mondo del lavoro, grazie anche all’istituzione di un’Agenzia europea del Lavoro, regolamentare in modo uniforme i diritti civili, politici, e sociali degli immigrati residenti e dei loro familiari, in applicazione della “Carta dei diritti fondamentali dell’Unione Europea” resa ora vincolante dal Trattato di Lisbona, stabilire che è cittadino dell’Unione chiunque abbia la residenza stabile nel territorio di uno Stato member e non solo chi vi è nato.

holding a sign that read “Stop all’ razzismo e all’ esclusione!” or “Stop the racism and the exclusion!” When asked what motivated her to come out today to protest she replied, “To show that we are indispensable to this city, this country, this life. We are asking for two fundamental things: that you recognize that we are men and women, subjects of rights exactly like you and that our strength be acknowledged.”³⁷

To a large extent, initiatives like the above protest, led by either immigrants or those advocating on their behalf, which seek to advocate for immigrants’ *protagonismo* and access to the same rights and privileges as formal citizens have increased. We see evidence of a more positive image of immigrants through organizations such as Coordinamento Migranti and the Scuola Migranti XM which aim not to save immigrants but give them the material conditions necessary to help themselves. The objectives of far-left activist groups such as Comitato Maisha, which use a rights-based discourse in order to work with immigrants, also reflect a more complex view of Italy’s immigrant community that may, eventually, work to facilitate their formal recognition as citizens. In their decisions to immigrate and through both collective and individual actions, immigrants continue to access many of the same rights and privileges native citizens are entitled to on Italian territory, exercising a form of insurgent citizenship that not only improves their material and physical well-being but helps to increase their *protagonismo* in Italian society.

On the other hand, we also see evidence of increasingly stringent immigration laws, ongoing xenophobia espoused by political parties such as the Lega Nord, an emphasis on immigrants’ cultural incompatibility or violent tendencies in the media, and

³⁷ per dimostrare di essere indispensabili alla città, del paese, della vita. Chiediamo due cose fondamentali: che li si riconoscano quello che siamo, cioè uomini e donne soggetti di diritti esattamente come voi, e che venga misurata la loro forza

various incarnations of the “immigrant as victim discourse” promoted by many of the left-wing political and social organizations claiming to work on immigrants’ behalf throughout Italy. We see the persistence of “detention camps” (like the one recently established in Lampedusa to hold 1,300 immigrants for Northern Africa) that not only entrap and mistreat immigrants, but contribute to the public perception of immigrants as illegal villains who are a burden on Italian society. Even highly educated scholars in Italy often deny immigrants *protagonismo* by using crude statistics that represent immigrants as an indistinct mass and present immigration as a problem rather than a resource.

Thus, it is clear that throughout modern Italy, depictions of immigrants as either victims, villains, or culturally incompatible in combination with the scholarly representation of immigration as a statistic dehumanizes Italy’s immigrant community, denying them *protagonismo* in Italian society. All of these actions ultimately work to reinforce the distinction between native Italians and immigrants which justifies their continued denial of access to formal citizenship status as well as many of the rights and privileges that go with it. Furthermore, the policies that label immigrants as illegal felons reinforce racist and xenophobic sentiments which justify the various forms of discrimination immigrants encounter on a daily basis on Italian soil. If allowed to continue and proliferate, these discourses and policies will not put an end to immigration in Italy but continue to create a climate in which Italy’s immigrant population is ostracized, alienated, and easily exploited.

While attending the conference I described in the “Immigrants and Social Service Organizations” section titled “L’Islam e la donna il pregiudizio colpisce ancora/ Women and Islam, Prejudice Still Exists” that took place on January 22, 2011 I noticed, however, that in some ways these discourses are being drowned out by the individual voices of

immigrants which, to some extent, are being broadcasted to Italians more directly than ever before. The fact that so many people chose to attend this conference where Muslim women, one of the most historically silenced groups of immigrants in Italy, were able to speak on their own behalf suggests that some groups of immigrants are finally being given a venue to express their opinions and show their diversity, directly challenging the logics which attempt to deny them *protagonismo*. However, shortly after the three women finished speaking about how Islam is not inherently oppressive to women and not all Muslims are misogynistic, a man wearing an Armani suit and sunglasses who seemed to be in his late thirties raised his hand to say the following:

“Muslim women are oppressed. This is a fact. We cannot sit here, in church (where ironically, the conference was located) and pretend that Muslims deserve a place in our Catholic society.”

A few members of the audience clapped. In that moment, looking at the pained expression of the one unveiled woman sitting beneath the Jesus-frescos, I realized that in spite of all the actions being taken to increase immigrants' *protagonismo* and let their individuality (and therefore, worthiness of the rights and privileges associated with formal citizenship status) be recognized in Italian society, there are still many Italians who, unwilling to remove their designer sunglasses, are unable to see them. Thus, it appears that in spite of increased efforts to fight it, xenophobia still occupies a key role in Italian society, and it is the intersection of these circumstances, both the persistence of inequality in regards to the distribution of Italian citizenship and its contestation through immigrants' resistance, that makes the current situation of immigrants in Italy both increasingly hopeful and harshly oppressive.

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